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BLUE BOOK

An illustrated magazine of Adventure, Mystery and Humor

NEW BARBARY GOLD, *by* Beatrice Grimshaw

W. C. Tuttle, S. Andrew Wood, Bigelow Neal

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OCTOBER 1934

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 59 No. 6

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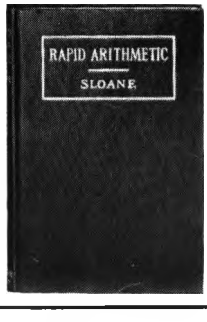

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BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1934 VOL. 59, NO. 6

A Swift-Paced Novelette

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An Extraordinary Novel

Prize Stories of Real Experience

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

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A PRIZE OFFER: The truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 130 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words; and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

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

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

New Barbary Gold

FROM far Port Moresby in Papua comes this fascinating story, the first of a fine series dealing with a new gold-field only to be reached by a hazardous airplane flight over mountain jungle—by the distinguished author of "The Flaming Sword," "The Forest of Lost Men," and other well-remembered stories.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

MARK M'CRACKEN came up the steps of the veranda, with his flying helmet in his hand.

He said: "Persis Cameron's lost!" And the three unemphasized words exploded on the veranda like three Mills bombs.

Most of the men were drunk; it was near Christmas, and almost every miner on the Laurie Field was "in" for the annual spree. Two were boxing in the barroom. Ten or fifteen, seated on benches, were beating on the floor with their heavy boots, while they sang, each independently of the others, "Auld Lang Syne," "Happy Days," the inescapable "Genevieve, my Genevieve," and "Hinky Dinky Parley Voo." One heavyweight, alternately sitting down on and rising up from the keys of the long-suffering piano, seemed to be attempting an accompaniment. Beneath the house, among the piles, several dogs were fighting.

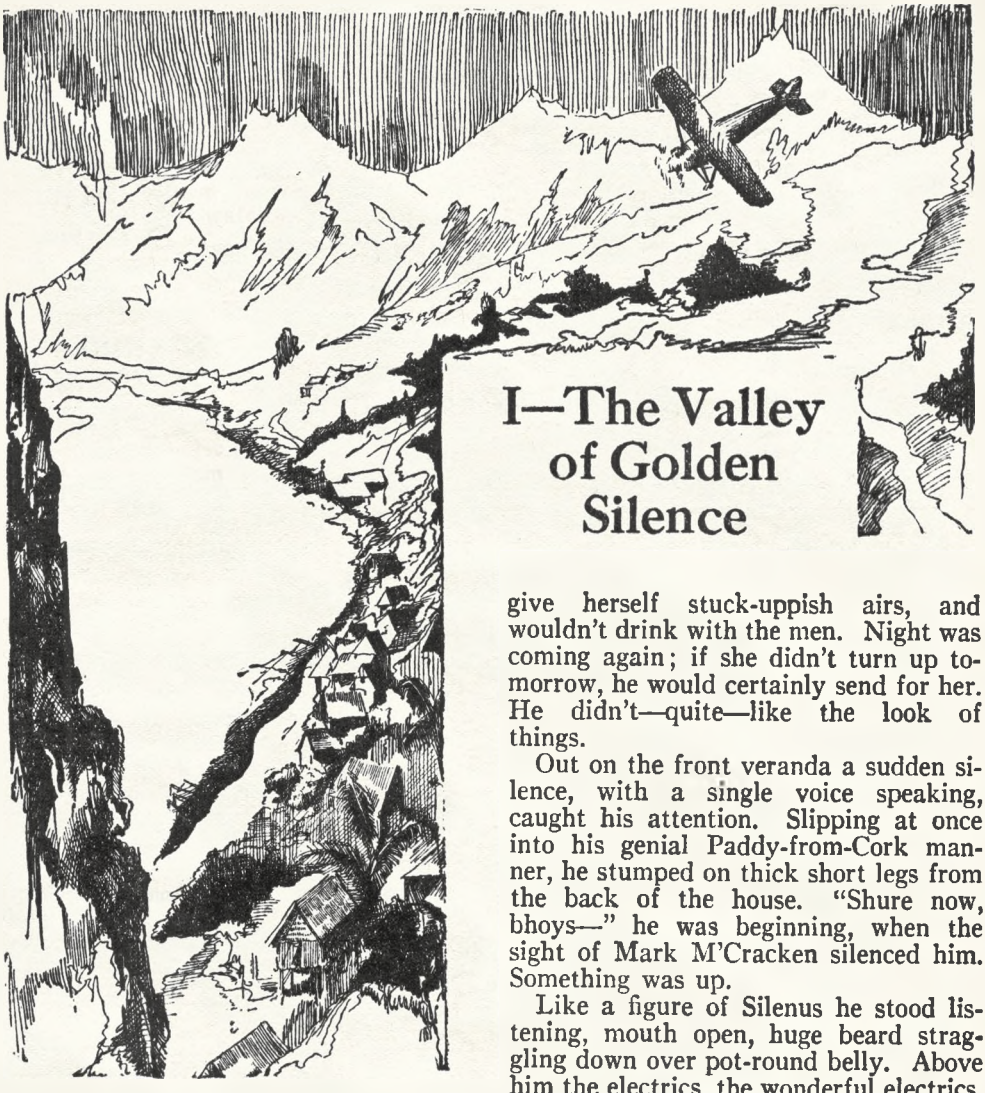
Nevertheless, as if by some miracle, M'Cracken's words were heard. One or two men in his neighborhood caught them, and springing to their feet, began to shake and shout the others into silence. The fighters in the bar, suddenly conscious of the loss of their audience, lurched to the door, and looked with amazement upon the spectacle of thirty or forty half-intoxicated miners milling about Mark M'Cracken, star pilot of New Barbary Airways, the most dangerous flying service in the world; Mark, who never treated, never drank, and seldom came into the hotel, save to bolt a hasty meal and go away.

He stood there at the top of the steps, waiting for silence. He had taken off his overalls, and his bare brown knees showed under his shorts, the same color as his darkly coppered hands and face. Six feet was Mark, a fathom of tough young slenderness (they were all young, in that dangerous service), strong-necked, high-nosed and proudly grave, like the bronze statue of an American Indian. Only his eyes showed feeling; they were gray-blue, the most expressive of colors, and they shone in the rays of the electrics, just a little too wide open, a shade too bright.

And now the miners, many of them less drunk than they pretended to be, were almost quiet, realizing the horror of the thing he told.

Persis, the little girl lately from the coast, orphan of a plantation manager, left destitute and obliged to take place as housekeeper's help in the gold-fields hotel; Persis of the silk-black curls, and the long, dark-honey-colored eyes, and the intriguing poppy-bud of a mouth that (it was said) no man on all the field had yet succeeded in kissing, unless that cool young devil Mark M'Cracken had managed it—Persis Cameron was lost. She had slipped, no one knew how, from the islet of safety that was the settlement of Magadiri, into the sea of unknown ranges and impassable forests surrounding it; into the world of tumbled knife-edge ridges, peaks ten thousand feet tall, and furious rivers, the country of the head-hunters and cannibals, the Stone Age impinging upon the last and most sophisticated of Twentieth Century developments.

A day and a half before she had gone away early, walking briskly in her white shorts and little bare legs, to see the wife of a miner who lived just over the next hill. The neighborhood was sup-



I—The Valley of Golden Silence

Illustrated by Paul De Leslie

posed to be safe; the miner and his wife were friendly people. No one had troubled much when she did not return that night, save Tim Murphy, the lessee of the hotel, a pseudo-Irishman from Sydney, who growled at her absence in the Christmas season, as he growled at everything that threatened to deprive him of a penny of profit. Genial Irish, with an accent turned on like the beer taps, was Murphy in the bar; out of it, everyone feared his tongue and sometimes his coarse, heavy hand.

The second day passed over, and Murphy began to get indignant—a bit troubled too. What did the Wilsons mean by keeping his star attraction? For that Persis Cameron was, even if she did give herself stuck-uppish airs, and wouldn't drink with the men. Night was coming again; if she didn't turn up tomorrow, he would certainly send for her. He didn't—quite—like the look of things.

Out on the front veranda a sudden silence, with a single voice speaking, caught his attention. Slipping at once into his genial Paddy-from-Cork manner, he stumped on thick short legs from the back of the house. "Shure now, bhoys—" he was beginning, when the sight of Mark M'Cracken silenced him. Something was up.

Like a figure of Silenus he stood listening, mouth open, huge beard straggling down over pot-round belly. Above him the electrics, the wonderful electrics, shone, on the armchairs, the fancy tables, the looking-glasses, china vases, crystal and silver, that had been carried up from the far coast by plane, even as the hotel itself, bit by bit, had been carried; all of it brought into being in a night and a day almost, as if by some enchanter's spell, here in the heart of Stone Age, tameless New Barbary. He did not see, outside, the immense dark shapes of the ranges blacking out the stars, or hear, below the plateau, the Laurie River, mother of death and gold, muttering ill-will against the whites who had dared her passes. He was listening, shocked and troubled for once, to the pilot.

BRIEFLY, unemotionally, Mark was telling the men that Wilson had gone out with him that morning to locate a missing plane in the "big bush." Wil-

The men were making ready for a start at daybreak; the carouse they had been looking forward to, was being tossed away without a thought.

son did most of the salvage work for the field; when he and Mark had found the wreck, flying above, Wilson would return, take out his boys, and start to bring in the remains of a costly Junker. There was little hope of saving anything else; pilots seldom escaped from a plane-crash in New Barbary.

When they were a few minutes on the way, something Wilson said had made Mark realize that Persis Cameron wasn't at Wilson's camp, had indeed never been there at all. (He did not explain how he knew she was going. Most of the pilots knew most things that went on, about the plateau.)

They had gone on; a pilot on duty stops for nothing. But when the wreck was located, far in the forest, spiked upon a mountain pine, in a place where no landing was possible; when Wilson had been taken back again, to go out with his gang of boys next day, Mark had come up to tell the hotel what he knew.

Persis was missing.

OTHER people had been missing, from time to time. They had been found sometimes; sometimes never. Last week a lone prospector had been discovered split like a kippered herring, and tied to his tent-pole, as a warning to any who might think of following him. Last month the heads of three white men had been rolled down an inaccessible cliff, onto the river claim below. There was a man named Finch who had gone out with his boys months before, and never been heard of, he or the boys, again.

Murphy was troubled, angry. Hell, why couldn't Persis have kept herself safe, mere helpless kid of nineteen that she was, with those little bare legs of hers in blue socks like a baby's? And if she had to get into trouble, why couldn't she have done it without spoiling his Christmas trade? For it was going to be spoiled; that was clear. The men were putting their heads under taps, calling for coffee. They were going out to the store at the back, and shouting to have it opened. They were buying provisions, looking up carriers, making everything ready for a start at earliest daybreak. The Christmas carouse—to which, in far-off camps, in drowning gorges, in the midst of heavy toil with the company's giant dredges, all these men had been looking forward for months—was being tossed away without a thought.

Persis might be stuck-uppish, might be less generally liked than Ruby, the second help, who would take a weight or two, or an ounce or two, from any man, and not for nothing either; but

Persis was respected, admired, by many a man who had a young wife or a daughter far away at home; and not one of the crowd but would gladly have laid down his life to help her.

With dawn coming up over Koroni Mountain, sinister Koroni that had eaten men as a man eats apples, the miners were away. Planes would join in the search later on, when the mists lifted; but the men knew that planes could do little, above that ocean of unbroken forest, where armies could have hidden, safe from scouting air-men.

They went, and the mists swallowed them. The sun got up, and the planes rose roaring to fly at a hundred and twenty miles an hour over those knitted forests where men crept slowly, five hard miles a day. And in all the range of country that they covered, there was nothing to be seen, save, far in the forests, the shine of Judd's wrecked Junker, clinging spiked to a tree.

Mark's plane was the first to take off. Roaring over the wreck, he thought of Judd, who was certainly dead. Persis had seemed to like the fellow a little; she would have been sorry to hear of his end. Persis, in off-duty hours, had been rather fond of hanging around the edges of the 'drome, out of the way of its fierce winged dragons, but near enough to see and sometimes talk to the pilots as they came off their run; as they stood there, proud, reserved, keeping themselves aloof from the common company of the field. The girls liked the pilots; yes, one had one's privileges. . . . What was that tale of ancient Mexico he'd read, about chosen youths who were fêted, feasted, crowned with flowers and given their choice of beautiful maidens, all because, in a little time or a little more, they were to be taken up the steps of the sacrificial temple, and there, before all the people, to have their hearts torn out?

WELL, he had seen young Spenser burned alive before the public, on the 'drome, three months ago. That was worse than having your heart cut out, maybe.

It came to this, that he and his kind were privileged, because they might have to die.

How far had Persis given him privilege, in her little innocent heart? He might never know that now. Just as well. Pilots in the New Barbary service had no right to marry.

They'd find her; he was sure of that. Planes or men would locate the child—she was scarce more—and bring her out in safety. No use saying you couldn't be lost, in New Barbary—but Persis wouldn't be. Mark was a little superstitious, a trifle inclined to believe in "hunches." He had one now. He would not give up hope.

THE girl Ruby came down the veranda of the Magadiri Hotel, where weeks ago Mark McCracken had stood to announce the loss of little Persis Cameron, Persis, of whom, despite patrols, planes, expeditions, capture and questioning of suspected natives, nothing had been heard.

Ruby was pagan; she was gay; she smiled and walked like a Botticelli Flora. Some one had told her as much, but the compliment missed fire, since Ruby merely supposed that Botticelli was a cheese. . . . She was twenty-five, looked twenty, was as innocent in appearance as an April lamb, was called Miss Ray, and had been twice divorced.

She was the most good-tempered creature in the world, spoke ill of no one, and had cheated and cajoled numerous miners out of dust and nuggets worth many hundred pounds, all of which she hoped eventually to smuggle out of New Barbary, in defiance of law, and at the risk of some confiding pilot's job. No trained pig of the Pyrenees had ever a keener scent for truffles than light-footed, light-hearted Ruby had for gold.

Persis was dead, of course, and Ruby was not sorry. She wouldn't have raised a finger against the kid, but the hotel was a pleasanter place without a little white-ankled pussycat who gave herself airs, and wouldn't drink with the men.

Besides, there was Mark, who never seemed to know that she, Ruby, was alive, as long as he could look out of the corner of his big gray eyes at Persis. Mark had come into the hotel oftener of late, Lord knew what for, since he didn't drink, unless it was to see Ruby herself. But the girl was shrewd, and she was not as sure as she would have liked to be, that Mark was really making love to her, when he sat opposite her at one of the little veranda tables, deliberately flirting with eyes and with clever foot.

"Seems somehow as if he was gettin' at me," she thought. But how?

Today Mark wanted to talk about what really interested her above all else—gold. As soon as he came in and sat down, he began. It wasn't quite like

Mark—although on the Laurie everyone talked gold. Much of the ground was owned by companies, but there was still a good deal to be searched for, maybe found, by venturesome spirits, out back in cannibal country, where the stockaded villages were, and the head-houses, and the pools in the rivers where brown women took their human meat to wash for cooking, wiping it clear, sometimes, of drifts of useless yellow spangles that would have spoiled the dish. . . .

Gold, always gold! In the safe of the hotel, in bits of moleskin trousering pulled from men's pockets; in the planes, heavily packed, going down to the coast, thousand and thousands of ounces at a time; in camps, put in old boots and empty tins, for want of better storage; in the idle talk that flowed like water night and day, about the bar and lounges of the hotel.

Mark, removed from it all as the cloudland seraphs in "Faust" stand removed from the turmoil of devils on the stage below, found himself wondering, detachedly, if anything, anything whatever, could happen on or about the Laurie that was unconnected with the great motive-power of the field.

There was his hunch; and it led him, without rhyme or reason, to Ruby.

HE had just brought up from the coast the marble head-stone sent from Australia by Judd's mother; the man was in his mind—and strange to say, Ruby began talking of Judd.

"I saw him carried out when they came back," she was saying. "All done up in canvas, and they said he was smashed something cruel. There's many a one has given their lives for gold."

Mark looked at her. He had treated her to beer, costly on that field as vintage wine; he knew that it was bound to make her talkative, for Ruby liked beer, and could drink any amount of it, without affecting her Botticelli-nymph figure. But for the moment, he felt almost as if the beer had been in his own head, instead of hers. Judd—and gold? It didn't fit.

"Judd was trying to locate a new emergency landing-ground," he told her. "We need one or two." That was what Judd had given his life for. Mark could see, as weeks ago he had seen, the wreckage of the plane, great shining wings, and battered engine parts, being carried to the 'drome; and behind it all, a long stiff canvas parcel that was Judd. . . .

Memory played him an odd trick. Had he, or had he not, seen a fragment of Judd's socks sticking among the plane wreckage? And if he had, did the late pilot habitually wear blue socks—bright blue? He was almost sure that Judd did not, simply because he could not remember ever noticing his socks.

RUBY leaned across the table. She was very pretty, with her laughing lips, and bacchante curls, black-red, that only needed the mænad crown of grape-clusters to be complete. "Judd was my friend," she said. "I put him on to it."

"On to what?"

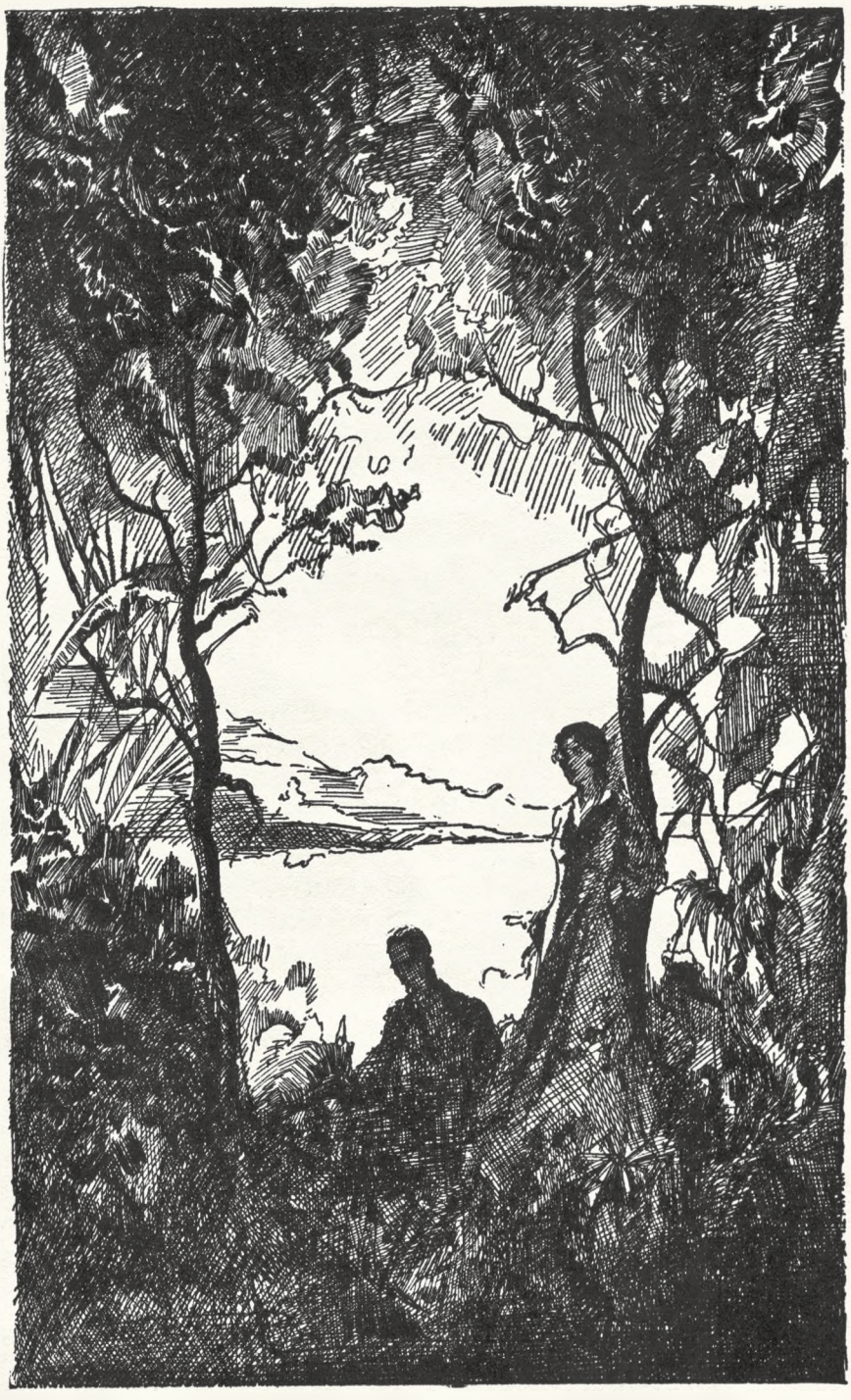
"Aha," she said, and began to whistle. Suddenly she went on. "He wasn't like—some people. He could be generous to a girl. Says he: 'I'll give you half.' Says I: 'Finch would have done that anyway, when he comes back from where he's gone to. Finch and me were cobbers.'"

"Finch," observed Mark, watching her, "won't come back from where he's gone to; he's melted long ago."

At the sneer, she grew red. "Finch," she said, "was worth ten of some people, that kiss you like a cricket-bat slicing a ball—when they do." Mark had dropped a hard peck on her cheek, when he sat down, and Ruby's pride of a pretty woman was up in arms. "Finch," she went on, "isn't lost, if I know him—and I ought to. I bet my life. I bet my five gold bracelets and my three diamond rings, he's on it somewhere, in the Koroni; and that's what I told Judd."

Something was fluttering in Mark M'Cracken's brain, like a bat in the dark, unable to make its way out. His heart was throbbing as it never throbbed when the plane went into an air-pocket over Koroni Mountain, with visibility bad, and altitude too low. The bit of blue sock—the bit of blue sock! Judd, who had tried to flirt with little Persis, who had gone out looking for gold. Finch, and gold. What pattern did the bits of the puzzle make? There had been no sign of anyone near the plane, when they found the wreck. But the hour—and the day—

He got to his feet. Sunset was close at hand. You could see, hung out in front of the veranda like tapestry of turquoise and of jade, the range of cruel Koroni; you could hear, far down, the mutter of Koroni's evening thunderstorm, rolling through the gorges of the Laurie. It was as if the mountain, and the river, spoke; as if, together, they were hurling curses at the butterfly splendors of the



There would be gold enough to let a pilot retire from his work and marry a rich young woman, who might have a chance to know how her man would kiss her a year after marriage . . . . not agonizing over every storm that swept from the peaks of cruel Koroni.

plateau and its hotel, making little of them, threatening—"By and by!"

"Yes," he thought, "by and by, they'll get the whole place back again; they're stronger than we are." And he thought of Persis, lost among those torrents and those ranges, one, perhaps, of the many sacrifices made to the god of the gold-field. "There's been too many," he thought; and a certain resolution took birth and shape in his mind. If she was found—

Something was happening in the hotel. One or two men, who had been listening to Ruby, had slipped away at the back. Others were following. Murphy was hurrying to the bar; he called to Ruby: "Come on, you, and serve!" Murphy was an old hand on the fields; as the barometer feels and marks the coming of rainy weather, so he, before it was fairly started, could feel the onset of a gold-field's rush. There would be drinking and rioting tonight; tomorrow, not a glass, not a bottle, would be sold in the bar.

Mark went out. But before he left, he astonished Ruby by catching her round the waist, and showing her that he did know how to kiss—and not like a cricket bat slicing a ball.

PERSIS gathered herself together, and knew that she was not dead.

When the plane crashed, falling into a thick sea of mountain mist, she had been sure that she and Judd were going to be killed.

She had tried hastily to pray as they went down, but there wasn't time. She knew she should not have gone with Judd at all; she was breaking the rules of the plane company, running away from her paid work, and telling lies—she who didn't lie—to hide it. He had asked her to come for a joy-ride, and she had thought it might make some one else jealous—some one who was too stiff, too conscientious, ever to smuggle a girl into his plane.

So she had given out that she was going to Wilson's, and instead, had slipped unseen into the Junker, while it was still in the hangars, Judd concealing her.

And here was the fruit of her sneaking and her lying: she was going to die. . . . And then came the crash. . . .

She found herself looking up at green, green all round; she was buried in green. At first she thought—

But no; she was not dead and in her grave. She was at the bottom of one of the enormous beds of moss, fathoms deep, that floored the forests at the eight-thousand-foot altitudes. Into this, as into a spring cushion, she had fallen; and as far as she could tell, she was unhurt.

It was horribly still; there was no sign, or sound, of Judd. She could see the plane hanging in a tree a few yards away; the top of the tree had gone right through it. Judd—

SHE saw him, when she had painfully made her way out of the moss-bed, feeling her limbs to make sure she was, miraculously, uninjured. Judd was lying at the far side of the tree, with his head twisted to one side, and his back doubled up like a jack-knife. Dead. . . .

Persis, sobbing, crashed her way through more of the stifling moss, and round the trunks of more of the cruel pointed firs that had spiked the plane—anywhere away from the wreck. She sat down, a long way off, upon a fallen tree. She must not think of Judd. They would come and look for the plane, quite soon, and if she could hold on for a few days—here where perhaps the mountain tribes did not come, where there wasn't a living soul but herself—

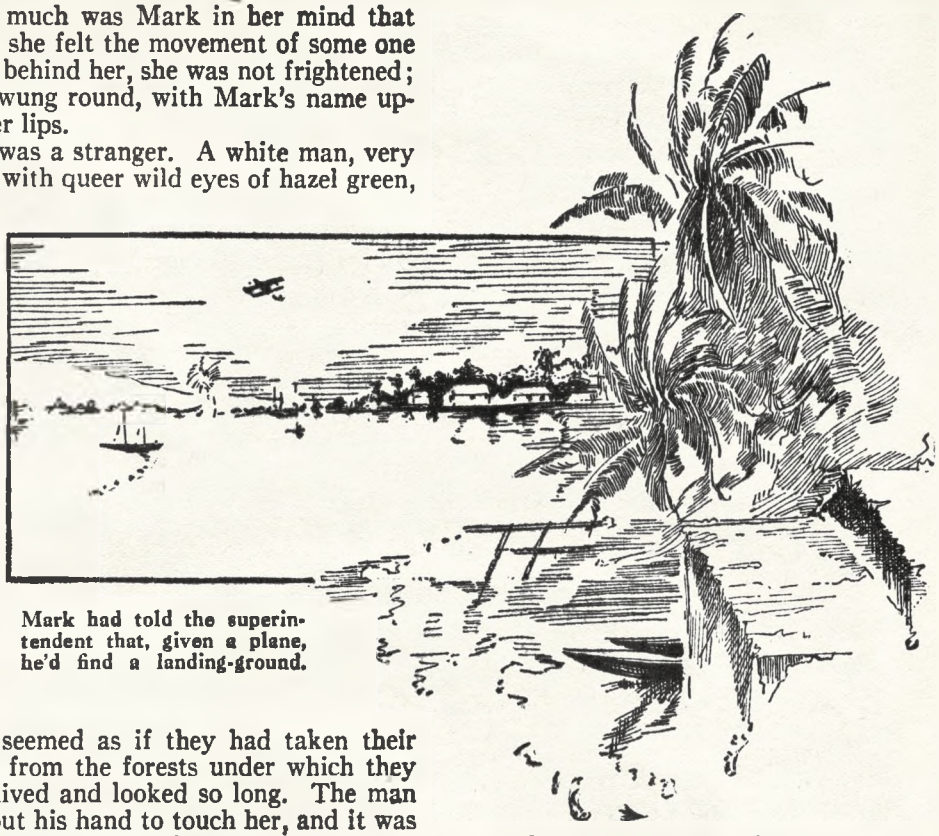
Thought broke off—went on again, with a jar. "Not a—living—soul," she repeated, staring at something that stood wedged into the fork of a tree, upon the edge of a giggling stream.

A billycan. A gallon billycan, packed full of gold!

"My Lord," she said, and went toward it with hands outstretched, like one walking in a dream. It was no dream. She couldn't stir the can—it seemed incredibly weighty; but the touch of the gold, fine, squeaking under her finger, the regal color of it, convinced. There was a fortune here, hanging up in the tree. There was enough to make a girl—a girl who had been thrown young on the world, and was beginning to feel afraid of it—safe, independent for life. There was enough to let a pilot retire from his work and marry a rich young woman, who would never have to sit sick with terror in her cottage near the 'drome, wondering why his plane hadn't come, or spoken. Who might have a chance to know how her man would kiss her a year after marriage; bear a child to him maybe, in peace and confidence, not agonizing over every storm, each drowning mist, that swept from, or concealed, the peaks of cruel Koroni.

So much was Mark in her mind that when she felt the movement of some one close behind her, she was not frightened; she swung round, with Mark's name upon her lips.

It was a stranger. A white man, very pale, with queer wild eyes of hazel green,



Mark had told the superintendent that, given a plane, he'd find a landing-ground.

that seemed as if they had taken their color from the forests under which they had lived and looked so long. The man put out his hand to touch her, and it was fish-white, like his face.

"Real, b'gosh," he said in a dull voice. He pinched her, dispassionately, as one might feel a piece of meat. "So you're not a dream," he said. "What do you want?"

Persis had heard of "hatters," men who had lived in the big bush so long that they had lost touch with their kind, who were queer, inclined to set a hat up on a tree-stump and talk to it, for want of other company. This must be a hatter. She was sorry to have met him, because of this gold that was undoubtedly his gold, not the abandoned treasure of some dead prospector; but she was glad, as well.

"You'll have to get me out of this, come with me to the Laurie," she told him imperiously. Men, on the goldfield, were the slaves of girls; one ruled them with a finger, because they were always wanting, always hoping. . . . Oh, one had learned about men, since one first came, a little frightened kitten, to the Laurie.

It seemed, however, that one had not learned enough. This man was not to be moved by any woman's finger. Another god than woman had his worship—the god of gold.

"And do you think, you little spit-cat," he said, "that when I'm right on it, I'm going to drop everything and go back with you? Give the whole thing away that I've kept quiet—just to please you? Women," he said, and spat upon the ground, "women are the curse of any field."

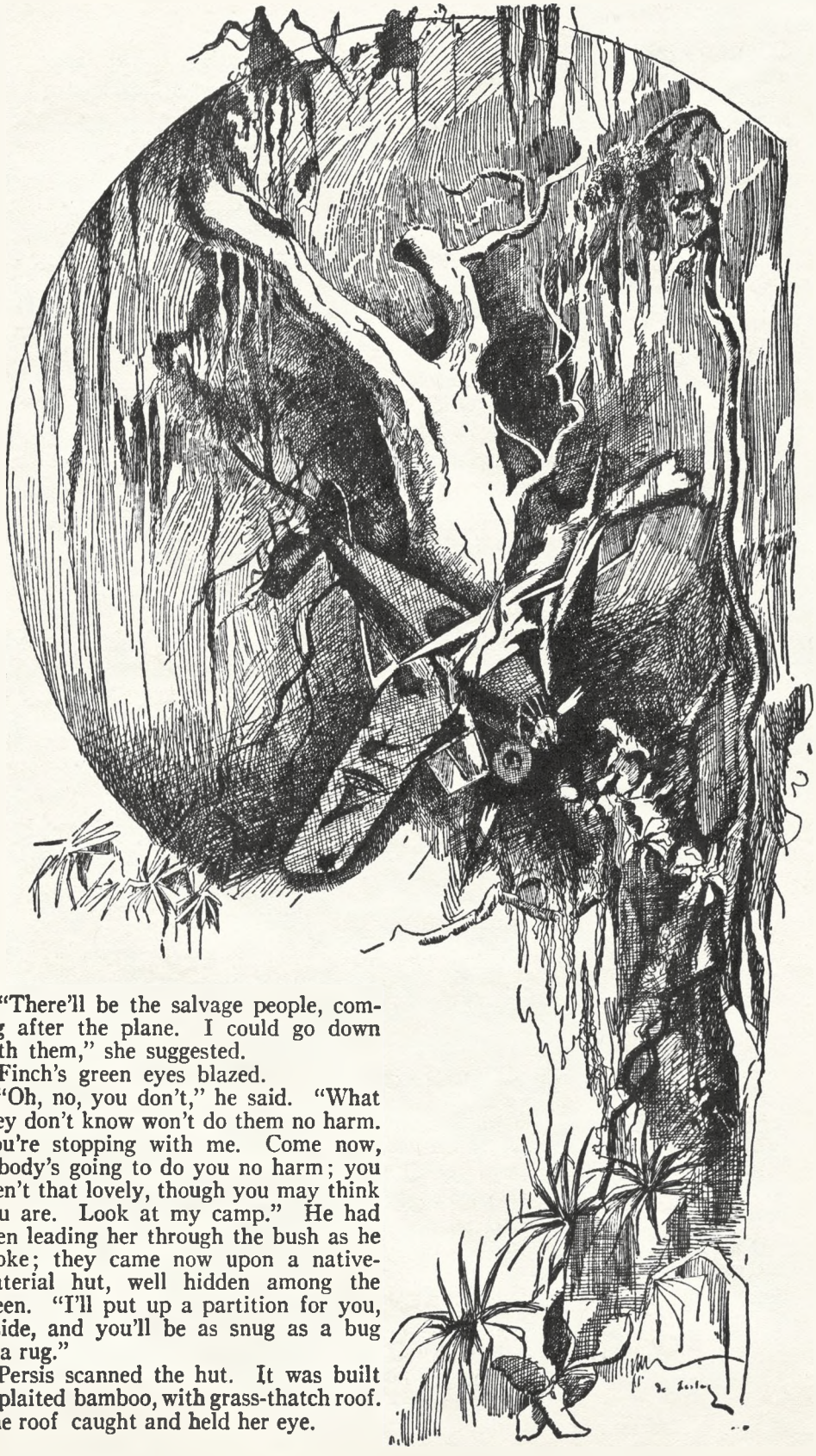
"You dare to call me a—a woman!" She would not be classed, even by this hatter, among the henna-haired too-thin ladies with cigarette-dyed hands, who strolled in gorgeous kimonos about the rooms and lounges of Tim Murphy's hotel, coming and going no one knew whence or where.

He said indifferently: "Makes no odds. Here you stay, till I've got what I call a decent shammy to take out with me."

"You can't," she told him triumphantly. "What about stores?"

"Stores are all right. Those cursed carriers of mine, they chucked their loads, just before I came on it. They was ki-ki'd by the wild niggers, I reckon—and serves them right, too!"

EATEN—no doubt! Finch (for it must be Finch) was running serious risks himself; and here was she, obliged against her will to share them.



"There'll be the salvage people, coming after the plane. I could go down with them," she suggested.

Finch's green eyes blazed.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said. "What they don't know won't do them no harm. You're stopping with me. Come now, nobody's going to do you no harm; you aren't that lovely, though you may think you are. Look at my camp." He had been leading her through the bush as he spoke; they came now upon a native-material hut, well hidden among the green. "I'll put up a partition for you, inside, and you'll be as snug as a bug in a rug."

Persis scanned the hut. It was built of plaited bamboo, with grass-thatch roof. The roof caught and held her eye.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded. He wouldn't know why she asked. . . .

But he did. He made no answer, but only grinned at her. "There's the fire," he said. "Charcoal! I made it—I don't want too much smoke. You can get yourself some tea, and then come down to the creek, and I'll show you where you can begin to work tomorrow. The more work you do, the sooner you'll get away." His tone was final, convincing.

DURING the weeks that followed, Persis lost all sense of time. In the dusk-emerald gloom of this huge forest one day was like another: food served grudgingly to her by Finch, who counted every morsel; work in the creek with prospecting-dish, while Finch handled shovel and box; nights beneath the grass roof that represented her only hope, sleeping uneasily, yet never disturbed by word or movement or even a significant forced cough, from the other side of the partition. She knew, now, why the queenship of a girl on the gold-fields had been snatched away from her; why she was, as woman, little or nothing to Finch. The man, brain, body and soul, was eaten up by gold-fever; no other passion could find room.

Every night she gave over to Finch's suspicious eyes and hands the gold she had washed out, by slow primitive methods, during the day—handfuls and handfuls of pure fine stuff. Every day or two Finch cleaned up the box, and took out what seemed to her incredible quantities of gold. The creek was a veritable jeweler's-shop, a rival to that celebrated Crœsus Creek that had opened the whole Laurie field.

Gold was tied up in trouser-legs, packed away in handkerchiefs, tobacco-pouches, empty meat-tins—anything that could be made to hold it. And still Finch labored madly, and the food grew less, and there was no talk of going back. Persis, not daring to encounter the forests by herself, realizing that Finch was daily growing stranger and stranger in his ways, began to fear that she would never escape from this golden valley alive.

The worst of all was on the day when distant sounds of axes announced the near approach of the plane-salvage party. Finch took her by the arm then, and hurried her away. The wreck of the plane lay far from the camp, but clearly he was taking no chances. For miles he drove her up into the untrodden forests above, where the trees were veiled in weeping mosses, and chilly mists hung low above the path that was no path, led nowhere, and Persis' garments, thin with work and washing, clung to her like wet seaweed. She could have cried to think of rescue so near at hand, so utterly beyond reach. One consolation only she had, that Mark would not be with the salvaging party; it was not his work.

One? There was another now, a hope so faint that it was no more than a star upon her dark horizon, yet still a hope. Once, when the mists had lifted as they were climbing, she saw, bright emerald, far below, among the tops of the cedars and pines, a patch of shining grass. She had been on the lookout for that, but she did not dare to cast more than a single glance at it; Finch was watching her.

They went back again. The forest was still once more; the salvaging party had taken the remains of the plane, and departed.

FINCH was growing queerer. Now he hardly spoke to her, save sometimes to tell her that she ate too much for a little "scrawfish" like her; to grumble, suspiciously, over the gold when she gave it to him.

"He needn't be afraid," she told herself, for she believed the very thought of gold would sicken her for the rest of her days, if ever she got away. Even to look at it made her feel, sometimes, as if she had been eating it; as if it lay, a cold heavy mass, in her stomach. And yet—and yet—it fascinated; it held. Gold was so strong. There was not much else in her stomach nowadays, and the light-headedness brought on by hunger and hard work made her sometimes fancy that she saw things in the bush: Skull faces, heads twisted horribly over shoulders, like the head of Judd, after he had fallen. And once—

But that was real. She had not imagined the fierce brown face, painted in black and red, with upright locks above it, supported by a crown of human teeth, that looked at her silently from the encircling green, and swiftly disappeared. She knew it was a native of the Koroni, that the tribe were now beginning to haunt the camp.

When she told Finch, he only said, "The blankety-blanks are after my gold," and went on rapidly spading wash into the box.

Persis knew that the natives didn't understand gold, never troubled themselves about it. Finch must have known that too, before the gold, and the big bush, together, had begun to eat his mind away. There was danger now, grave danger; and he did not even know.

She did not dare to ask him about the grass plot, whence he had obtained material for thatching. But it remained in her mind; the glimpse she had had of it convinced her that here might, be, for a daring, a reckless air-man, a possible landing-ground. Yet—what was likely to bring any of the pilots out so far from recognized routes? She had never known why Judd had ventured the trip; caprice, perhaps, the desire to give her a real thrill. . . . Well, after what had happened to him, no one was likely to follow in his wake.

IT was a day or two, or more, after this when Persis, working as usual in the creek, was amazed to see Finch suddenly drop his shovel, and catch up his rifle from the rock it leaned against. Crashing through the close-knit jungle, he vanished in the direction of the downward slopes beyond the creek—the place where, Persis thought, that open space of grass must lie. Were the Koroni natives assembling, ready for war, on the flat? What sound, inaudible to her ears, had caught the keen, bush-trained senses of the miner? She listened hard. She could hear nothing—nothing save the ordinary sounds of the forest and the creek; tattling of water over stones; the slate-pencil squeak of some small parrot; some way off, a giant green frog bleating, like a lost goat, in the bush.

Underneath these, under the fainter noises of the forest, small chippings and rustlings that one did not notice as a rule, she thought—she dared to wonder if—she heard another sound. An indistinct low hum, that might have been made by a swarm of the huge black hornets of the bush, disturbed in their nest.

Or—might not.

Persis dropped the prospecting-dish; a mass of gravel and gold, half washed, went glittering into the stream. She fell on her knees, and began to pray.

The noise came nearer; it was too loud, now, to be caused by any hornet-swarm.

Persis sprang to her feet, eagerly listening. The sound of a rifle-shot, and a cry, came to her as she stood. . . .

Mark M'Cracken had managed to persuade the superintendent into letting him take one of the Fox Moths, in order to look for an emergency landing-ground in the Koroni country. The superintendent was none too anxious to risk another valuable plane, but he understood well enough that a new gold-rush meant trouble, and planes were meant to keep trouble away. Mark had told him that, given a plane, he'd find the makings of a landing-ground, or go to blazes—a figure of speech, in this connection, not entirely figurative.

So, provisioned, and accompanied by a couple of natives with clearing-axes, he got his plane, and roared away. . . . It would be a mistake to say that a girl's face was in his mind as he cleared the 'drome, and headed for Koroni heights. Mark was too good a pilot to dream on duty. But he had done his dreaming, a great deal of it, the night before, and he was working hard, now, to make the dream come true.

The rush had started. Sensitive to the smallest hint of gold in the air, as their own scales were sensitive to a grain of the real thing, the miners had put together various apparently unrelated facts, and out of them, made something like a certainty. The continued absence of Finch—Judd's unexplained trip across the Koroni country—rumors, whispers, that from time to time had drifted down to the field, from wandering natives—these were enough.

THREE of the men, mates in the Australian sense, which means friends for life and death, had kept together, and were well ahead. They were old-timers—all that fever, hunger, ptomaine-poisoning, dysentery, blackwater, and attacks from hostile natives, had left alive out of hundreds who sought gold in the earliest days of New Barbary. Hard, enduring, well-nigh impossible to kill, they meant to be the first in, and they were. The sight of muddied water, in dry weather, in a creek that they were slowly ascending, told them they were nearing the goal. Within an hour they stood by the banks of the tributary on which the missing man had made his camp; they saw his box, his dish, his shovels; they guessed at the richness of the find, and felt themselves repaid for everything. But they did not see Finch.

Instead, they came unexpectedly, in a glade not far from the camp, upon a man and a woman who were engaged in

putting up a roughly made cross on a new grave.

As one, they burst into astonished cries of profanity. "It's Persis!" "Curse me, it's little Persis from the pub!" "Blimy, the little what-you-may-call-it isn't dead, after all!"

Persis, very far from dead, and glowing like a New Barbary mountain sunrise, flung up her hand in greeting. "How do you do, boys!" she cried. "You've come a bit too late."

The man unbent his back, and looked at the cross. It was well and truly set. "Hold on, Persis," he remonstrated. "You can't peg out a whole field. We've got two claims and maybe a reward; that's plenty."

Persis, who had found herself, during the last few hours, as hungry for gold as any other victim of gold-fever; who would willingly have taken possession of all the dead man's treasure, if Mark had not, provokingly, packed it away in the plane for the Intestate Estates to deal with—Persis, who was learning that she and Ruby were not in some matters quite as far apart as she had thought—silently, unobservedly, made a face. She could not see why Mark and she might not take up the whole of the creek.

"Where's Finch?" shouted the newcomers.

"There," replied Mark, nodding toward the new-filled grave.

"What happened?"

"Well, when a man goes batty, and starts shooting at a plane when it's making a landing, and misses, and goes for it with his hands to stop it—"

"That's right. It would. I reckon he had a rat."

"He had several, if you ask me."

"There's more than Finch on the Laurie, that has them little companions," another man cut in. "Maybe we're all a bit batty in the belfry. There's something in the way the stuff gets you—if you know what I mean."

Mark said nothing. He looked at the three men; old, worn and poor—they who had handled many thousands, lost them, lost health and regained it, lost it again; who had no homes, no sons, no women save the Rubys and her kind; who would go on losing, finding, seeking, until the day came when even their iron frames gave out, and they went, to join the mates who had gone before.

He looked at Persis, and saw, in her eyes, something of the light that burned in the eyes of the old men; the same light that he had known in Ruby's. . . . Ruby, who after all, had been the guide to the New Crœsus Creek; who must, of course, be compensated.

Well, that would be easy. But first, there was something that he had to say.

"My claim is pegged. And Miss Cameron's," he said. "And you might as well know that when we get back to the Laurie, there'll be two claims on the New Crœsus put up to auction to the highest bidder." He laid one hand on Persis' shoulder, and suddenly the miners raised a cheer. "Good luck!" they said. "Good luck to you both!"

PERSIS threw back her head with a confident gesture. Maybe you could "get over" your husband. Married women said so. . . . And gold was gold, the biggest thing in the world. Almost she could still feel the weight of the gold she had gathered (surely that at least should have been hers) lying like a weight in her body, like food. Yet she was hungry for more.

Mark said: "The boys will finish clearing, and we'll take off in an hour."

Another vivid story of this series, "The Claim of the Golden Head," will appear in an early issue.

Raft on the

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

NOW, with ghastly suddenness, the Law and the prey of the Law were placed on an equal footing. The vast hiatus that separated the detective from his prisoner had been closed swiftly by the conduct of the oil-tanker. The old petrol-carrier decided to quit, and the nearest land—five hundred miles away—was the Virgin Islands. The name, to the two men, stressed the remoteness of the haven.

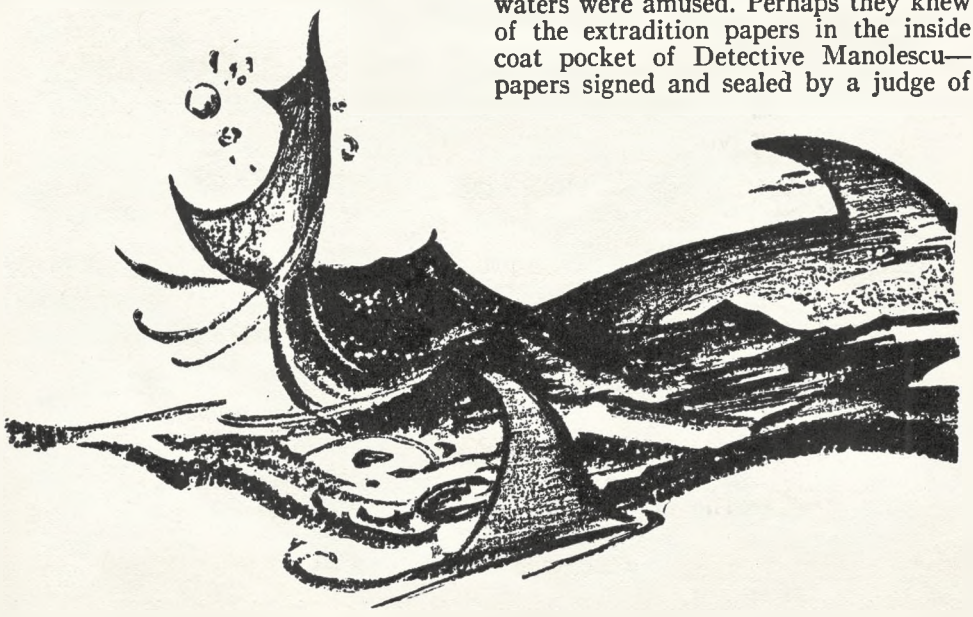
Clinging, one at each end of the pontoon raft, the thick night made them invisible to each other. The detective, by the occasional clink of the loose steel cuff when it struck the zinc floats, sensed the position of his prisoner. The prisoner had the same directional knowledge through a malady of his guard. The Law was slightly asthmatic, and made whistling noises under the influence of fear and the night air.

The detective, one John Manolescu, had shown a certain amount of bravery. Or it may have been the dreadful professional adhesiveness born of his *métier*. Anyhow, when the captain had shouted: "Over the side!" the detective had fought his way below-deck to get his prisoner.

The lock on the cabin door and his own nervousness had delayed him. When he and his prisoner stumbled out upon the nearly perpendicular deck the boats carrying captain and crew had dived into the night.

A pontoon raft, torn from its lashings forward, had rushed by them as the *Coomassie* dived. Manolescu and his prisoner had sprung for it. They were sucked down; the raft, longing for sea freedom, fighting the suicidal tendencies of the mother ship that had held it for years to her bosom. They were spewed up again, and rode a wild maelstrom for what seemed hours. Then quiet fell upon them. A tremendous quiet! The only sounds were the slopping of the inquisitive waves through the slats of the raft and the air-tight zinc cylinders gurgling joyfully over their first victory with the sea.

Perhaps the dark gods of the big waters were amused. Perhaps they knew of the extradition papers in the inside coat pocket of Detective Manolescu—papers signed and sealed by a judge of



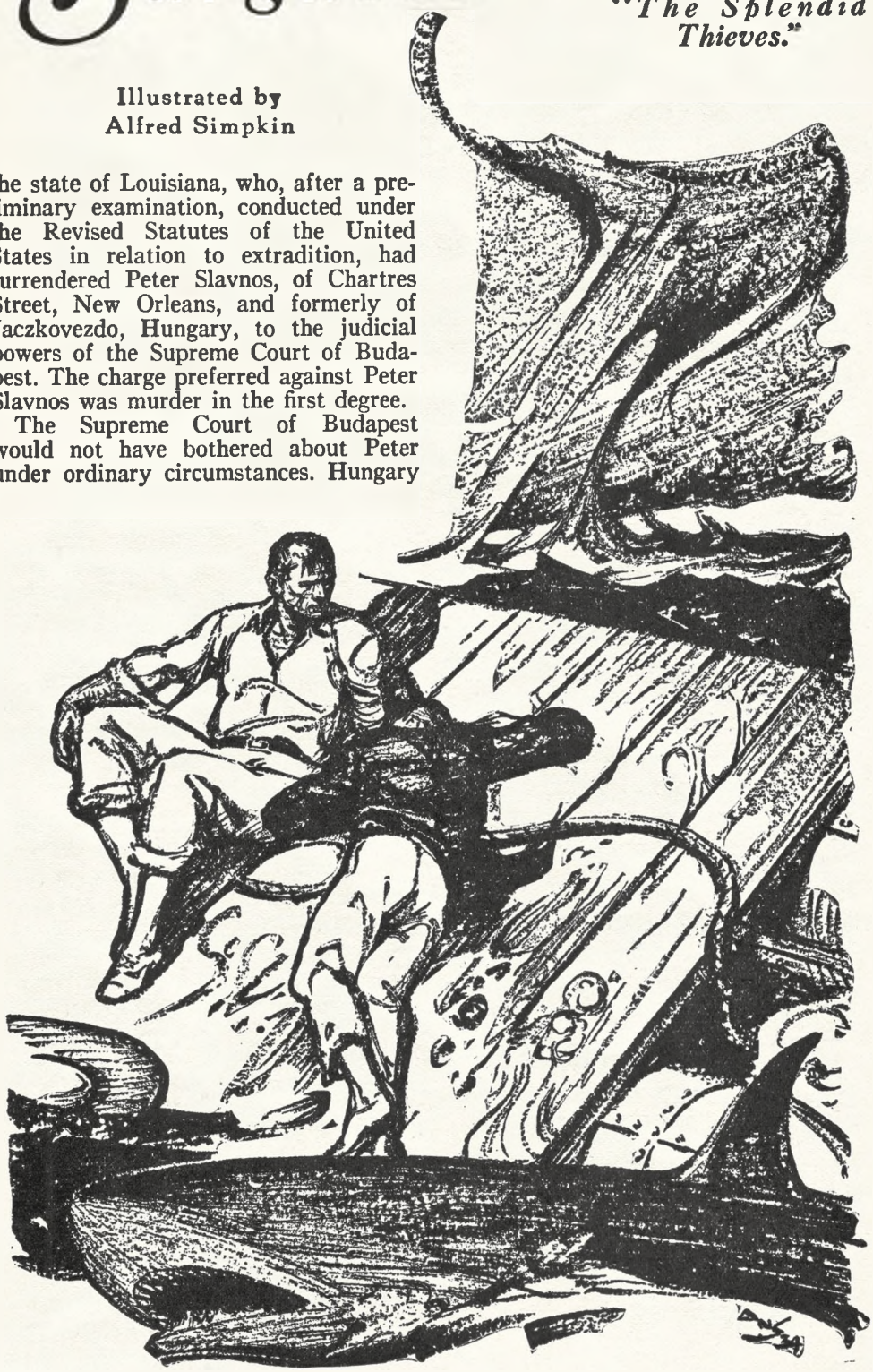
Sargasso

A vivid story of sea and shore by the noted author of "Jungle House" and "The Splendid Thieves."

Illustrated by
Alfred Simpkin

the state of Louisiana, who, after a preliminary examination, conducted under the Revised Statutes of the United States in relation to extradition, had surrendered Peter Slavnos, of Chartres Street, New Orleans, and formerly of Jaczkovezdo, Hungary, to the judicial powers of the Supreme Court of Budapest. The charge preferred against Peter Slavnos was murder in the first degree.

The Supreme Court of Budapest would not have bothered about Peter under ordinary circumstances. Hungary



was not in a position to send detectives around the world hunting for escaped criminals. But this Manolescu had come to the United States as a sort of body-guard to a high Hungarian official, and as this official did not require his further services, he was ordered to find Peter Slavnos and bring him home. The simple gesture of demanding a refugee murderer from the powerful United States was in itself fine advertising for Hungary.

Detective Manolescu had been ordered by his superiors to make the cheapest possible return with his prey. The *Coomassie* was bound for the Black Sea, calling at Trieste. Consular entreaties made the oil-company stretch a point, and Manolescu and Peter Slavnos shared a cabin. And now the dark little gods of the Great Waters had played a trick on the old judge and the Royal Supreme Court of Budapest.

"LISTEN!" cried Peter Slavnos. "Some one is speaking!"

A voice, megaphone-fattened, came out of the darkness. It gave steering directions to the boats. "West, sou'-west!" came the command. "Captain speaking! Keep together! West sou'-west!"

The scream of the detective went up from the raft. Threaded with hysteria. "Detective Manolescu with prisoner!" he shouted. "Slavnos, murderer! On raft! No compass! No food! No water! Help!"

Again came the calm advice of the captain, the toneless repetition suggesting a reproof. "West, sou'-west! Keep together! Rescue certain!" Of course he had not heard the scream of the detective Manolescu.

Something that might have been a derisive laugh got mixed with the clink of the steel handcuff. The detective cursed his prisoner with Magyar curse-words that have a fine corrosive capacity.

Again he screamed of his unenviable position. "Detective Manolescu! Wait! Wait!"

From a thousand miles away—at least it seemed—came the near-Greeley advice of the captain. "West sou'-west! West sou'-west." The small waves struck up through the slats of the raft with a noise like belly-laughter.

The prisoner made an observation. "Once," he said, and his voice was quite calm, "I caught a fish that had just caught another fish. A cod. Had it in his mouth when I pulled him in."

"Shut up!" snapped the detective. "Listen, swine!"

But there were no sounds except the thick-lipped chatter of the raft with the sea. The *plop-ploppety* jargon of the waves as they swirled the raft in a stately saraband, two-stepped it in a wild rush forward, or banged it down with a spine-shaking wallop into a suddenly formed valley, between waves.

The prisoner had a vision of the Fair Grounds at New Orleans. There, on a spring day, he had ridden with Kolya on a contraption that acted in the manner of the raft. The thing had frightened Kolya. He recalled her sweet, pointed face as she clung to him when the devilish whirling jigger tried to hurl her into space. It was nice to hold her slim body close and listen to her little cries of fear.

Kolya was terrified of many things. Of lightning, of snakes, of the sea. She had a curious fear that the Mississippi would one day lift itself over the levees and come rolling inland to join Lake Pontchartrain. When that fear came upon her he had to hold her till her little heaving breasts became tranquil. . . . . He swore softly to himself. Kolya was alone now! Alone in the little two-room apartment on Chartres Street! And he—*"Slavnos, murderer!"* the terrified detective had called him. Screamed the words to the listening waters.

He tried to forget Kolya by baiting the Law. That fish simile was good. The fool detective was so frightened that he didn't see the analogy. Slavnos decided to try again. It was painful to think of Kolya,

"That fish that caught the little fish and was then caught by me," he began, "was one—"

Again came the stream of green Magyar curse words. A great fear gave a whining note to the voice of the detective. The sinking of the *Coomassie* had brought terror.

SLAVNOS was not afraid of the dark sea. Afraid to think of Kolya, but not timid of the waters. He listened to the snaky waves running breathless from the Pole, and he tingled. This sea around him had murdered thousands, millions, but no one could put handcuffs on the sea. No orders from a silly old judge could take it somewhere to be tried for a murder it had committed years before. And the winds that ran with it were its accessories in crime.

The voice of the captain, megaphone-fattened, gave steering-directions to the boats: "West, sou'-west! Keep together! Rescue certain!"

Was it crime? He wondered. The sea murdered those who got in its way. Those who mixed themselves up with its wild passionate storms, or those insolent ones who sailed over it in rotten ships like the *Coomassie*. The sea might find some justification for his own crime. It would understand.

Suddenly he felt curiously kin to it. He tore off his coat and impulsively gave it as an offering to the playful waves. The little geysers spouting from the slats that laced the zinc cylinders together, ducked him again and again. And the warm winds dried him with fingers that made him tingle. This sea that was playing with him was the Sargasso! Dear God! A mighty thing that permitted him to ride on its back. He, Peter Slavnos, on his way to Europe to be tried for murder. . . . In the dark hours of silence that followed the last whisper of the megaphoned directions he felt strangely humble, and, yet at the same time, exalted.

The light of dawn came slowly, resembling that strange cloudy whiteness of absinthe dropped in water. Peter Slavnos made out the form of the crouching detective; the detective peered at Peter.

Manolescu was suddenly aware of the strength of his prisoner. There was a leopard-like quality about him; muscles moved, like serpents under silk cloths. The detective regretted that he had not snapped the loose handcuff to one of the bars that held the cylinders in place.

When the sun washed away the light fog there were no boats in sight. The raft had the whole floor of the ocean to dance upon. It sloshed and spun and pirouetted like a drunkard. It seemed to be having a fine time.

Manolescu spoke. He attempted to fight the fear that was on him. The fear of the sea, the fear of Slavnos. Slavnos was strong enough to throw him off the raft. The rippling muscles made dumb threats each time his prisoner moved.

"They'll hunt for us," said Manolescu. "Ships that heard the wireless call will be about soon." His words had no body to them. Terror had gnawed the guts out of them.

Peter Slavnos grinned. "Just for the moment I rather like it," he said. "Of course if we get so weak that we cannot hang on to this buck-jumping thing it will be different. Lucky I have the loose handcuff. I can snap it to this iron rod."

Manolescu blundered then. "That's a good idea," he said hurriedly. "Why—why don't you do it?"

"Because you have the key," said Slavnos quietly. "If I hooked myself up, it would make me your prisoner."

"You are—you *are* my prisoner!" cried Manolescu.

"Nonsense!" said Slavnos. "Those porpoises out there are your prisoners also?"

"I'm not talking of porpoises!" snapped the detective. "I'm speaking of you. I'm going to take you back! Understand?"

Peter Slavnos laughed. He had read of some body of police—Canadian, he thought—who brought back their man, no matter what happened. Manolescu must have read about those chaps. But the "Get-your-man" fellows were tough. Peter's eyes ran over the body of his companion. Manolescu wasn't tough.

Manolescu noted the appraising glance. Slavnos, he thought, was already plotting

to kill him. He told himself that he must not doze. And he should make an effort to keep on friendly terms with his prisoner. He remembered with regret that he had used the word "swine" when silencing Slavnos in the night. Undiplomatic, surely.

"You—you might get out of it," he stammered. "The corroboration is lacking. A clever lawyer, y'know. There's always a chance. That's what I told your wife. The last words I said to her—"

"When was that?" interrupted Slavnos. "When did you see her last?"

"Night before we sailed."

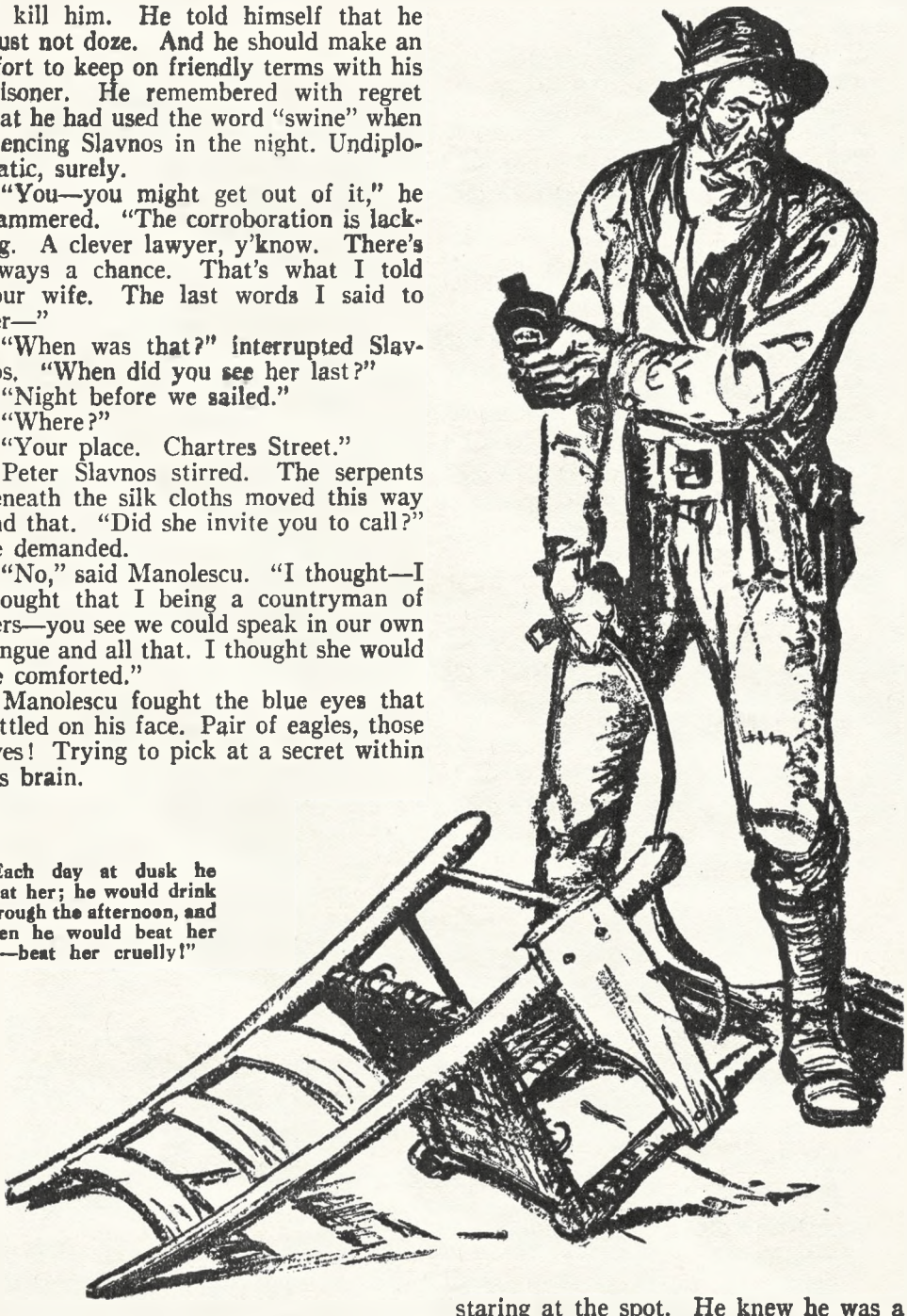
"Where?"

"Your place. Chartres Street."

Peter Slavnos stirred. The serpents beneath the silk cloths moved this way and that. "Did she invite you to call?" he demanded.

"No," said Manolescu. "I thought—I thought that I being a countryman of hers—you see we could speak in our own tongue and all that. I thought she would be comforted."

Manolescu fought the blue eyes that settled on his face. Pair of eagles, those eyes! Trying to pick at a secret within his brain.



"Each day at dusk he beat her; he would drink through the afternoon, and then he would beat her —beat her cruelly!"

The gaze fastened on his chin. Peter Slavnos recalled a scratch that Manolescu had on his chin the day they left New Orleans. A vivid red scratch. On the left side.

The eyes forced Manolescu to lift his hand and touch the spot where the scratch had been. He knew that it had disappeared, but the blue eyes were staring at the spot. He knew he was a fool, before he could snatch the fingers away.

"Then," said Slavnos, slowly,—oh, so slowly,—"it was not the first time you called?"

The spirit of murder climbed onto the raft. Out of the hot blue sunshine it came and squatted between the two men. The raft raced up the face of a slippery comber and dropped into an

abyss dug by the wave's passage. Manolescu was thrown forward on his hands and knees.

"How many times?" asked Slavnos.

"Four," said Manolescu. He hadn't the power to lie. And fear made him defiant. Fear of expressed fear.

Slavnos turned his head and watched a school of porpoises plowing toward the sun, welcoming it with fine porpoise artistry. And the silence—the silence that fell upon them—was busy. Fearfully busy. The tense questions and answers, the thoughts, the somber fears and the suspicions, quick-breeding like asps, had created a phantom woman. They had brought her into the white sunshine. A slim gypsy woman with Magyar grace. A woman with great dark eyes in which were stored all the joys and sufferings of her race. Long of limb, with little pointed breasts and hands like flowers. Hands with supple fingers that were never still.

Slavnos saw her in the flashes of sunshine that struck slantwise at the rising waves. Manolescu also, although he was fearful that his prisoner would detect what he was staring at.

After a long silence Peter Slavnos spoke. "You thought you would comfort her?" he said, silkily.

The question was a trap. It was a feint to be followed by a blow. Manolescu was wary now. This Slavnos was a killer.

"Let's forget it," he said. "Why argue about something that is—that is neither here nor there. The matter that concerns us is whether we will be rescued."

THEY remained silent like two dogs after a snarl. Mentally regurgitating, dragging back question and answer. Manolescu thought the steel cuff on the wrist of Slavnos increased the strength of his prisoner's arm. Of course it didn't, but it brought an impression of force. A downward chop with that cuff would hurt. He winced.

Slavnos had that long red scratch under the mental microscope. Had the detective gone down to the little apartment in Chartres Street to bargain with Kolya? *To bargain?* He swallowed with a strange lapping sound. Doglike. Somewhere he had read that the wives and sweeethearts of the wretches on Devil's Island sell themselves to the guards to obtain better treatment for their convict husbands and lovers. . . . Did Manolescu bargain? . . . . The thought was a cold iron gauntlet that clutched his intestines, producing a terrible nausea. . . .

The waves wrestled with the raft. The sun beat down upon the two men. In the reflected light danced the phantom woman.

He thought himself clever. Rather worldly. What were women when one was facing death? Still the vision of Kolya was there in the great sheets of flashing sunlight that struck the wave flanks.

Manolescu took a bold step. He told himself that he had to fight the fear of Slavnos. Fight it with nonchalance. He must show the fellow that he was not afraid.

Manolescu's tongue tricked him. When his ears registered his remark he was startled. Had he really put such queries? He must have. This is what he had said: "How did you come to meet your wife? She is not of your village. I know Jaczkovezdo very well."

Slavnos grinned. Manolescu didn't like the grin. To him there was a devilish humor about it. It said: "You wish to talk about Kolya? Very well, I will oblige you. Later I will bash your brains out with this handcuff and toss you off the raft."

But Slavnos answered the question. Slowly. "She is not of Jaczkovezdo. She is from the Bakony Forest."

Slavnos wished to speak about Kolya. When he spoke of her he saw her more plainly. When he said "Bakony Forest" she rose on a wave some twenty feet from the raft and smiled at him. She had told him many stories of the great green stretches running up from Lake Balaton.

And this hound Manolescu wished to hear about her? Well, he would hear everything. Everything. Later Slavnos would think out a plan. He wondered why the authorities had picked a rat like Manolescu to bring a supposed murderer back from foreign parts. A small, mean rat who made secret visits to the wife of his prisoner.

Slowly, hesitantly, he commenced to speak. "She came to our village on a morning, in spring," he said. "She followed a man who was playing a violin. Followed at his heels like a slave. She was a slave."

HE paused, his head thrust forward. There she was on the water, close to the raft! Just as he had seen her on that wonderful morning in May. Her strange flexible body that he always said he "could fold up like a ribbon of steel and put in his pocket." Quite plain she was. Her long graceful legs, so different to the legs of the women of the village. So very different. Her pointed face. "Fox-face" he called her playfully. Her long brown fingers that were so very much alive.

"What is it?" asked Manolescu. "What do you see?"

"I thought," said Slavnos, and his voice was lowered as if he thought sound might dissipate the apparition. "I thought I saw Kolya as she was that morning. Walking behind that—that dog who owned her. No, she wasn't walking! She was—she was swimming! Swimming through the hot air of the valley!"

Manolescu gurgled. Swimming was the word. That was how she moved in the little apartment on Chartres Street. Swimming!

Momentarily off guard, the detective touched his chin where the red scratch had been. The eyes of Slavnos fell upon the point of contact. Those fine fingers of Kolya! Their beautiful pointed nails. Again the iron gauntlet seemed to twist his intestines.

MANOLESCU was startled by the light in the blue eyes. This fellow was a murderer. He must watch himself. With simulated calm he prompted: "Yes, yes. She came into the village with a fellow who played a violin."

Slavnos, still staring at the water, continued. It was strange, this appearance of Kolya on the waters. He wondered if the sun had affected his brain. The sun and the absence of food and drink. "They stayed in the village," he said. "I thought it was—I thought it was because I prayed that they would stay. Prayed all that May night after I had seen her." Again there flashed the vision of her. That confession of how he prayed pleased her. She was smiling at him.

"I was nineteen," he murmured. "She—she was the same age. The man with the violin was fifty. More, perhaps."

The Law, punctilious, offered a correction. "Only forty-nine when he was—when he died," said Manolescu.

Slavnos started, glared at the detective for a full minute, then continued. "He beat her!" he cried. "Beat her every day! Beat her cruelly!" He struck the zinc cylinder with the loose handcuff. The muscles bulged as if they heard a cry for help.

Manolescu crouched as the prisoner swung upon him. "He was small like you!" cried Slavnos. "A rat! His head came up to my shoulder! I—I stood beside him on the day that he came to the village so that I could measure his strength."

The detective tried to muzzle the fear that was upon him. Slavnos was going to confess everything! He was going to

tell how the germ of murder had sprung into his mind after he had seen the woman. The pointed face, the long graceful legs, and that strange swimming movement of the slim body had implanted the germ. Manolescu's ears were wide. Corroboration. The fine watchword of detectives. He saw in fancy a red-gowned judge paying him compliments after sentencing Slavnos to death. ("And I must compliment the intelligent detective who, in a position of dire danger, did not forget, etcetera, etcetera.")

"Each day at dusk he beat her!" said Slavnos. "He would drink through the afternoon, and then he would beat her. She would run out of the house with that brute staggering after her. She would hide in the woods, and when he slept off his temper she would creep back. I waited—"

Slavnos broke off, got upon his knees, and then sprang upright. Manolescu tried to follow his example, but the surge of the raft threw him back on his haunches. Leagues and leagues away to the south a feather of smoke appeared on the burnished blue. It wavered like the tail of an invisible cat, now erect, now undulating. The raft seemed anxious to see it. It rushed to the tops of waves and hung there while Slavnos and Manolescu, eyes shaded, stared at it. At times the detective whimpered like a small dog kept from its food.

FOR a half hour the cat's tail showed, then it drifted away. Tramp steamer beating down to Rio. The raft flung itself into a watery valley and geysers came up between the slats. The raft was pleased it hadn't been sighted.

Slavnos took up his recital. "I waited in the wood one afternoon," he said. "Waited till he would chase her into the trees. I thought of killing him then." He paused for a moment, then spoke in a voice that showed a faint surprise. "There were girls in that village. Nine cottages had a flower painted on the outside to tell young men that there was a marriageable girl within, but I didn't want those girls. And I had never spoken to Kolya. We had only glanced at each other when we met on the little street. Yet she knew—she knew that I would be there on that hot afternoon ready to kill. She knew!

"She caught hold of me as I rushed out of hiding; she flung her arms around my neck and dragged me back into the bushes before that drunken dog had seen me. She was strong. Her arms were around my neck! Around my neck."

Manolescu sighed softly. He forgot the taunting feather of smoke. He licked his thin lips. Beard of Christ! The fox woman with her arms around the neck of Slavnos in a shady wood on an afternoon in summer! A blood-vessel within his head started to imitate a metronome. *Tick, tick, tick!*

"He was hunting for her, but we lay quiet," said Slavnos. "It was sweet there in the wood. She still clung to me, afraid that I would rush out at him. Her breath was on my cheek. My heart was leaping like a salmon."

SLAVNOS halted and considered the listening detective. It was nice to talk about Kolya. His confession to Manolescu wouldn't matter. He knew that. Kolya smiled at him from the sun-licked waves.

"After that drunken dog went back to his cottage I showed her how to catch the big spiders," said Slavnos. The memory softened his voice. He smiled in a dreamy way. "Did you ever catch them?" he asked. "No? It is simple. You warm a little lump of pitch and stick it on the end of a string. You drop the string down the hole in which the tarantula lives. At first he will not touch it because he knows by the smell that it is not good to eat, but if you keep on jangling it up and down he gets mad and then he makes a smack at it with his foot. His foot sticks to it, and when he tries to wrestle with the pitch he gets all stuck up. Then you pull him out of the hole and kill him."

Slavnos looked at Manolescu. There was surely some relationship between the spider and the detective. He tried to find the exact connection, failed, then went on with his story.

"Kolya didn't like that game. She had sympathy with the spiders. She would not let me squash them. She was like that. Always like that."

Again he smiled. He was watching the waves. It was nice to think of that quiet wood, Kolya's body close to him, their faces touching, their eyes upon the hole of a tarantula. Silly of the spiders to hit at the pitch. Again came that thought of a possible relationship between Manolescu and the spiders. When the next apparition of Kolya appeared he would surely understand. The strong sunshine muddled his brain, but

when she smiled at him he became suddenly wise.

His dreams were interrupted by a loud cry from the detective. There came a gasped-out question that had upon it the fine fur of vocal terror. "What's that?" screamed Manolescu. "Behind us! *Look! Look!*" Spears of horror were those words: "Look! Look!"

PETER SLAVNOS turned. A black plowshare drove up through the glittering water. Tore through it like a broad German halberd—a stout glaive cutting through silver-tinted silk.

Another and another! Four! Five! In line formation. Black axes from the depths. Unclean! Fear-breeding! Suggestive. They spoke of lost seas! Heat. Thirst. Green waters beckoning to the unbalanced brain.

"They think we're all washed up," said Peter Slavnos. "Don't put your legs overboard or Hungary will have to give you a pension. You wouldn't listen to that little story I told you about the fish that caught another fish and was caught by me. Looks as if you're doing something like that."

The black plowshares held the eyes of Manolescu. There was a magnetic quality about the dorsal fins as they sliced the water. A dreadful suggestion of murderous force. Their very gathering seemed to kill all thoughts of rescue. Here were the executioners. There was no reprieve.

Peter Slavnos, watching the swirling fins of the escort, was not depressed. He was startled at his own indifference. This company of sharks knew the waters. They had probably calculated the chances of rescue before they attached themselves to the raft. They understood the resistance of the occupants lacking food and water. Cunning devils. They, with their own shark cunning, knew perhaps the distance between the raft and the nearest ship. They knew of ugly weather ahead that would shake the two weakened men from the buck-jumping raft. Yet Peter was amazed to find that, instead of experiencing a fear that would have been natural under the circumstances, he felt a certain exhilaration. A startling exhilaration.

He would speak of Kolya. He would tell this terror-stricken detective more about Kolya. To the devil with the sharks. This confession of his that the detective longed for was something that took his thoughts from the fate that seemed inevitable. And when he thought of Kolya, he was flooded with a belief that he would see her again. A belief that he would comfort her when the fear of serpents, lightning, and the rolling Mississippi came upon her. The good Lord would not leave Kolya alone with her nightmares. The Lord was kind.

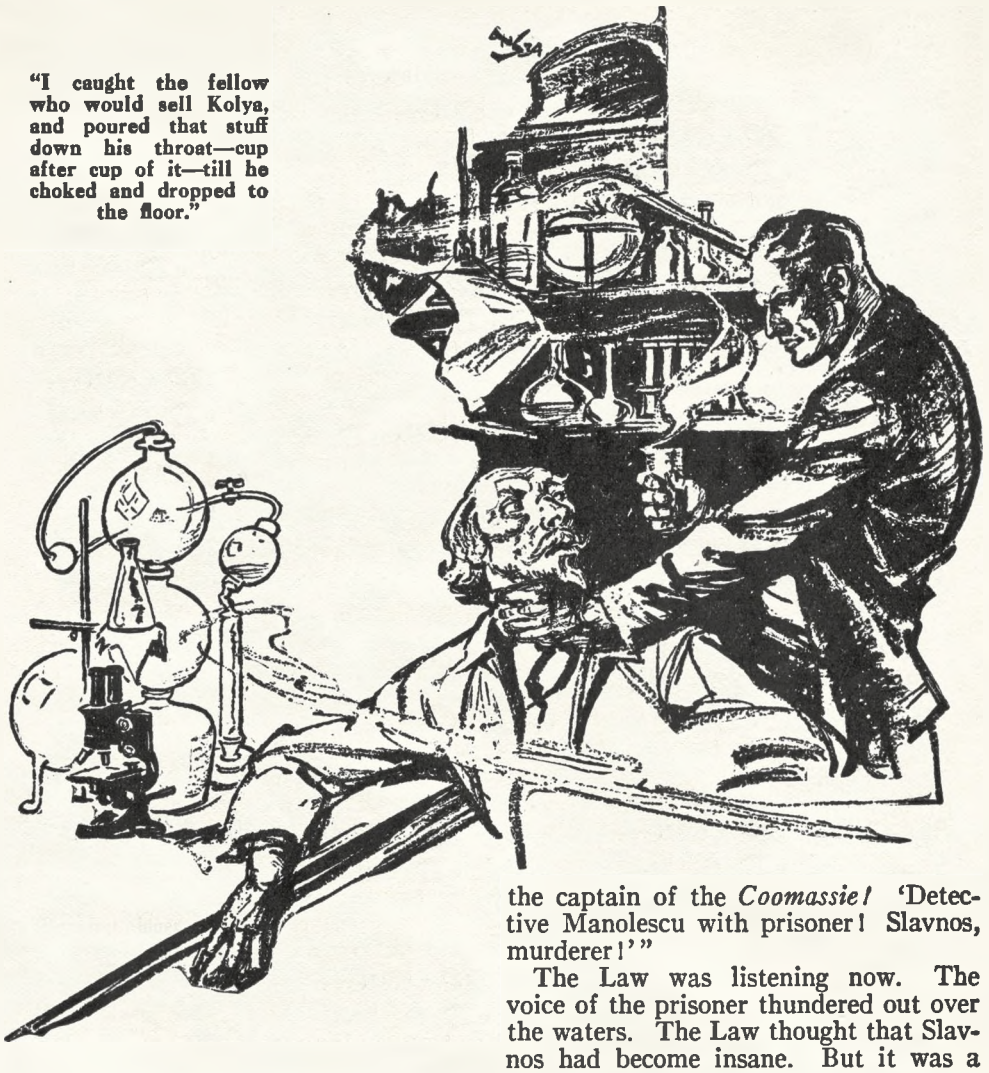
Manolescu was watching the black fins, but Peter Slavnos moistened his lips and continued his confession. If Manolescu didn't hear everything the sea would hear. The sea that was also a murderer. The sea might understand and help.

"There was a man in the village who knew more than most," said Peter. "A queer devil of a man. He lived by himself and he sold charms for cattle. And charms for women, so they said. For childless women. Folk were frightened of him. He had a way of looking at you, a way of laughing—so shrill and so high, and no man in the village would contradict him. He knew the history of the Magyars from the days when Zsolt and Taksony led the galloping Magyar horsemen across Europe. He could tell of them so that on wild nights when the wind blew up the valley the listening children saw them. Saw them riding in the black clouds. A devil of a man."

MANOLESCU was trying to listen. For the sharks might not know everything. Now and then the vision of the courtroom in Budapest came into the detective's mind. The congratulations of the judge. Manolescu knew that Peter Slavnos was working up to the murder. The fins were disturbing, but duty told him he should listen to the confession.

"He had glass tubes and pots with crooked necks," said Slavnos. "And in them he made mixtures. Folk bought them for this and that. And, if the mixture didn't cure, the sick persons were afraid to say so. For he looked at them with his fierce eyes and they were terrified.

"Now I'll tell you what he did. Look at me! Never mind the sharks! Listen to this! Get it in your ears and carry it to the court of Budapest. Tell it to the old judges who will sentence me to death! This fellow, this devil of Jaczkovezdo, gave out that he had made a mixture that would make men live for a hundred, two hundred, three hundred years. More! You just ate a handful of it and you were immortal. Or damned near immortal.



"I caught the fellow who would sell Kolya, and poured that stuff down his throat—cup after cup of it—till he choked and dropped to the floor."

"Up and down the village he screamed of it. And no one had the courage to call him liar. No, no! They were thrilled. There was nothing in that village worth living for. Nothing, I tell you! They were all poor, horribly poor. They were frozen in winter and baked in summer. They were drunken, shiftless, and immoral. But they had a desire to live. To live for a hundred, two hundred, three hundred years. Tell that to the judges. Justice ought to know the depths of ignorance! Isn't that so? These sharks they don't know that you—you are the representative of the Supreme Court of Budapest! They don't know that you have papers in your pocket giving you power to take me there and have me tried for murder. The sharks don't know. They're ignorant. Ignorant! And God won't tell them that you're a big detective in charge of Slavnos, a murderer! Sing it out to them like you called it to the captain of the *Coomassie!* 'Detective Manolescu with prisoner! Slavnos, murderer!'"

The Law was listening now. The voice of the prisoner thundered out over the waters. The Law thought that Slavnos had become insane. But it was a confession. A frank confession. The Law was forced to listen. For a moment the sharks were thrust out of a mind trained to absorb every item that would lead to a conviction.

"That hound who—who owned Kolya wished to live three hundred years!" cried Slavnos. "He had no money! Not a single *kronen!* But he had Kolya! *Kolya!* And the devil who made the mixture wanted Kolya! Tell that to the judges! Bow before them and tell how this frightening devil at Jaczkovezdo was going to get a soul in payment for making a thieving brutal dog immortal!"

Peter Slavnos paused. The detective turned his back on the swimming escort. He had to hear the end of this. The mood was on his prisoner. If it passed it might never come again. "And you?" he stammered. "And you?"

"I listened while they bargained!" answered Slavnos. "They didn't know I

was there! I listened, I tell you. Then when the stuff was poured out—the stuff that would make one live three hundred years I rushed out at them. Tell it to the judges! Take it all in! I knocked down the fellow who made that mush; and then I caught that other—who would sell Kolya—caught him and poured that stuff down his throat. Poured cup after cup of it. I would give him a thousand years of life! Three thousand! Ten! . . . . I was liberal. I poured that stuff down his throat with him biting and kicking. Poured it down till he choked and dropped to the floor. . . . I didn't know that it killed him. Not till you came after me. I just locked the door on them and left them. I met Kolya and we fled. I had heard of America. I had dreamed of it."

A GREAT silence followed the murder story. The sea was glassy. Black clouds shouldered up from over the Caribbean. Manolescu stared at the escort; Peter Slavnos sprawled on the raft and watched for those fleeting glimpses of Kolya that appeared from time to time on the shimmering water. The vision comforted him. Kolya was smiling. Smiling at him.

He pondered over the apparition. Did Kolya think that he would pull through? Could this spirit see the sharks and the black clouds? Or was the whole thing a sort of mirage brought about by the action of the fiery sun on his brain? Perhaps, yet at times he saw her so clearly that he cried out to her. Cried out in a manner that startled Manolescu.

The afternoon dragged on. Manolescu expressed his fear of the night. A storm was coming. And although the sight of the black fins was unnerving, the thought of their being there and yet invisible was more frightening still. And now that he had the confession of Slavnos it would be unjust for death to rob him of the chance to tell it with fine trimmings in the great hall of the Supreme Court of Budapest. Frightfully unjust. . . .

The raft too was afraid. As the dark closed in it made curious movements. At times it spun in circles at tremendous speed. Slavnos had a belief that some giant of the waters had thrust up a mighty digit on which the raft spun like a plate on the finger of an equilibrist. The movement terrified Manolescu. He squealed as the thing revolved.

Then, stopping suddenly, the raft would plunge forward along a greasy stretch where the waves had been curiously flattened as if by fear of the approaching storm. Lightning slashed the darkness at intervals. It showed the escort, the black fins in the silvered water, quite plainly to the two men. . . .

Manolescu began to call upon his saints. His words seemed to whip the raft. As his shrieks became louder the thing turned into a buck-jumping horror. The storm lashed it in the manner of a boy with a top.

The detective was thrown across the raft. He would have gone overboard if the strong arm of Peter Slavnos had not clutched him. The fellow's muscles were loosened with fear. He screamed entreaties to his prisoner.

Peter Slavnos rose to the occasion. He twisted the loose handcuff behind a bar joining the cylinders, then snapped the spare bracelet on the left wrist of the detective. The raft could buck over the moon, but it couldn't unship them. He yelled the news to Manolescu, but Manolescu was crazed with fear. He could not understand.

Peter Slavnos was filled with a wild exhilaration. The sea was angry, but not with him. It knew him. *"Slavnos, murderer!"* That was what Manolescu had shouted. He, Peter, was kin to the sea. Unintentionally he had committed murder. Perhaps the sea had no real intention to kill. It might, like him, have only intended to frighten, but its strength, like Peter's, brought about fatal results. . . .

At moments when the lightning flashed he saw that vision of Kolya. Still smiling. Comforting indeed as the waves sloshed over the raft. Choking, blinding waves. At times they lifted both himself and Manolescu from the slats so that their safety depended solely on the steel handcuffs. When the waves rushed from beneath them the two were thumped down with tremendous force upon the slats. Again and again the racing waves lifted them, to be foiled in the attack by the handcuffs twisted round the bar.

IN the early morning Slavnos, in a lull in the storm, addressed a question to Manolescu. The detective did not answer. The prisoner shook him. With his free hand he opened the jacket of the other and placed his hand on his heart. Manolescu was dead. The tremendous buffeting had been too much for him.

Peter Slavnos searched the pockets of the dead man. He found the key of the handcuffs. He released his own wrist and sat upright. The sea had gone down. The raft rode easier.

Slavnos was chilled. Something—later he thought it a suggestion that came from the vision of Kolya—prompted him to strip the jacket from the detective. It was quite a task. Then he handcuffed the body to the bar, crawled as far away from it as possible and laid himself down.

He felt very tired and very cold. He thought that death was near. He had no sorrow for Manolescu. In the very height of the storm the detective, fear-maddened, had shouted words at him. He had cried out the name of Kolya. Begged the pardon of Slavnos. Dimly Peter had understood. He was speaking of his visits to the little apartment on Chartres Street. His offers to Kolya had been rejected. Peter, half conscious, recalled the angry red scratch on Manolescu's chin. Kolya's long nails had written an answer for Peter to read. Dear Kolya. Murmuring her name, he slipped into a coma.

The sun came up. The black fins reappeared. Their owners wondered why Detective Manolescu remained on the raft. They knew he was dead. According to all shark experience he should roll off when the raft plunged.

PETER came to his senses in a cozy berth. A dark-faced ship's officer was standing near. He smiled when he saw Slavnos had returned to consciousness.

"That's better," he said, speaking with a foreign accent. "Bad time you have, eh? No *bueno*. No *agua*, no *comidor! Mucho malo!* Better now?"

Peter nodded his head slightly. He was too tired to speak.

"This ship," said the officer, "she is *Rocamora*. Barcelone, La Habana. We find you sick, your prisoner dead. Captain read papers in your pocket. Understand? You are *oficial de policia*. Good. Your prisoner he has—what you call them? *Brazalete*, eh? Steel *brazalete* tying him to raft. He kill, eh? No matter much when dead. *Madre de Dios!* Everything finished when man dead. Captain make sailors cut off *brazalete*, bury him in good style. Old *Santo Pedro* no know him killer. Joke on old *Santo Pedro*. Captain make damn' fine talk. Say all men equal when dead man. I go now get you food."

The sea had arranged it! The sea and Kolya! The killing of that wretch in the village of Jaczkovezdo had been unintentional, and the sea understood. All the killings of the Great Waters were accidental. The waves thought that the little ships that were built by man were so much stronger than they really were. The waves played roughly with them, and they fell to pieces.

THE talkative officer was the only person on the tramp steamer who could communicate with Peter. The officer explained that they would reach Havana within three days, and that Peter, if he was wise, should rest in his berth and think of all the evil-doers he would catch in the days to come.

"*Mucho malo hombres!*" he said, in an effort to comfort the supposed detective for the loss of his prisoner. "Thousands! Millions! Catch 'em all! *Si, si!* Put de nice *brazalete* on de wrists."

So Peter Slavnos lay in the berth and dreamed of Kolya. He felt that she knew he was safe now, because she did not appear to him as she did when he was on the raft. Dear Kolya. . . .

The *Rocamora* rolled in by the Morro light and nosed into her wharf. A shipping reporter from the *Diario de la Marina* boarded the vessel, and was rushed by the talkative officer to Peter Slavnos. Peter could not speak Spanish, so the officer gave his account of the rescue, stressing his own share in the happening. Peter remained silent. He was thinking out a way of escape. He wished to get to New Orleans with all possible speed. Kolya might be worried about lightning, or there might come to her that strange belief concerning the attachment between the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain.

The excited reporter desired a photograph. He beckoned Peter to follow him. Together they went down the ladder to the pier. The reporter placed Peter in the sunlight while he rushed around looking for the photographer connected with his journal.

Peter Slavnos, blinking in the fierce sunshine, suddenly roused himself. For an instant he saw Kolya! Kolya, urging him to move. Quite plainly he saw her in the white glare of the sun upon the sheds! Without hesitation he turned on his heel and hurried along the wharves. . . .

Hours later he came to Machina Wharf where all was bustle and hurry.

The finishing touches were being given to a steamer about to move out from the wharf.

Peter inquired her destination, from one of the negroes busy in the loading.

"N'Awlyins," answered the stevedore.

New Orleans! Dear Lord in heaven! Peter Slavnos grabbed one of the boxes and carried it aboard. Dropping it, he walked aft and found a hiding-place. Kolya had surely directed his footsteps to the boat. He was praying as the steamer threshed out to sea. . . .

It was dark when Peter Slavnos passed Jackson Square. He clung to the shadows of the French Market. He had to be careful. Many persons in New Orleans knew that the long arm of the Law had reached out and grabbed Peter.

The air was hot and heavy. A storm was sweeping up from the Gulf. The wind rattled the signs and whipped the branches of the trees. Drops of rain commenced to fall.

Peter Slavnos turned into Lafayette Avenue, then swung into Chartres. Here was the house. A flash of lightning illuminated the building. He hurried up the uncarpeted stairs to the third floor.

The door was ajar. Softly, on tiptoe, Peter entered. There was a light in the bedroom. He crossed the little sitting-room and peeped.

Kolya was on her knees. She was praying. Her sweet pleading voice came to his ears; thrilled, he listened. "Dear Lord, send back Peter to me! He is a good man. I am so lonely. Send him back, dear Lord, for I am afraid. Afraid in the storms and the long nights."

Peter Slavnos stumbled forward and dropped on his knees beside her. For a moment surprise paralyzed the tongue and limbs of the woman; then with a strange piercing cry she fell into the outstretched arms of her husband. . . .

Minutes later Peter Slavnos spoke. "I am supposed to be dead," he said quietly. "The sea arranged it. I have come back to a new life, but we must go away from here where I am known. Pack up what you want and—"

"No, no, I want nothing!" cried Kolya. "Let us go at once! At once, Peter!"

She took his arm and pulled him to the door. Hurriedly they went down the stairs and out into the night. The storm had fallen upon the city, but Kolya was not afraid. Peter was at her side, Peter—whom the dear Lord had sent back to comfort her.

Tancred

By BIGELOW NEAL

Illustrated by E. H. Kuhlhoff

THE battle was not of Tancred's choosing. Even had the odds been in his favor, his was not a warlike disposition. Under the circumstances, his part in the affray could be little more than suicide.

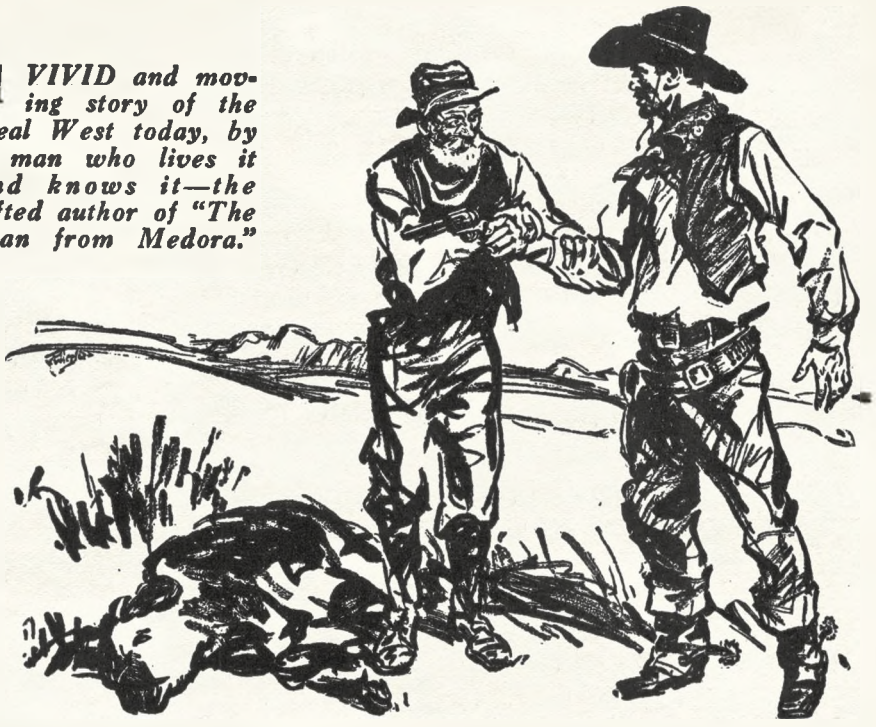
He came onto the ground which was to prove an arena, with no thought of conquest in his heart. He came following sleepy-eyed in the wake of the milch cows belonging to the 4X, down over the bluffs that bordered the valley of Clear Creek and out onto the bottomlands by the stream, plodding steadily on, in their nightly quest of water and of the comparative freedom from flies promised by the barns at ranch headquarters.

Tancred heard a dull rumble coming along the valley floor but at first he gave it no attention. When it came again, deeper and longer, more threatening than before, the Hereford opened his mild brown eyes and stopped still in his tracks. From somewhere along the dim lines of heredity and through the channels of instinct, a note of warning had reached his sluggish mind. That rumbling roar of hate was meant for him—for although he was little more than a yearling, with less than a thousand pounds to his credit, he knew himself to be sole protector of the band of cows. In fall or winter there would have been a dozen or more of the great herd bulls in from the range, but now they were out on the prairies and the little Hereford, as warrior and protector, was alone.

Again the rumble came, and throwing up his white-crested head, Tancred saw his opponent coming slowly, but nevertheless menacingly, across the field of battle.

Haakon IV was a Holstein. Tall, long, rangy and slab-sided, with prominent bones upon which the bulk of his hide seemed draped, he was not a thing of beauty; he weighed nearly a ton, and

A VIVID and moving story of the Real West today, by a man who lives it and knows it—the gifted author of "The Man from Medora."



"Don't shoot him, Mr. Daily! He aint dead yet by a long ways!" Blighty Joe pleaded.

his barrel-shaped neck arched forward to a wicked and cruel-looking head. Nature had intended him to inspire terror. Nor was it an empty threat, for his perpetually bloodshot eyes and the curled hair on his forehead were backed by a pair of long flashing horns, curved forward and admirably adapted to rip and tear as only such weapons can when driven by nearly a ton of bone and muscle.

Against such odds the little Hereford, with his lack of strength and weight, his meager horns set at right angles to his head, and his genuinely peaceful disposition, was as helpless as a fleck of chaff before a whirlwind. And yet he stood his ground, squarely blocking the path of his larger antagonist without a visible tremor or a sign of fear.

The distance between the antagonists narrowed to a matter of rods. The oncoming monster moved with his head hung low and turned to one side. As he advanced, he paused at intervals to throw clods of earth and spurts of dust above his back. With roar after roar following each other in rapid succession, he was lashing himself into the frenzy of battle.

AT two hundred yards the Holstein broke into a trot; worry appeared in the attitude of the Hereford, as he now swung his head and glanced down the trail toward the range. Perhaps it was because he knew he had friends there, men like the range-boss Chuck McArthur, who had petted him since he was a calf, or it may be he had heard the staccato beating of hoofs and knew that help was already on the way. At any rate he had no time for a second glance, for less than a hundred yards away the Holstein dropped his savage head and leaped forward to the assault.

That was the time, the last time, that Tancred might have escaped. It would have been easy to dart through the ranks of the bewildered cows and thus find the path to safety; but that was not the Hereford's conception of duty. While his ancestors never sought trouble, they were not a breed that fled from danger or even death. Tancred's pedigree was that of an aristocrat among his kind. Disdaining to flee, he too lowered his head and answered the roar of the oncoming warrior with one intended to be fully as savage, failing in this only because he lacked the vocal development and the necessary power of lung.

When they met, the first round was over in an instant. Although Tancred's neck gave great promise for the future, it could not yet stand that terrific assault.

His body, too, gave way, his little hoofs were swept from the ground and he was rolled end-over-end across the field. Scrambling to his feet, he received the brunt of a second charge full in his side —and again he rolled in a cloud of dust. A third time the Holstein struck at an angle, when the badly bruised Hereford had struggled only to his knees; his hide opened with a sound like tearing canvas as the Holstein's wicked horns glanced along his ribs. Now he was down and unable to rise again.

As the Holstein backed away for a final charge which would have crushed the ribs of the little fellow to pulp, the beating of hoofs grew louder, and two mounted men burst into the cloud of dust. But Chuck McArthur, a practical cattleman, could not shoot his neighbor's bull, and he knew that a rope would be of as little value as the single strand of a spider's web. McArthur placed his trust in a more practical weapon—and as the Holstein lunged forward with murder in his heart, a seven-foot ash fence-post described an arc in the air, terminating between the horns of the would-be killer. Another similar weapon driven by equal power from the other side struck fairly on his nose, and while the Holstein continued his charge he overshot his target, tripped on the prostrate form of the calf and rolled end-over-end. Before he had recovered his balance another fence-post jarred him from head to tail, and as he turned to lunge at the fleet-footed cow-pony a fourth blow not only confused his perspective but closed one of his eyes for some time to come. From then on it probably seemed to Haakon IV that his ribs had been mistaken for anvils by lusty and enthusiastic smiths. He left the field of his interrupted conquest hastily, and so firmly was his inglorious retreat impressed or indented upon his ribs and back that for many months he forgot about revenge. Thus a final encounter between the Hereford and the Holstein was indefinitely postponed.

THE sun set behind the serrated skyline of the Badlands. The voices of Chuck McArthur and his companion, together with the hoofbeats of their horses and those of the retreating Holstein, died away. The cows had wandered on toward home and the dust-clouds had drifted away.

Tancred lay as he had fallen, flat on his side, limbs and neck outstretched, gasping for breath and trembling all over. Before his nose a cone of crimson froth reared itself, growing steadily with every gasp from his laboring lungs.

While the defeated and almost annihilated Hereford fought his way back to consciousness, a new actor appeared on the scene. This time it was a man on foot, an old man with white hair and beard and watery eyes, who hobbled along, carrying a pail and aided by a diamond-willow cane. Seeing the form of the prostrate young bull, he paused.

BLIGHTY JOE was a squatter and a remittance-man. The first term meant he was one of the men who simply built a shack on unsurveyed Government land and claimed the premises by virtue of prior occupation. And the second term meant that he received a small monthly or yearly allowance from some estate beyond the seas, in return for his remaining out of the picture. As was common with so many characters in the "Old West," no one knew his family name, and he went by a Christian name which might or might not have been his, coupled with a nickname to differentiate him from a multitude of other Joes.

It so appeared that Blighty Joe had reached a time of tragedy as surely as the little Hereford that lay at his feet. As a squatter he had made a tragic mistake. Instead of squatting on Government land belonging to the Interior Department and thus open to entry, he had built his shabby little home on the corner of an abandoned military reservation.

For many years Blighty Joe had lived a hermit's life in the valley of Clear Creek. He was a simple old man, so simple in fact that some people thought him just a bit off. His remittance and his quarter of land, plus a vein of lignite coal and the spring to which he had been going when he came across the prostrate form of the young Hereford, had in the past sufficed for his wants. But of late a change had come and Blighty Joe found himself a trespasser on the land he called his home. That was because Bill Daily, the hard-boiled cattle baron and owner of the 4X, had purchased the military reservation and now positively refused to agree that cabbages and carrots and Indian pumpkins were compatible with the raising of beef cattle.

"Sorry," said the cattleman when Blighty Joe, after receiving written notice to vacate had gone to see him personally, "—sorry, but we can't have a

squatter right in the middle of our range."

There was something in the Boss' tone which would have discouraged further argument on the part of a less desperate man, but Blighty was getting old and it is hard to tear up roots embedded for so many years. Falteringly he tried again:

"But I aint aimin' to bother none, Mr. Daily. There's just me and my little garden an' a couple of horses, an' we wouldn't do much damage to the range; an' anyway I get a bit o' cash once in a while an' I'd be willin' to pay what it's worth to you."

"Can't do it, Joe, an' that's that. I've seen it tried out. You work hard on that garden an' you get to thinkin' a lot of it. Then some night, a bunch o' my dogies bust in there an' play ball with your cabbages. In the mornin' there's hell to pay, right! I settle with you for the garden, but it's gone just the same—an' we're both sore. Now I aint sayin' you got to get off tomorrow or even this fall. Take another year if you want to, an' then find yourself another roost."

Blighty knew there was no use in pleading. Bill Daily had a reputation for being a just man but a hard one. And so the old man went back to his shack and sat in the shade for a long while looking out over the little place where he had hoped to spend his last days in peace.

Although living in the cattle country the old man had eschewed the live-stock industry. The reason lay in the fact that his nature would not allow him to kill anything he raised, or to sell an animal whose destination was the slaughter-house. Once he had raised a pig and fed her so well that she was large enough to butcher the first fall. Unable to summon the courage required to turn her into ham and bacon, he fed her through the winter. By the next fall she was of course larger and fatter than ever—but he carried her over the second winter for the same reason that he had carried her over the first. By another fall the problem grew yet more complicated, for the sow grew so large that either one end of her or the other must perforce project from her sleeping-quarters. In this dilemma, where he must either butcher the sow or build an addition to her residence, Joe was tremendously relieved when she broke out of her quarters one night and wandered into the Badlands, where a buffalo wolf promptly turned her into a finished product.

Blighty owned a yellow mongrel-shepherd because it is the supposed privilege of dogs to die of old age. For the same reason he had two horses and a black cat. They were his only companions and he lavished his affection upon them.

NOW as the old man stood above the form of the fallen calf, swayed greatly by his own troubles and rendered doubly sympathetic thereby, his heart literally went out to the bedraggled and bleeding Hereford. Kneeling, he went over the visible wounds, one by one. There were a number of cuts about the Hereford's head which, although occasioning some loss of blood, did not amount to much. There was a long deep gash on his side and a jagged hole over his ribs. Lastly, to render Tancred's case seemingly hopeless, one front foot hung limp from a place halfway between the knee and the hoof. If ever there was a hopeless problem in bovine anatomy, Tancred was that problem—and when Bill Daily now appeared on the scene in person and saw the state of the calf which had cost him five hundred dollars plus copious quantities of ground feed, the cattleman first swore savagely, then drew a pistol from his holster. Stepping to the head of the Hereford, he was about to put the little fellow out of his misery when Blighty Joe exclaimed:

"Don't shoot him, Mr. Daily! He aint dead yet by a long ways."

"That's just the trouble," grumbled the cattleman. "For a critter cut an' busted plumb beyond repair, he aint dead *enough!* The first thing to do is to put him out of his misery an' then take his price out of the hide of that Norwegian farmer over there who thinks he can start a dairy farm right in the middle of a cow country. Who the hell but an ex-Iowa clodhopper gone crazy with the heat, would try to raise Holsteins in North Dakota? Damn' slab-sided, kick-

in', fightin' sons-o'-guns, no cream in their milk, no beef on their bones, with bulls as big as a barn—an' man-killers before you can get them weaned! If I had my—"

"But listen," interposed Blighty, rendered far braver in the cause of the battered calf than he had been on the occasion of his last argument with Daily, "this calf aint dead yet. I bet you the tail o' my shirt an' the buttons throwed in I can save him for you yet."

"Who the hell ever—"

But the old man had his courage screwed up to the fighting point, and he interrupted again. "Now just listen a minute. I can sew up his side in a jiffy. Them holes don't amount to nothin'. As for that hole in his ribs, it might be worse'n I think, but—"

"Who the hell ever made a broken leg knit on a calf?"

"Well, I hear'n of its bein' done once—an' this here break is right in the middle of the shin-bone where splints ought to work if they got half a chance. Anyway, I'd kind o' like to try, Mr. Daily. If he lives he's worth somethin', an' if he dies he aint no more than dead, anyhow."

DAILY stood undecided a moment, fingering the pistol in his hand. In common with most outdoor men he found little pleasure in killing helpless things and in spite of his reputation as a hard customer, it is probable that he was ready to grasp at any reasonable excuse in the present instance. Suddenly dropping the pistol into its holster, he turned to his horse, saying as he swung his foot into the stirrup:

"Well, have it your own way an' see what you can do. I know damn' well it's a waste o' time—but you got plenty o' that. If he lives he'll be stunted an' worthless except for beef, but at that, you might get a few meals out o' him." At that Daily turned his horse in the direction of the farm of the Norwegian settler and rode away, leaving Blighty Joe in somewhat doubtful possession of a still more doubtful problem.

For a time after Bill Daily left, the old man remained kneeling by the injured calf. Now that Tancred was his and he was free to exercise his best judgment, he found that the problem was not as simple as he had thought. Although little more than a calf as far as age alone was concerned, the Hereford weighed nearly a thousand pounds and was still unconscious. Blighty knew that in some way he must get his patient right-side-up and hold him in that position—for cattle are prone to die with no better justification than that of being out of the perpendicular.

BLIGHTY began his campaign by going to the spring for a pail of water and dousing it over the little bull's head. Returning for another, he rinsed out the gash in the Hereford's side and the wound in his chest, persevering until at last the patient emerged free from dust and blood. With returning consciousness Tancred's labored breathing was succeeded by a series of moans.

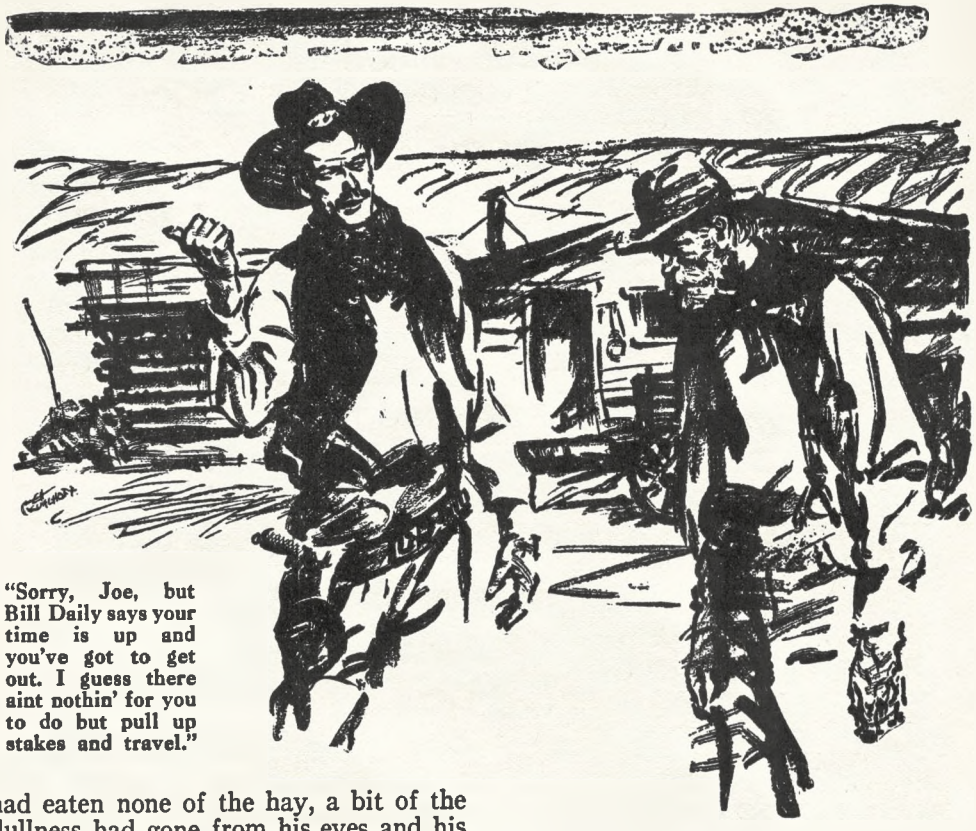
A trip to his shack netted Blighty Joe some pieces of board, a seamless sack and a roll of binding twine. With these he fashioned a set of splints and a bandage for the broken leg. Another trip secured a lantern,—for it had grown dark by now,—a wash-basin filled with disinfecting solution, a darning-needle and some thread. With these Joe sterilized and sewed together the edges of Tancred's wounds.

Throughout the early hours of the night the old man worked without ceasing. With the aid of a post-hole auger he set a tall post by one side of the calf and with a fence-stretcher lifted the curly head and pulled the patient upright. When Blighty after much straining and heaving had flexed the rapidly stiffening legs into position beneath Tancred's body, he found with satisfaction that the fence-stretcher could be removed and the patient remain upright although the curly white head was wabbly indeed and the pink nose remained close to the ground.

After securing an armful of hay which the injured bull evidently did not want, Blighty stood by the side of his charge, running horny fingers along the satiny neck.

"Doggone, fellah," murmured the old man, "that's about all I can do for tonight. All you got to do is stay right-side-up and—" A long-drawn sigh from Tancred, speaking eloquently of continued or renewed agony, changed his physician's line of thought. "An' if that Holstein takes a notion to stick his nose in our business again, we'll see what an ounce an' a quarter of bird-shot will do about keepin' the son-of-a-gun to home," Joe added.

Soon after daybreak Blighty found, much to his satisfaction, that Tancred remained upright and that although he



"Sorry, Joe, but Bill Daily says your time is up and you've got to get out. I guess there aint nothin' for you to do but pull up stakes and travel."

had eaten none of the hay, a bit of the dullness had gone from his eyes and his breathing had become regular, without the tendency to moan. Accordingly the old man entered on the second phase of his campaign by setting three posts in addition to the one already there and placing cross-members as support for his block and tackle. Fashioning a sling from canvas, he gradually worked it beneath Tancred's body and fastened the free ends to the lower end of the block. Thus after many efforts and many failures just as evening was again settling over the valley of Clear Creek, Tancred found himself resting lightly on his feet. Resetting the broken leg, Blighty left him for the night with a fresh armful of hay and a pail of water within easy reach. Tancred promptly upset the pail of water, but he ate a little of the hay.

FOR two weeks the patient remained suspended, although toward the end Blighty Joe loosened the block and allowed the Hereford to carry most of his weight on his feet. Then the sling was removed entirely and by slow degrees the old man led his charge on a three-legged march toward the tar-papered leanto which was to serve the calf as a hospital and home. Here in a stall before a manger which was always filled with hay,—the recipient of constant attention of one kind or another,—not only did Tancred's wounds heal rapidly, but there came a time when he began to trust a little weight to the injured leg. Apparently the splints and bandage had done their hoped-for work.

Although there is little room in the heart of Tancred's kind for gratitude—and the association of Blighty Joe and the bull had begun under inauspicious circumstances because of the latter's pain—yet slowly but surely the old man aroused the slumbering germ of affection in the heart of his patient. Tancred, as his wounds healed and the bones of his leg knitted firmly into place, came gradually to forget the unpleasant business of Blighty's rough surgery, and in the end, the old man's constant attendance, the many delicacies brought from the garden, the cool water which always came when the heat was greatest, and later the soothing strokes of brush and currycomb, all combined to cause a constant feeling of dependence on the part of Tancred which ripened gradually into something as near affection as ever comes to a bovine heart.

While Tancred could not be called an apt scholar, there were some things

which by dint of constant repetition gradually impressed themselves on his mind. He learned to stand over in his stall when told to do so, to obey the pull of a rope about his horns or neck, and to lead in a rather reluctant manner, especially if a half-hitch of the lead rope were placed about his nose for emphasis. And lastly, finding that such things as carrots, rutabagas and cabbages were associated with his name, he remembered to come when called. Later when the corn began to ripen, he came with alacrity.

During the early stages of Tancred's convalescence, while the leg was stiff and cumbersome with bandages, and even after the bandages were removed and he had begun to trust his weight to the injured limb, he was allowed the freedom of the yard. Later still, when he was well enough to hobble about, his liberty was curtailed by nothing worse than a picket-line. But in the early part of the summer Blighty Joe, for reasons best known to himself, instituted a change in routine. One morning when Tancred became restless as the usual time for his trip to the picket-line came and passed, Blighty Joe did not appear and while he did come later laden with an armful of young carrots from the garden, Tancred's rope was not loosened and he remained standing in his stall with the shed doors shut and securely fastened throughout the day. Not until darkness fell did Blighty Joe appear again and that night Tancred's tour on the picket-line began with dusk and ended with dawn.

From that time the Hereford saw little of sunshine except such as came through a window cut in the wall of the shed. He disappeared completely from the public eye and became, contrary to his normal nature, a creature of shadow and moonlight. Because he slept most of the day, he either roamed the full length of his rope at night or else stood still with head thrown up listening to the sounds which came along the valley from above and below. He heard the nightly chorus of the wolves singing from the Badlands and the answering bark of dogs from the buildings of the 4X Ranch. From the farm above he heard the quarreling and bickering of the dogs, the excited crowing of roosters misled by the rising moon, and often the low rumblings and bellowings of Haakon from a high-walled corral where that murderous individual was now confined, for his temper had not improved with age and he had become a man-killer dangerous to his master as well as to strangers. When those threatening rumblings came echoing along the valley, Tancred sometimes paid them back with interest, for he had not forgotten his unequal battle with the great Holstein, and the urge for revenge grew steadily in his normally mild breast.

Summer passed and with it the green things both from the garden and the prairie. Now there were times when cold winds swept down from the North, whipping rain or snow along the valley—and often when Tancred was backed up to the wind Blighty Joe would appear out of the night to lead him back to the security of the shed. Later, when the

Daily was beside himself with excitement. "Go to it, red boy!" he cried. "Give him hell for me!"

rains had ceased entirely and the valley lay cold and still, blanketed in white, Tancred's exercise, like that of his enemy at the farm above, was confined to a corral which Blighty Joe had built for just such an emergency. There was plenty of hay, however, and because the old man worked long and late at his line of traps in the Badlands and along the stream, he made a little extra money and ground feed began to appear on Tancred's bill of fare. No matter how low the supply of bacon and flour might become in the little shack, the Hereford never reached the stage of hunger, and so he grew constantly.

THUS a year went by and again came the time for warm weather. Still the old man jealously guarded his charge from the public eye and still he raised and gave and sacrificed the best he had, that nothing might stop the development of the Hereford. . . .

As the time came near when Blighty Joe must find a new home or become a wanderer on the prairies it seemed that the old man's mentality was not equal to the simplest preparations. Instead, he would come to Tancred's stall at night and there leaning against the bulging neck of the great beast he would pour out his troubles to a highly attentive, if quite uncomprehending ear.

Then one day Chuck McArthur came along, dismounting where he found the old man leaning on the handle of his hoe.

"Sorry, Joe, I hate like the dickens to say it—but the old man jumped me this afternoon an' wanted to know if you were still here. He says your time is up an' you've just naturally got to get out in a hurry, or he'll start action against you an' put you to a lot of expense."

Blighty Joe listened without comment, looking up through watery eyes at the wind-tanned face of the cow-puncher. When McArthur had finished, the gaze of the old man faltered a bit and then wandered toward the little cabin and across the fields he had tended so long and so well. After a time he nodded his head slowly.

"Yeah," he said, "I guess it's time to hit the trail. I knowed it was comin', but somehow,"—and here his gaze was wandering again over the only home he knew,—"but I just couldn't get goin'. Seems like I'm too old to start again."

Obviously Chuck McArthur did not relish his job, for his face was almost as troubled as that of the old man. "Dog-gone, Joe, I said I was sorry an' I meant it. As far as I can see you don't do a

danged bit o' harm right as you are—but you know Bill Daily. He's got his mind made up an' nobody ever changed it yet. What's worse, he fell off a horse when his cinch busted here a while ago an' he's only just gettin' so he can hobble around. He's got a temper that aint none too good at best an' right now it's a fright. I'd try to talk him out of it, but it wouldn't do a doggone bit o' good. I guess there aint nothin' for you to do but pull up stakes and travel."

THAT night the old man went out to the shed and told Tancred all about it. "They tell us, son, we got to hit the trail. We aint wanted around here no more an' we got to go off somewheres an' start all over again; an' we aint as spry as we used to be—an' besides, there aint no place to go!"

Tancred swallowed the cud under consideration and swung around the head that had grown ponderous during the passing months, until his huge pink nose was against the front pocket of the old man's overalls. He drew a deep breath and then another. But there was neither a carrot, a turnip nor an ear of corn. Sighing, he regurgitated his cud.

"An' pretty soon it's winter again an' we got plenty o' hay an' corn an' carrots an'—" Here was a language Tancred understood. Again he swallowed his cud and swung his head. Blighty Joe slipped an arm around the giant head and ran his fingers through the curly hair on Tancred's cheek, and the Hereford was willing to let his head remain beneath the frail arm of his master. Thus they stood while darkness came and until Blighty Joe finally went out and closed the door.

The next morning Blighty Joe should have been beginning his preparations to move, but instead he was hoeing again, working slowly up and down the rows with strokes which seemed to have grown markedly feeble since the afternoon before. Suddenly he paused, straightened and turned at the sound of a harsh voice behind him.

"How many times have I got to tell you to get to hell out o' here?" roared Bill Daily. "After giving you more'n a year to move, have I got to come up here an' throw you out head-first?"

When the old man turned to confront the angry giant he seemed to shrink into himself like the leaves of a cottonwood under the icy grip of frost. He trembled too and his voice was thin and piping. "Why—why, no, Mr. Daily. I'll go all right. I aint aimin' to stay here if you don't—"

"Then why aint you gone long ago?"

"Well, you see I did figure on goin'—an' I'd 'a' been out o' here 'fore this, only—" His voice trailed off to silence, his face went white, his gaze became an expression of terror and it was fixed on something behind the form of the cattleman. Bill Daily whirled on his good leg and the stump of his crutch to see something which caused even his ruddy cheeks to blanch. Coming directly down upon them, cutting them off from the buildings and protection of any sort, coming with both his state of mind and his intent written plainly in the arch of his barrel-like neck and the deadly gleam of his bloodshot eyes, was Haakon the killer bull.

The feeble old man, and the strong one who was crippled, were cut off from any sort of refuge.

In this emergency it was the old man who recovered first. Grasping the cattleman by one sleeve, he sought to propel him forcibly toward the little cabin. "Hurry—for God's sake, hurry! Maybe we can make it before he gets here."

Suddenly galvanized into action, Bill Daily swung about so forcibly that his crutch drove down into a pocket gopher tunnel and snapped off short at the level of the ground.

"Never mind," cried Blighty Joe. "Put your arm across my shoulder an' maybe we can make it yet."

BUT Daily knew better. There wasn't a chance in the world. The giant bull was coming steadily on and at any moment he might break into a run which would bring him down upon them in an instant. In that moment the better nature of the man came uppermost.

"Run for it, Joe! You can make it alone, an' maybe I can dodge it out with him here."

But it appeared Blighty Joe was not a quitter either, for although his face was as white as a sheet and his teeth were actually chattering with fear, he stuck manfully to the task of helping his crippled companion.

Meanwhile the Holstein had been content to advance cornerwise, so to speak. Raking the ground with his hoofs, he was going through the standard bull-like preliminaries of an assault. Now he let out a dull roar and broke into a trot. At the same time Blighty Joe got an idea.

From his stall Tancred heard his name in the thin, quavering voice he knew so well. Bill Daily was sure now that Blighty must be crazy, for he not only called out Tancred's name but he followed it with another high-pitched cry: *"Turnips, turnips! Co-boss, turnips!"*

"Crazy as a loon!" muttered the cattleman, but he did not allow the state of his companion's mind to delay his progress in the least.

On the old man's second call the little shed housing his pet bowed inward along the wall by the manger. And Blighty Joe tried again: *"Corn! Tancred! Corn!"*

"Loony as a bedbug," grunted Daily, and now out of the corner of his eye, he saw a ribbon of dust rising from the hoofs of the charging Holstein. A hundred yards more and they would be safe —but they could never make it!

And then, while Daily used the last of his strength and breath in a final desperate effort—too far spent to comment at the old man still crying his senseless gibberish, which had now become a frenzied cry of, *"Carrots, boy! Co-boss! Carrots!"*—the door of the shed burst from its hinges, and Tancred sprang out into the sunlight.

Bill Daily, in spite of all Blighty Joe could do to help, had expended the last of his breath and had dropped until he rested on his one good knee with Blighty Joe still tugging valiantly in the attempt to drag him to safety. At that juncture the Holstein lowered his head for the final charge and Daily heard the popping of posts and the twang of wire as the black-and-white killer leveled the garden fence. He was coming then, almost upon them! Daily, gathering his muscles for one last effort to dodge the blow which could mean nothing but death to him, heard another roar from the direction of the shed. Looking up, he caught a momentary vision of a giant bull of another stamp. This one—cherry-red of body and shining like satin, white along the head and neck with horns which flashed like sabers in the sunlight—thundered by in another cloud of dust, while the ground trembled under the impact of his hoofs.

The Holstein, intent on his intended victims, saw nothing of Tancred. If he saw anything at all it was the trembling old man, and Bill Daily still kneeling as he had fallen. Another leap and he would be upon them, ripping, tearing and stamping them into pulp beneath his

feet! And then, out of a clear sky, came another ton of bone and muscle driven by a thirst for vengeance which had endured long and grown accordingly. Almost on top of the two men, Tancred and Haakon met in a bone-splintering crash which enveloped the spectators as well as the combatants in a suffocating cloud of dust.

Automatically Bill Daily rolled to one side, out of the path of the charging Holstein. It was unnecessary, for, when the breeze moved the dust aside, the two warriors knelt face to face and horn to horn; neither had gained or lost an inch.

DAILY had seen many Hereford bulls in his life, some of them costing thousands of dollars, but never had he seen the equal of the one that had come to his rescue. Now he was not only looking at the most magnificent specimen of a Hereford that he had ever seen but he was looking through the eyes of a man whose anger at the Holstein had endured as long as Tancred's, whose sporting blood thrilled wildly at the prospect of a great battle and whose reaction from the fear of death drove him nearly frantic with excitement. He forgot that he was exhausted, forgot he had an injured leg, forgot everything but the scene before him.

"Go to it, red boy!" he cried. "Give him hell for me."

The warriors were on their feet now, sparring for position, with no sound but the straining of their lungs and the click of horn on horn. The Holstein had the advantage that his weapons were curved while Tancred's, set at right angles with his head, were all but useless. Tancred had a slight advantage in weight although too much of that was fat. All in all the odds were about even unless it should prove that the younger bull had more endurance than his adversary.

Suddenly the Holstein gave ground and threw Tancred off his balance. Then Haakon came in with a deadly lunge to the ribs. But Tancred threw his rear end around just in time; the Holstein missed.

Daily, beside himself with excitement, was hopping up and down, yelling at the top of his voice: "Now's your chance, red boy—hit him low on the nose and fold him up!"

But Tancred and his opponent both struck high and again the shock dropped them to their knees.

"Look out now when you break," cried Daily, "or he'll rip your face to pieces!"

THEY were on their feet again; Tancred leaped in so suddenly that he opened a long red seam along the Holstein's shoulder and the Holstein returned the compliment with a thrust which glanced from the Hereford's flank. For a time both were lost to sight in the dust, for the scene of battle had shifted to Blighty Joe's cabbage patch where the top soil was light and dry.

Hopping excitedly about on one foot, Daily peered into the gloom, able to follow the course of combat only by the breathing of the warriors and the clashing of their horns. When it seemed that the fortunes of war favored the Holstein he listened and watched with strained and worried features. When he judged that Tancred was getting the better of the engagement he threw his arms violently around Blighty Joe and nearly crushed the old man in his bear-like hugs. And once when the black-and-white fighter received a jolt hard enough to drive him clear from the curtain of dust, the cowman's evident joy gave the old man the courage to hazard a question:

"Mr. Daily, he's mine, aint he?"

"Who's yours?"

"I mean the bull—Tancred—you give him to me, didn't you?"

"Sure I did! Who says I didn't?"

"An' you'll take him away from me now that he's good for somethin'?"

"Take him away? Hell, no! But I'll give you a thousand dollars for what's left of him after he cleans up this he milk-cow. Look! He's got him down! Sick 'im, you red devil! Give 'im seven kinds of hell for me!" Then as the dust shut down again Daily heard the small, persistent voice at his elbow.

" 'Fraid I couldn't sell him, Mr. Daily. You see, I patched him up an' raised him an'—well—I guess maybe you don't understand."

Now the combatants were on sod again and the dust thinned down. Apparently the odds were about even, but the experienced eye of the cattleman saw that the Holstein had little more to offer while the eyes of the Hereford glittered brighter than ever.

"Now, old turnips, carrots and parsnips," yelled Daily, "turn in an' finish 'im up!"

Tancred was long past any interest in garden produce, but he appeared to realize his advantage. Giving over his close-quarter fighting he widened his range and charged again and again. And each assault rocked the Holstein and all but crushed him down. Once more the Hereford drove in and fate decreed that the force of the blow should land squarely against Haakon's horns. One of them snapped like a pipestem. No dehorner could have done a better job unless it had done it years before. And now a crimson plume waved above the combatants, driving the Hereford to frenzy. He charged again, this time with a savage roar of hate and caught the Holstein low on the nose.

This last charge was too much. The great barrel-like neck gave way under the strain. The cruel head rolled back against a shoulder and up—it was the half-Nelson of prairie fighters. Haakon crumpled and fell, turning over and over, unable to stop because of the battering-ram that was launching blow after blow against his ribs. With Daily crying and yelling himself hoarse, with the old man hopping about with a dexterity supposedly long lost, with Tancred still roaring defiance and hate, the would-be killer got to his feet, jammed his tail down tight between his legs and set out with what speed he could, for home.

WHEN they had coaxed the champion back to his stall and anchored him securely with a chain, Bill Daily leaned against the broken door-jamb and said: "Tell you what I'll do, Joe. I'll give you two hundred dollars a year for the use of the bull in the summer time, a deed to this piece of land, an' I'll furnish all the ground feed the old son-of-a-gun can eat the rest of the year."

The old man couldn't speak for a time. He looked out across his ruined cabbage patch, at the broken manger and splintered door and smiled.

What did anything matter now that he and Tancred had a home they could call their own?

The Dignity of the Bench

Is college football "overemphasized"? Perhaps you will agree with the hero of this fine story that it can't be done!

By HERBERT DALMAS

Illustrated by George Avison

THE Wednesday before the State game, Tommy Norman was moved down to the third team from the nominally honorable position as guard for the Spareribs. He walked back to the gym a little ahead of the others with a curious feeling that the incident more or less rang the curtain down on his college career. Of course anybody might be sent from the second to the third team; but coming as it did after nearly a year and a half of trying, the demotion had something definite, almost symbolic, about it.

It was symbolic of everything, not just football. Fraternities, for example. By the time you were a sophomore at Franklin, you were pretty well settled: either you were an athlete or a practiced tea-fighter, and had joined one of the High Street houses, or you were a colorless nonentity. Tommy, as a hopeful freshman, had refused the lesser houses, in order to remain neutral. He didn't know why the big fraternities hadn't been after him. He supposed at times that it was because his father was a not spectacularly wealthy resident of a small town too near the college—somehow it seemed to be the boys from the big prep schools, the boys who had fur coats and lent each other cars, who went to the better fraternities. Football had been the only apparent way of breaking into a world where he felt instinctively that he belonged. Now that that was definitely over, it occurred to him that he could get all he was getting out of college from a correspondence course.

There was an added stab in being cashiered just before the State week-end. It was the high point of the fall. The alumni swarmed raucously back to the campus; almost all the houses had parties, and every man had his girl up. Win or lose, it was the biggest week-end of the year. The only way to do it justice, Tommy knew, was to invite Jane. He could have done it with propriety, because the fraternity dances were always open at such a time. But the word "open" seemed somehow to apply to the other houses—open to each other, not to interlopers who belonged nowhere.

He dressed slowly and meditatively, pondering the future, wondering what he'd do. The romantic possibilities of shipping out or going West presented themselves, but he rather thought it would be a job in the bank back in Truesburg. An unexciting prospect, but Jane would be there; that would be something. Furthermore, he'd have a place in town. Rich though they surely were not, the Normans were one of the oldest Truesburg families.

He hurried more when the rest of the squad began to straggle in, because he didn't want to talk to anybody. As he went out into the cold New England dusk from the steam of the locker-room, the gym clock struck six, and the sound quite unexpectedly unnerved him. For one whole college year and part of another, his life had been chimed along by that clock. It was painful to imagine living without it. He looked across to

the chapel with its Gothic tower a softened shadow against the brittle stars, and at Baldwin Hall alongside it, which the intellectuals liked to call an eyesore. It wasn't one to him, though. He belonged to it all. . . . He called himself a sentimental ass and dived into Bascom, where he roomed.

THE place was hearteningly alive, as it always was just before dinner-time. Radios—roommates bandying insults in a loud argument—some one bellowing a song in a rushing shower on the top floor. But it didn't last long. Singly and in groups the residents of the upper floors clattered downstairs, past his door without pausing, and out on their way up to their several fraternity-houses.

A quiet dormitory is only a shade less dreary than a mausoleum; and Tommy, badly needing some one to talk to, sat down to write to Jane, who was the only person who could be properly sympathetic when he was discouraged. He filled five pages rapidly. Drool—disgraceful drool. He tore them up, flung the scraps into the fireplace and went out.

He bought a paper both for company and protection during dinner. Better to eat alone and read, than with a chance companion he neither knew nor cared much about. The sheet which he scanned across his gravy-inundated lunch-room "special" offered nothing particularly consoling. Even the front page was dominated by football news; it was all anybody was interested in these days. A headline, "Franklin Head Declares College Football Overemphasized," made him smile a little. With the end of the season three days off, it was to be expected that the perennial pearls on athletic overemphasis should be forthcoming. Now, however, he found himself wondering if there might not be something in it, after all.

Feeling thoroughly sorry for himself, he went to the movies after dinner. The noisy darkness did nothing but accentuate his loneliness. Angry and hurt, Tommy hurried grimly back to his room and fished his suitcase from under the bed. He threw things into it indiscriminately. He'd do his trunk next, and be off in the morning. . . .

Somebody knocked faintly at the open study door, and said: "Hey!"

Tommy straightened, and saw the tall, lean figure of Mike Humboldt.

"Hello," he said, concealing a justifiable surprise. After all, the great All-American Humboldt, the local deity, had never paid him a visit before.

Mike grinned apologetically. He said: "I came downstreet so I could call up my girl without a lot of half-wits yapping at my elbow, and I haven't got enough money. Got any change? I can't seem to find any of our freshmen or sophomores in this damn' building."

Tommy searched his pockets.

"I only need about forty cents," Mike said. "I'll pay you tomorrow at practice."

Tommy handed over the money, but Mike hesitated as if reluctant to leave abruptly without an effort to warm the transaction. He nodded toward the suitcase. "Going somewhere?"

The truth would have been ridiculous. Tommy shook his head. "Just getting some things together," he said vaguely.

"I thought you might be clearing out," Mike said, and grinned again. "You never can tell about you sophomores—you're always getting sore at the place, and wanting to head out. I almost quit myself, a couple of years ago."

"Nothing like that," Tommy said with an appearance of ease.

This seemed to close the subject. Through a long pause Mike jingled the coins reflectively, perhaps feeling that there hadn't been forty cents' worth of conversation. "Well," he said, groping like a gentleman for common ground, "the old season's about through."

Tommy said: "Yes."

"Gonna be a tough game Saturday," Mike offered. "This bozo Tramsky's gonna be a hard baby to handle."

"I'll say," Tommy agreed.

"Prexy'll probably want us to give 'em a couple of touchdowns for a present so we won't be over*em*phasizing the game."

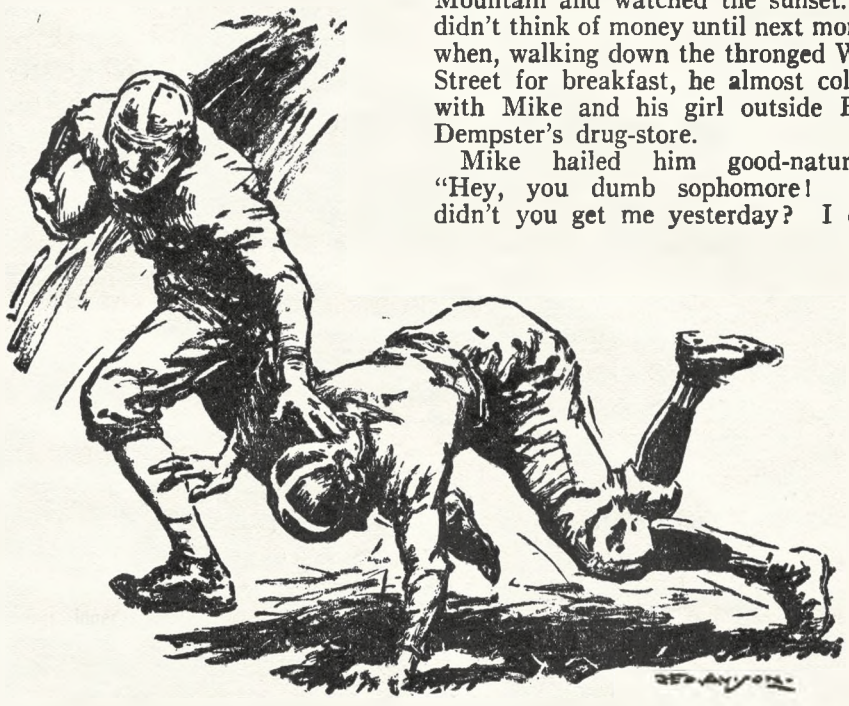
HERE at last was something Tommy knew the answer to. He laughed derisively. "Somebody ought to tie a muzzle on that guy," he said professionally.

Mike laughed loudly, and the atmosphere was cleared. "Aint it the truth!" he said. "Well, I'll be rollin'—no use keeping the little gal in suspense too long. So long, Tommy—thanks. I'll pay you tomorrow. Don't forget."

If Tommy had been still a freshman, he might have been thrilled at having his first name used by a man who figured in several thousand headlines every week.

But he knew better now. It was a trick big men had. It flattered their inferiors, disarmed dangerous competitors, and collected votes generally. In this case it was just interest in advance on forty cents. He returned to his packing, finished it, and went out for a long walk so he would be able to sleep.

Next morning he cut his eight-o'clock and had a solitary breakfast. There were a few details to clear up before he could drop out of town, but it was amazing how little he had to do. No ties at all to be broken; he was as much alone after a year and a half as he had been the first day he came.



Mike caught the punt and side-stepped one of the headlong ends. Then he stood still and watched the avalanche sweep toward him.

There was a letter from his father at the post office. Part of it said: "I think I'll sneak away Saturday and come up for the game as I did last year. It's something I'd like to keep up while you are there, especially since you are on the squad—it makes me feel a little as if I were in college too. I won't get there much before the game starts, I guess, but I'll meet you afterward, and maybe you can come back with me for a week-end at home. I can think of one or two other people besides your mother and me who would like to see you."

Though he had decided only the night before, it was a shock to Tommy to realize that there could be anyone who did not take his departure for granted by this time. It would be easier to explain to his father while riding back with him on the train, he decided, than to land at home with no warning at all.

Tommy didn't get the forty cents from Mike that afternoon at practice, because he didn't go to practice. He walked by himself halfway up Saddle Mountain and watched the sunset. He didn't think of money until next morning when, walking down the thronged Water Street for breakfast, he almost collided with Mike and his girl outside Eddie Dempster's drug-store.

Mike hailed him good-naturedly. "Hey, you dumb sophomore! Why didn't you get me yesterday? I clean forgot. Miss Dixon, this is Mr. Norman. Wait, Tommy, I got to get some stuff."

Tommy found himself struggling uncomfortably for words while Mike dashed into the store for change. Miss Dixon smiled up at him, her eyes sparkling a reflection of the excitement that was electrifying the whole town.

"Are you one of the Sig sophomores I heard Mike ordering around so brutally last night?" she asked.

Tommy looked embarrassed, and shook his head. "No," he said, trying unconvincingly to sound as if he were at least a prominent Delt.

She changed the subject quickly.

"I never was so excited about a game!" she said. "Everybody says Tramsky's going to walk rings around us."

"Mike'll be able to hold him, and a little bit more," Tommy said loyally.

She smiled thanks, as Mike came back.

"Here," he said, pouring some coins into Tommy's hand. "See you at the game. Don't eat much for lunch—we're probably going to need the whole squad this afternoon."

Tommy dwelt fondly on the recollection of Miss Dixon, because she made him think of Jane. It was rotten that he couldn't be walking down there that minute to give her breakfast at Gus' restaurant. . . .

The rest of the time passed somehow. He wished only that he might be spared the stupid business of dressing and going out on the field at all. It was pretty pointless. Still, no good spoiling the game for his father, who, heaven knew, had something of a shock coming to him afterward.

THE locker-room was in its usual pre-game uproar. The varsity squad was relieving tension by bawling importantly at the sweating assistant managers. Mike Humboldt and one or two other stars were stretched royally on the rubbing-tables, being kneaded and slapped by the trainers; Curly Ogden, the coach, was talking steadily in low tones to Mike. The word *overemphasis* came to Tommy's mind again. A silly, meaningless word, but its connotations were accurate enough. Nothing mattered now, but the widely advertised stars.

A compet, one of those slaves even lower than scrubs, brought Tommy his uniform, and the attention made him feel better. He further bucked up his ego by ordering the menial out for some tape. He didn't need tape any more than he needed water-wings, but the act of putting it carefully on one ankle and his wrists passed the time, and helped him forget the inglorious part he was to play in the coming spectacle. After this he put on his uniform: the hand-me-down pads, the stained pants, the darned jersey with the moth-eaten 64 on its back. "*T. Norman 64 . . . . 188 lbs. 6 ft.*" He wondered how many people besides his father would see that far down on the program, or seeing it, bother to pick him out on the bench.

Earlier in the season he used to listen with something of a thrill when the coach read the starting line-up. Once in a very minor early-season game he had been out there on the field for the first whistle, and the intoxication of that had been until recently fresh upon him. But today he didn't even listen. This was no minor game; the guards would be Dayton and Crowe, the best available.

He jogged out with the scrubs to pass and kick and run through signals. The cheering-sections boomed their antiphonal battle-song; the bands played a portentous *obbligato* to the din, which exploded into pandemonium when the two first teams charged ferociously out almost together. After a while Tommy walked to the sidelines, wrapped himself with great care in a blanket, and sat down on the end of the bench. He was neither player nor spectator; that bench was the symbol of his whole unbearable existence at college. His life was spent on a bench, a place where he had neither dignity nor dishonor, a place where he was simply a zero.

The two captains were shaking hands with each other and the officials, who were pretending not to notice the cameras. Then Mike won the toss, and took the slight wind at his back and the kick-off. The teams lined up at last; the referee blew his whistle; and Tommy was swept up from the depths by the familiar spell, and began in spite of himself to be interested.

It didn't, he was forced to concede, look much like the contest of champions it was supposed to be—not from the spectators' point of view, at any rate. Each team had everything to win and everything to lose, and they played the kind of air-tight, extremely hard football that adds years to a coach's life even if it doesn't bring the stands surging to their feet at every play. State, with Tramsky and three other heavy backs began its attack on the line, gained seven yards, and cagily kicked on the third down.

Mike caught the punt, and coolly and effortlessly sidestepped one of the headlong ends. Then he stood still and watched the avalanche sweep toward him. Two men bore down, and he became briefly a twisting miracle, leaving them crumpled and unimpressive on the ground while he continued in an apparently unhurried amble about five yards toward the sidelines. In an instant, like a bolt of lightning with a mission, he reversed his field and made for open ground. Tramsky, who had kicked, swooped down from nowhere and made the tackle. The stands very properly foamed at the mouth.

State had been scouted carefully and was known to have one comparatively weak spot at left tackle. Mike slid off

This time Tommy brought him painfully down. That would teach the big oaf to go around wiping his feet on other people's necks!

that point for eight yards, and before State could catch its breath, again for four more and first down. Then he unexpectedly pulled a short pass out of the hat for an even five yards. But right there State held, and he had to kick on third down.

Those first few minutes were the pattern for all that followed. Each team made short gains, some first downs, and then had to kick. State's flimsy left tackle became mysteriously as good as any other place in the line; but that was because of Tramsky. The man was even better than report had made him. Calm, seemingly above fatigue, he walked back and forth behind his line, directing its defensive movements like an army officer in a battle of romance. Time after time he made apparently impossible tackles when it looked as if a Franklin back might worm himself free. On the other hand, however, he was unable to gain against Humboldt and the Franklin defense. By the end of the first quarter the game had all the promise of a scoreless tie, and Tommy could not help wondering if Mike had really met his match at last.

Then it began all over again. The teams traversed and retraversed about seventy yards of field, the deadlock unbroken. If Humboldt could once get well past Tramsky, it seemed certain he could score, for there were only about four men in the country who could hope to bring him down in the open field, and the tough little Pole was not one of these. Tommy pulled the hood of his sweat-shirt closer about his ears and blew against his blanket to warm his face. What the hell—it didn't make any difference to him! Mike Humboldt's reputation was safe enough. He was playing All-American football—but there were two men doing it on the same field.

A VOICE called: "Norman! Tommy Norman!"

The man next to him shoved him off the bench, and he stumbled, stiff from long sitting, toward Curly.

"Warm up," Curly said before he got there.

Tommy turned and writhed out of his sweat-shirt. He ran briskly up and down the side-line, blowing on his hands. He crouched and charged fiercely, trying desperately to warm up. But it was no good; there was no warmth there—what little there had been, promptly left him. His thighs, fairly normal a few minutes ago, became like cold water-soaked toast, and every organ of his body convened unreasonably at the pit of his stomach in a hideously curdled mass. Somebody yelled from the stands, "Get in there, Tommy, boy!" and that should have encouraged him. It didn't, though. It did nothing more than emphasize the stupidity of sending him, not even a good Spararib any more, into a situation that even the best guards they had could not cope with. Then Curly called him, and he ran back and knelt in front of him like a knight about to be dubbed.

Curly put his hand on his shoulder and said: "Go in there for Crowe at right

guard, and tell Mike to freeze that ball if it's the last thing he does. Tell him never mind about this half now—play it safe. I want to have a talk with Crowe. Now get in there, and see what you've got. You ought to be good for three minutes; you haven't done anything to get tired about all week."

Tommy nodded. "Do you want me to do anything—special?" he asked, rising.

Curly's mouth twitched. "Well," he said, "you might break Tramsky's leg if you have a second free."

THREE or four people on the bench laughed; and Tommy with a hot face realized the meaning of this substitution. It was just that he was big, and probably had three minutes of football in him. Three minutes out of a season! He could be useful in giving Crowe a chance for added rest before the real work was outlined by Curly. They were perfectly safe in putting him in, because if he got hurt, there would be no loss, not even the loss of a really good substitute guard.

"Don't forget to report to the referee," Curly said, pushing him. "And don't talk till after the first play. Go on!"

He scrambled on legs that didn't belong to him out toward the two teams, one arm waving hysterically. The umpire tooted his horn, and the referee blew his whistle. The reporting was done, and Crowe ran off.

The first play was nothing to Tommy but a bruising blow on the shoulder by the opposing guard, and a vast melée of legs and rasping canvas while Drake, a Franklin back, made two yards around left end. After that, though, things cleared up nicely. The sloping sides of the stadium vanished; the steady roar of the crowd went with it, and the two teams might have been alone on a prairie. Tommy had time to examine the man opposite him. He was forbidding enough, and Tommy thought how strange it was that everybody else was so at ease, so confident. He made what he thought was a fairly plausible pretense at being an old hand himself, but it didn't quite come off, for the other guard made no effort to conceal his contempt.

When the ball was snapped, Tommy charged in the approved "tight line" fashion that was part of Curly's old-fashioned system. The other man, having solved the offense, bowled him over again and romped through easily. But he didn't stop the play. It was off the State left tackle, and Tramsky erased it convincingly after it had gone three yards. Then, sitting unimpressively on the ground, Tommy had an idea. That guard had got past him without trouble, but it was evident that Mike was too fast for any guard to get on that play. Why not, therefore, give the man free passage, as long as he was likely to take it anyway?

He whispered in Mike's ear: "Curly says keep plugging there!" It wasn't exactly what he had been told to say, but he didn't think of that. His heart pounding in his throat with the daring of his inspiration, he lined up and prepared to do the unthinkable—to disobey Curly's express and often repeated orders. To bolster his courage, he scowled rather balefully at his man. Mike called the signals; Tommy nominally checked the other guard and let him by. Then he snaked through the line and dived frantically at the feet of Tramsky, who was cutting in on the play. They went down jarringly. When Tramsky's knee was removed from the Norman spine, Tommy propped himself on one elbow and looked curiously about for Mike. The redoubtable fellow was on his feet more than ten yards ahead and still dancing on, but the two State halfbacks came at him at once. He settled to the ground under their terrifying impact as lightly as a snowflake on a coon-skin sleeve; but when he got up, the two State men were limp. Time was called, and Tommy, his mind and perceptions now razor-keen, watched Tramsky narrowly and saw him say a few words to the guard.

MIKE, passing him, said out of the side of his mouth: "The old fight in there, Tommy!"

They lined up for the same play; and Tommy, now blissfully in command of the situation, grinned impudently at his opponent. "What's the matter?" he said easily. "Papa bawl you out? Don't get sore, sonny. That's what you're paying him for, isn't it?"

The other man's lips moved in a muttered malediction, and he leaned forward, tense and very wary. Before the ball was passed, Tommy made a sudden movement, taking care not to be offside; and the other, too eager, was thrown off his delicate balance. It was a trick that might work once, especially if the victim was quite sure of himself.

Tommy got through again and hurled himself at Tramsky, who was playing

farther over toward the tackle this time. For this reason he hit only one leg, but the fraction of a second gained while Tramsky faltered was enough to let the ghostlike Humboldt slither by. Tramsky furiously jerked his leg free like a man who has carelessly stepped into a pool of molasses, and his shoelaces rubbed in brief agony across Tommy's neck. At that instant Tommy ceased to see in the State fullback an All-American choice, and saw an ordinary and rather crude mortal who had rubbed his tender neck raw. He scrambled to his feet, pursued the man a few steps into the open and attacked him again savagely. This time he brought him awkwardly and painfully down. Tommy, with his chin pressed against the frost-hardened earth, smiled happily. That would teach the big oaf to go around wiping his feet on other people's necks!

HE got to his feet with the satisfying sense of having done properly by a debt, and was a bit astonished to find that the stands had come back into focus. One side of them was tossing like an imbecile, almost perpendicular ocean, with gull-like hats sailing over it through a drifting snow of torn programs and newspapers. About eight bass drums had gone amok, and a man in white flannels and sweater was progressing down the field in a series of abandoned cartwheels. Mike Humboldt, it seemed, had made a touchdown. Well, why not? After all, he, Tommy, had taken Tramsky out of circulation. Mike would have been something less than advertised not to have been able to get down the field with the chief obstacle removed. Tommy touched his lacerated neck carefully and swore under his breath.

The play in front of the goal was a formality; Mike hadn't missed a point after touchdown in two seasons, and he didn't miss this one. The teams took their places, and Franklin kicked off. At which point Tommy was astounded and outraged to hear the field judge's gun announce the end of the half. Three minutes! Why, he hadn't been in there one, really. He was just getting warmed up, feeling like a million dollars. He reflected darkly that it was just as well, because in a couple more plays he'd probably have had that State team strewn about the field like confetti at a New Year's party.

Curly Ogden, who usually walked off the field deep in conversation with his star, came up and put his arm tenderly across Tommy's shoulders. "Boy," he said, "that was the nuts! I yanked Crowe out of there to tell him to do just that—I thought I'd need extra time to push it through his granite skull." In the excitement of the moment Curly almost sang. "Man, oh, man! I spend two seasons building up a pair of big guards, and I find one with real football brains buried under a pile of blankets on my own bench! But listen!" He became confidential. "Don't tell anybody I didn't tell you to do that, or I'll have the whole squad using their heads. They haven't all got 'em."

Tommy said nothing.

Curly went on: "You're not going back in there next half; you need experience. But next season!" He patted Tommy's shoulder lovingly: "Oh, man! Next season!"

At this moment a deeply rose-tinted cloud drifted by, and paused to catch Tommy and waft him lightly into his corner of the dressing-room. There it deposited him, and swam up about him to shut out the rest of the world.

The score, of course, remained at 7-0. The State guard wasn't to be fooled again. There were no breaks, no spine-chilling runs in the last minute. The second half was precisely the same sort of hard, faultless football on both sides that the first half had been. Tommy did not go back in, but he was content. He was ready if they needed him; in the meantime it was good to sit there with the consciousness of work well done, having earned the right this time to sit comfortably on the bench while others strove mightily and in vain to duplicate his feat. From time to time he was sternly critical of the play, relaxing from these moods at intervals to go over again what Curly had said.

AFTER the game he put on his clothes rapidly. He didn't know why he did this, except that there was a sort of breathlessness in the air, and he was part of it. He was on the point of going when Mike, draped in a bath-towel and distilling a strong odor of liniment, came and drew him aside into a corner. The hero was hesitant.

He said: "The boys'd kind of like to see you at the party tonight, Tommy."

Tommy couldn't think of an adequate answer to this. Mike gathered a little confidence and went on: "It's a kind of a late day to be coming around, but lots

of good men slip by us at the regular rushing season, you know. I mean, it isn't just your football ability— Look here, are you holding out for some other house?" He regarded the sophomore keenly. "Delt?"

Tommy flushed and shook his head.

"Well," said Mike, not thoroughly convinced, "my girl thought you were the Delt type. Not that *I* thought so. Listen, we don't want to hurry you into anything, or anything like that, but—you know—just think it over. Will you?"

Tommy nodded. "All right," he gulped.

"And bring your girl up tonight anyway, and help us break training. We're gonna smash hell out of it."

Tommy said: "My girl isn't here. I mean, she didn't—she's home—in Truesburg."

"Truesburg!" Mike seemed positively glad of it. "That's not more than about fifty miles down the line, is it? Listen, take my car. I'll meet you outside in a minute. And you can get down there and eat and get back before the party even gets going." Tommy's mouth was helplessly open, and Mike swung a jovial fist at him. "Go on! We got to keep you in a good humor for next year, don't we? Curly's orders!"

Living already in an incredulous daze, at thought of the ride home with his father in Mike's big roadster, and the ride back with Jane, Tommy went out. A red, very warm cheer-leader who was craning his neck from the top of a bus outside the door caught sight of him as he emerged. He turned and lifted his megaphone. "A long cheer for *Nor*man! A long cheer for *Nor*man!"

Tommy ducked and ran a gantlet of insane undergraduates. On the edge of the mob he found his shamelessly beaming father and another man.

The stranger shook his hand. "Congratulations, Norman," he said. "My name is Humphries—of the *World*. That was a great bit of work; I'm running a little piece about it. I suppose you realize you were the only substitution for your team. A very fortunate substitution—for Franklin. Got anything to say about your president's remarks on overemphasis?"

"Overemphasis?" Tommy seemed startled and puzzled. "Yes—I remember that. Well, I'll tell you: You don't want to take Prexy too seriously. He isn't always responsible. You *can't* overemphasize a game like football."

The Missing Earring

Not often are we privileged to read so memorable a story so briefly told.

By PAT HARRELL

IT was eight o'clock and time for the evening ritual. A thin figure in rustling black taffeta settled herself at a large round table. She smoothed its blue velvet cover that hung in heavy folds to the floor and picked up her pen.

"Where are my spectacles, Julia?"

A fat negress with a tiny white cap pinned to her kinky gray hair was turning down the bed.

"On yo' haid, Miss May," she said without looking up.

"So they are. Well, I'm ready now."

Julia took a worn leather box from a drawer of the dressing-table and approached her mistress slowly.

"Miss May, hones', Ah cain' see how nobody could be so foolish. Keepin' all dis here stuff in de house an' nary a soul to watch over hit but us two ol' women! Ah prays to de Lawd—"

"Put that box here on the table, Julia, and go on about your business. You may be old, but I'm not. I've looked after this 'stuff' for forty years, since the day my mother passed away, and I don't propose to hand it over to some upstart of a bank now. So I'm old, am I? Indeed!"

Her wrinkled hands shook with resentment as she lifted the lid. The jewels blinked a moment at the light, then glowed softly in its reflected warmth. Miss May unfolded her list and took a string of pearls from its bed.

"Grandmother Gifford's pearls," read the list. Miss May made a small check and went on with the roll-call: *"Aunt Catherine's sunburst."* Check. *"Grandmother Bennet's ruby locket."* Check. *"Mother's diamond watch."* Check. *"Mother's tiara."* Check. *"Mother's diamond and ruby earrings."* Ch—

She dropped her pen suddenly. A

black ink-stain glistened, then widened slowly on the velvet cloth. Miss May's thin body stiffened, but her faded eyes held her reflection in the long mirror.

"Julia," she called without turning.

The bulky colored woman gave the bed another pat and waddled toward the table.

"Yas'm."

"Julia, I want you to take a note to old Mr. Gates."

"But Miss May, hit's late—an' dark too."

"You'll have to go, Julia. I gave him my diamond bracelets to be repaired, but I won't be able to sleep a wink with them out of the house." She wrote for a moment, then put the note into an envelope and sealed it. "Here—and for goodness' sakes don't lose it. If Mr. Gates has already left the shop, go to his house. Tell him I've got to have the bracelets tonight. Those bracelets, Julia, are worth five thousand dollars apiece. Five thousand dollars apiece! Now stop scowling and go at once."

Julia took the note and stamped out. Her angry mutterings sounded like shouts in the stillness of the lonely old house. "Foolishment—couple er ol' bracelets—dis time ob night!" The door banged.

Miss May's eyes returned to the mirror. It was a large mirror, set in the wall from floor to ceiling, and it was kind to the old lady's seventy years. She wanted to adjust her spectacles, but her veined hands clung to the table-cover as if drawing warmth from its velvet richness. She was not staring at the sudden color in her cheeks, but at her feet—tiny feet in high laced shoes. She tried to move them away from the edge of the cloth, but they were motionless, ankles carefully crossed, for she was partially paralyzed.

A slight breeze came from the open window. The table-cover blew against Miss May's ankles. The color in her cheeks deepened. Where on earth was Julia? How long had she been gone? Miss May could not see the clock in the mirror, but its ticking grew louder, so loud that she set her teeth. The lamp sputtered. A single diamond earring paled and glowed again as the lamp flamed brighter. . . .

At last footsteps sounded on the gravel path. The stairs creaked, and the bedroom door was thrown open. Julia lumbered in, followed by young Archie Gates with a rifle in his hands. His deputy's badge looked new and shiny.

"Pa told me to come," he drawled in a flat voice. "Told me to come and bring a gun. Didn't say what fer."

Miss May's lips moved. She turned her head toward the door and smiled weakly. "Good evening, Archie. Thank you for coming. One of my earrings has been stolen. I must have interrupted the thief when I came up from supper. Nothing is gone but the earring."

Archie looked around.

"Who you think done it?"

"A man with tennis shoes on—white tennis shoes. I saw his feet in the mirror. Get him out of here, Archie, so I can go to bed."

Archie jumped. "*Here!*" He swung his rifle to his shoulder. "Where?"

MISS MAY stretched out a cold hand and lifted the velvet table-cover. A black man in white tennis shoes crouched under the table.

"Come out, you!" said Miss May firmly. "Waiting for my bracelets, were you? Every piece of jewelry I own is right here in this box. You give me my mother's earring and get out."

The negro's eyes were round; his jaw dropped in astonishment. He crawled out; and as he let a diamond and ruby earring fall to the table, Miss May gave his hand a quick, angry slap.

Julia half sat, half fell into a chair. Seemingly unable to speak, Archie prodded the black man out of the room with his rifle.

Miss May turned to her maid. "You may sleep on the couch in here if you're frightened. —Where's my nightdress? Old! Indeed!"

The Code of

A joyous novelette of the old frontier, by the favorite writer who gave us "Live and Learn."

"It's still there," whispered Cinch. "Should we ought to speak to it, Rosie?—Weepin' Willer, where'd you come from?"

NATURE had not been very kind to Rheinlander Strong Pollinger. He was exactly twenty-two years of age, six feet, five inches tall, and weighed a bare hundred and forty-five pounds. His face was long and lean and heavily freckled, his hair roan, rather than red. His nose was long, his mouth entirely too wide for his narrow face, and he wore horn-rimmed glasses over his blue eyes, which always seemed a bit amazed at the world.

Both ears flared a bit, the left a trifle more than the right, as though cocked forward, listening. Rheinlander had been an orphan for five years, during which time he had managed to graduate from school; and the last five months he had spent in running down newspaper want ads, trying to find a job.

He owed his landlord a month's rent, owed for meals, owed the last installment on a suit and overcoat, which were now in pawn, along with his watch and ring.

As for relatives, Rheinlander Strong Pollinger was entirely unincumbered. Out in Arizona lived an uncle—an ogre sort, so he understood; and a cousin, somewhere west of the Mississippi River. Rheinlander had written this uncle, asking him if there was any chance for an ambitious young man to get work in Arizona, but the letter had never been answered.

Rheinlander had at last obtained a position as a filing clerk in a suburban bank, and this was his first day. Even the twelve dollars a week looked like a million. In a few weeks, if everything went well, he reflected comfortably, he could pay up his delinquent room-rent, reclaim the suit and overcoat, and look the world in the face.

Never in his life had he been outside a city, and yet his most prized possessions were a pair of fancy high-heel cowboy boots, a five-quart felt hat, and a bulldog-type revolver. The hat and boots had been given him by his father, who had never worn them. The bulldog gun which completed the ensemble had cost him one dollar and fifty cents.

Rheinlander had no delusions of cowboy grandeur. Never did he dream of riding the open ranges; nor was he a throwback of pioneer stock. Perhaps he was prompted by seeing a handsome, dashing hero in a stage play. He did not smoke, drink or swear; and he had seldom had physical combat with any person. His spree consisted of wearing the big hat, the uncomfortable boots, and carrying that heavy revolver in a hip-pocket, causing a terrible strain on his suspenders.

Weary from his first day at the bank, he made his way to his rooming-house, where he entered fearfully, because of his long overdue room-rent, and went carefully up to his room. And there he found a letter under his door.

He saw at a glance that it was not the usual communication from the landlord, but a regular letter, postmarked Dry Lake, Arizona. Eagerly he slit open the envelope. Inside was a queer communication, written in a feminine hand.

Arizona

By
W. C. TUTTLE

Illustrated by
Monte Crews

Dear Sir:

Your uncle died yesterday, and I believe he willed you the Seventy-six. Look out for a small, dark man, who looks like a cowboy. I believe he will try to kill you. I am not sure of this, but be on your guard and shoot first.

Ann Unknown.

Rheinlander's Adam's-apple jerked violently. He removed his glasses, polished them vigorously, and reread the letter.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed helplessly. "A man coming to kill me! And I haven't done a thing!"

Trance-like, he sat there a long time, staring into space.

"And just when I have got a job!" he mused inanely. "I like the work, too."

He looked at the date-mark on the letter.

"My goodness!" he breathed. "Uncle has been dead a week! For all I know, the murderer might be right here in Chicago, by this time!"

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he removed his shoes and put on his boots. He put the bulldog revolver in his right hip-pocket, after which he teetered over to the wash-basin, where he began to remove the ink-stains from his long fingers.

SUDDENLY his telephone rang shrilly, and Rheinlander nearly fell over. Taking a deep breath, he viewed the inoffensive telephone as a man might consider a rattlesnake which had suddenly buzzed a warning.

"Hello," he said weakly; and a voice drawled in his ear:

"Is this Mr. R. S. Pollinger?"

"Ye-yes," stammered Rheinlander.

"That's fine. I'm a Mr. Smith from Arizony, an old friend of yore uncle Jim Strong. I promised him I'd look you up and have a talk with you."

"Uh—well—I—I see," choked Rheinlander. "Wh-when did you see my uncle?"

"Oh, a couple days ago. I'll be up pretty soon, and tell you all about it. So-long."

The man hung up, leaving Rheinlander weak in the knees.

"A—a couple of days ago," muttered the young man. "He lied. That must be the murderer. Good Lord, what will I do?"

Rheinlander never conceived the idea of leaving his room and keeping away from this man; nor did the loaded gun in his pocket mean anything to him. He read the letter again and became somewhat panicky, after which he put on his big sombrero and sat very straight in a chair listening.

Suddenly it did occur to him that there was a police department, and that

as a citizen he was entitled to protection. Teetering on his high heels, he crossed the room to the telephone—and was reaching for the directory as a loud knock rattled his door.

The man from Arizona! With the desperation of a cornered rat, Rheinlander staggered across the room toward the door, picking up a chair *en route*. He was not conscious of picking up the chair; but the next moment he was against the wall beside the door, and he heard his own voice saying: "Come in!"

The door was flung open; a man strode in—and the chair descended, crashing down upon the head of a man who sprawled into the room, knocked cold. Trembling so badly that the sombrero wiggled around on his head, Rheinlander stared wide-eyed at his victim.

"My God!" he exclaimed hollowly. "The landlord!"

The man had been knocked cold. Desperately Rheinlander looked around, trying to think what to do next. It was a nightmare to him. Then he stepped over the prostrate body, yanked the door shut and bolted down the hallway, heading for the stairs.

There was another man halfway up the stairs, a rather smallish man, wearing a sombrero. Rheinlander checked his headlong rush to prevent a crash.

"I beg yore pardon," drawled the man. "I'm lookin' for a man named Pollinger."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rheinlander and he deliberately fell against the man, shoving him violently with both hands.

THE attack was so sudden that the man went over backward, clutching wildly at Rheinlander; and together they bumped and rolled all the way down to the parlor of the rooming-house, where they fell apart.

Rheinlander got to his feet, dazed, bruised, his breath whistling in his throat. But the small man did not get up. On the floor were a number of objects which had fallen from their pockets, and Rheinlander mechanically picked them all up. One was a man-sized revolver, and another was a brown leather wallet.

Rheinlander, in his dazed condition, pocketed everything in sight.

A woman had been seated at the old piano in the parlor all during this fall down the stairs, and now she looked at Rheinlander, opened her mouth, and after several attempts, screeched weakly. He looked at her, adjusted his glasses, straightened his hat and said:

"Really, there is no use, madam. I bid you good evening."

And then he walked out, down the stone steps to the dark street, where the enormity of it all dawned upon him, and he began running—not very fast, because of those high heels, and with no definite destination in mind. Those two heavy guns sagged his pants, and the big hat proved quite a problem, but he managed to put several blocks between himself and that rooming-house.

FINALLY he halted in the illumination from a drug-store window, tried to remove a handkerchief from a pocket, and discovered the wallet, which he looked at curiously. In it were several pieces of currency, some silver, and a return ticket to Dry Lake, Arizona.

"My goodness!" he muttered. "This is remarkable, to say the least."

For a long time he stood there, trying to adjust his thoughts. He was sure he had killed the landlord, and there was a possibility that he had killed the man from Arizona. At any rate, he realized he must get out of town as quickly as possible.

Hailing a cab, he rode to the station, where he approached the ticket-clerk.

"Hu-how soon will there be a train to Dud-Dry Lake, Arizona?" he gulped with an effort.

Stifling a smile at his customer's appearance, the clerk looked through a schedule, consulted a paper-bound book, and then informed Rheinlander that Dry Lake was on a stage-line.

"You go by train to Oro Grande, and by stage from there to Dry Lake," he explained. "A ticket is good on both train and stage; and a train leaves in about ten minutes."

"Thank you very kindly," said Rheinlander.

"Do you want a ticket?"

"N-no, not exactly. I—I had a round-trip ticket, you see; and I'm just returning."

"You're just—oh, I see."

The clerk stared at the retreating Rheinlander, clattering uncertainly on his high heels, his sombrero cocked over one eye, and turned to a brother-clerk, who was grinning widely.

"You might tell the information girl that since the price of beef has gone down, they're turning to nuts in Arizona."

"I HEAR," said the bartender, "that Jeff Kirk is goin' to heir Jim Strong's Seventy-six spread."

"Rosie" O'Grady, a little button-nosed cowboy, looked at "Cinch" Cutter, a lean, gaunt-faced cowboy, who leaned on the bar, one heel locked over the rail, while he peered through a glass of whisky. Cinch lifted his brows slightly, turned his head and looked inquiringly at Rosie.

"Goin' to air?" queried Rosie. "You mean ventilate?"

"Quite a powerful undertakin', seems to me," said Cinch.

"I mean, he's goin' to git the Seventy-six," said the bartender. "Don't be so damn' iggerent."

"In reply to yore question of recent date," said Rosie, "we can say that we aint been advised about Jeff Kirk gettin' the Seventy-six. Trustin' that this will find yore nose full of mud, we beg to remain. Signed by O'Grady and Cutter, C.P.E."

"What's them letters C.P.E.?" asked the bartender.

"Cow-punchers Extraordinary. Give us a drink, Heel-you-tripe."

"I'll give you credit for a drink."

"Amounts to the same thing," said Cinch. He cuffed his hat over one eye, twisted his lean neck and looked toward the open doorway.

"My Gawd!" he breathed. "Oh, I hope not! Rosie, don't lie to me. Look toward the doorway and tell me what you see."

Rosie turned slowly, jerked up suddenly, and as slowly turned back.

"I don't think it's my eyes," he muttered. "Must be my stummick. Lightnin' Lewis has been mournin' so hard for Jim Strong that he's burned every meal."

"It's still there," whispered Cinch. "Should we ought to speak to it, Rosie?"

Framed in the doorway was Rheinlander Strong Pollinger, looking exactly as he had when he left that rooming-house, except that his shirt was dirty and he needed a shave.

"May I come in?" he asked meekly, making a weak gesture with one hand.

"You better duck yore head a little," replied Rosie.

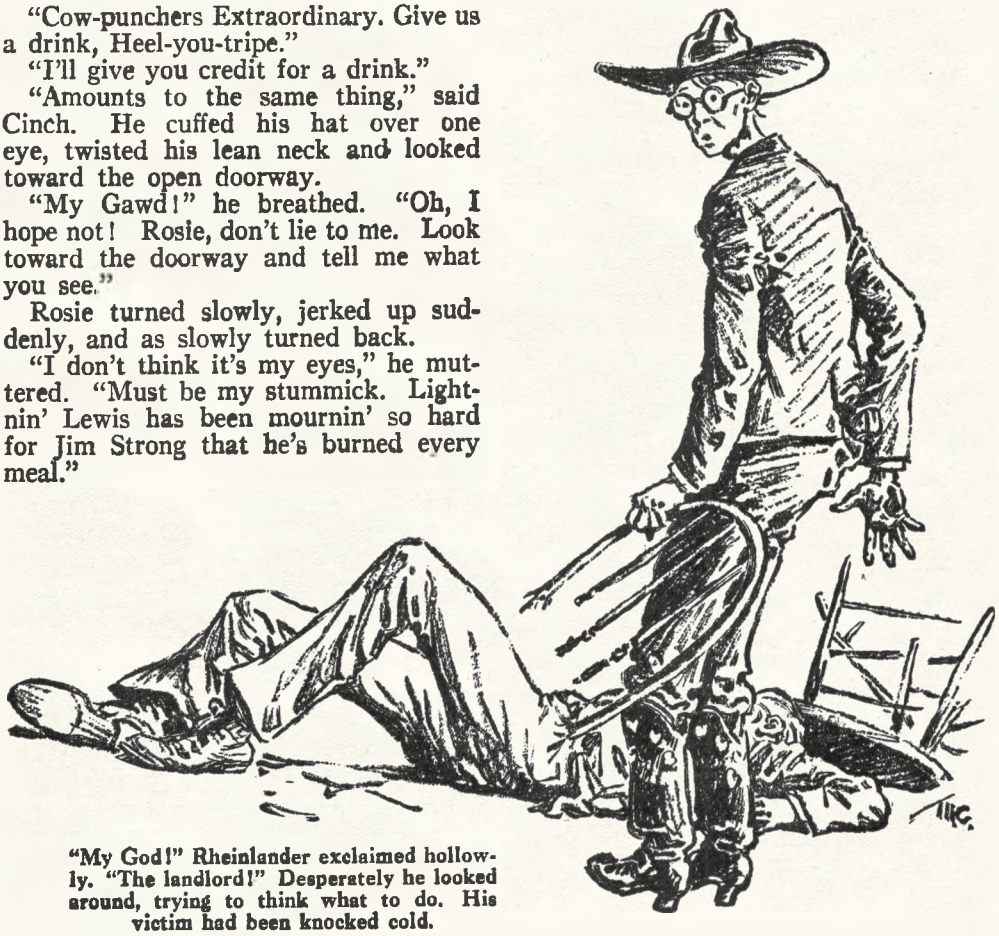
"Thank you, sir," said Rheinlander, making a slow approach.

"Weepin' Willer, where'd you come from?" asked Cinch.

"Off the train," replied the young man, looking rather bewildered. "I—I just came, you see. My name is Rheinlander Pollinger."

"Do you mind if we call you Shorty?" asked Rosie. "My name's Rosie O'Grady, and this horse-faced bunkie of mine answers to the name of Cinch Cutter. Aint a missionary, are you?"

"Oh, no, indeed. I—I'm not much of anything, really."



"My God!" Rheinlander exclaimed hollowly. "The landlord!" Desperately he looked around, trying to think what to do. His victim had been knocked cold.

"Never can tell," mused Rosie, looking critically at Shorty. "That's a good-lookin' hat yo're wearin', feller; and them boots aint no drawback. You don't happen to be somebody in disguise?"

"Sorry, but I don't understand what you mean."

"I think we ought to have a drink, before goin' into this thing any further," said Cinch. "Step up, Shorty, and name yore poison."

"Poison?"

"Liquor. The handsome lad with the damp curls is an expert on anythin', such as drawin' beer or givin' you straight liquor. Ask for what you want —and take what you git, Shorty."

"Why, I never took a drink in my life," protested Shorty. "If it is customary—of—course—"

"Whisky," said Rosie. He poured the extra drink and gave it to Shorty Pollinger, who watched them empty the glass at a gulp. With a flip of his wrist he flung the raw liquor down his throat.

LUCKILY none of it went down his windpipe. He stood there stiff as a statue for several moments, with mouth closed, eyes wide. Then his eyes closed and his mouth flew open. Several times this was repeated. Then he took out a handkerchief, removed his glasses and polished them, after which he put the glasses in his pocket and essayed to put the handkerchief on the bridge of his nose.

"Sorry," he said huskily, and replaced his glasses. He took a deep breath, tilted his hat a trifle, and said:

"I believe I like this place. It really is—well, different."

"Yeah, that's right," admitted Rosie. "But you should have seen it before they fixed that broken place in the sidewalk. You wouldn't know that Oro Grande was the same place. And then they took away that cinder-pile beside the depot, too, which made a lot of difference. I really didn't know the old town, did you, Cinch?"

"Did I?" retorted Cinch. "Didn't me and you ride right through here, never knowin' we was in Oro Grande, until we saw the railroad tracks?"

"Stranger," said the bartender, "I'd just like to warn you that these two are the biggest liars that ever came out of Dry Lake Valley. Nobody ever believes 'em."

"Professional jealousy, Shorty," asserted Rosie, and Shorty giggled.

"I—er—really, I should purchase a drink," said Shorty.

"Yo're a reg'lar feller," said Rosie. "Whisky, Heel-you-tripe."

"Some day I'm goin' to poison you for callin' me that," declared the bartender.

While the glasses were filled, Shorty Pollinger fumbled in that leather wallet. Rosie got a look at the outside leather, on which had been burned the initials *T. C.* The little cowboy's expression changed. He gnawed at the corner of his lip and looked speculatively at Pollinger, who paid for the drinks and replaced his wallet.

But this time he had no difficulty with the drink of whisky, except that it caused him to grimace and take a deep breath.

"I am going to Dry Lake," he told them. "I have an uncle there, whose name is Strong."

"Jim Strong?" asked Rosie quickly.

"Yes," Shorty agreed. "He is my mother's brother."

"Uh-huh," said Rosie, a shade of sarcasm in his voice. "There's a family resemblance, all right. Two legs, two arms. . . . So yo're goin' to Dry Lake, eh? Goin' to see yore uncle, eh? Would it amaze you a whole lot, Shorty, if we told you that yore uncle was dead?"

"Not at all," replied Shorty expansively. The strong liquor had started percolating. "In fact, I should be surprised if you said he was alive."

Rosie cuffed his hat over one eye and squinted at Shorty, who was leaning on the bar, looking at his own reflection in the back-bar mirror.

"That mirror needs cleaning," declared Shorty. "Either that, or it's 'nawful poor piece of glass."

"Do you know Jefferson Kirk?" asked Rosie.

"Not pers'nally," admitted Shorty, a trifle thick of speech.

"You've heard of him?" asked Rosie.

"Once," nodded Shorty.

"When was that, Shorty?"

"Jus' now."

The bartender's jowls jiggled with unholy glee, and he wiped his eyes. Rosie looked helplessly at Cinch, who choked slightly.

"It's kinda got me pullin' leather," admitted Rosie. "Let's have another drink."

"If you do," declared the bartender, "you two will have to take care of Shorty. I can't have him clutterin' up my place."

"I nev'r cluttered in my life," declared Shorty, "and I don't inten' to ev'r do any cluttering. I feel fine—except my feet."

"What's wrong with yore feet?" asked Cinch.

"I can't get my boots off. For four nights and days, I've tried to take off my boots." Shorty smiled wryly. "But they have eluded me."

THEY had the drink, which left Shorty in an expansive daze.

"How you goin' to git to Dry Lake?" asked Cinch.

"On a stage, of course," said Shorty.

"Well, what you goin' to do in Dry Lake?" asked Rosie.

"I really haven't gone deep in the shubject," replied Shorty. "You shee, I'm—I'm fug'tive from jushtish."

"He-e-ey!" yelled a voice at the doorway. "Som'er's around this town, I've got a passenger for Dry Lake."

It was "Exactly" Wright, the stage-driver, a short, bowlegged old rawhider.

"I'm the party," admitted Shorty. And to his companions:

"I'm ver' glad to've met you. A pleasure, I 'sure you."

He collided with the side of the doorway as he went out, made one complete turn, caught his balance in some remarkable gyrations, and followed Exactly across the street to the stage depot.

Rosie and Cinch got their horses at the hitch-rack, and rode away ahead of the stage.

"I never did see anybody funnier nor dumber in my life," said Cinch.

"Boy, you can't always tell by the label," replied Rosie. "If you only knew it, that funny jigger has a gun in each hip-pocket, and he's carryin' Tex Cole's pocketbook."

"Tex Cole's? What do you mean?" queried Cinch.

"Tex Cole was the only puncher I ever seen carryin' a pocketbook. It's one of them kind that folds up, and it's got T. C. burned on the outside. I *know* that pocketbook."

"How the hell would he git a pocketbook off Tex Cole?"

"I hope to tell you, there's somethin' crooked about it, Cinch. Tex Cole went away a few days ago. We all know that Tex is a bad boy, and he came here to do some private gunnin' for Jeff Kirk. All right. Tex disappears, and in comes this queer, iggerent-lookin' jasper, who claims to be a nephew of Jim Strong—said jasper packin' two pocket-guns and Tex Cole's pocketbook."

"Admittin'," added Cinch, "the fact that he's a fugitive from justice."

"And lookin' like he might be a fugitive from a circus. What did he say his name was, Cinch?"

"I dunno. Somethin' like Finlander Stillinger. We better make him write it out, in case Jeff Kirk objects to his claims, 'cause I've got a hunch that Jeff might not like the idea of somebody else tryin' to cut in on the Seventy-six."

"Well," sighed Rosie, "if Jeff Kirk ever gits the Seventy-six, I hope to tell you that me and you are out of jobs. It all depends on what Judge Reid has got in his safe."

"What you mean?"

"Well, they're sayin' that Jim Strong had Judge Reid write out a will. Nobody knows for sure, and they won't know, until the Judge gits back from Maine and opens his safe."

"I wonder why Harvey Good can't open it, Rosie? He's runnin' the office, while the Judge is away."

"I dunno."

"Don't they record wills?"

"I heard 'em talkin' about that, too. Mebbe they do. Anyway, the Judge mebbe didn't have time to do it. I don't know anythin' about law."

WHERE the road forked to the Seventy-six, they met Jeff Kirk. He would have tried to avoid them, if possible, for he was in no mood to talk with people he did not like. Kirk was just past thirty years of age, a big burly cowboy, owner of the JK outfit, east of Dry Lake.

Just now Jeff Kirk was slightly disfigured. One eye was swollen shut; his nose and chin had received cuts; and his left ear was red and swollen. Rosie and Cinch looked him over curiously.

"Hyah, Jeff," said Rosie. "Been out to the Seventy-six?"

"I reckon I've got a right to go out there!" snapped Kirk.

"Nobody sayin' you haven't," replied Rosie. "Horse kick you?"

"No, a horse didn't kick me," replied Kirk, and without another word he reined his horse and rode away.

"No," said Cinch seriously, "a horse didn't kick him, Rosie."

"Well, he's sure awful peevish about somethin'." They rode on, wondering.

At the Seventy-six they found "Lightning" Lewis, the old cowboy cook, sitting on the veranda of the ranch-house,

feet cocked up on the railing, and a meat-cleaver beside his chair. The two cowboys unsaddled and came up to the house.

Lightning was sixty, skinny as a rail, but "whale-bone warp and bull-hide fillin'," as he described himself. He eyed the boys severely.

"Prodigal sons come home to eat!" he grunted.

Rosie glanced at the cleaver.

"Waitin' for somebody to bring on the meat?" he asked.

"Mebbe."

"We met Jeff Kirk at the forks," said Cinch. "He looked unhappy."

"Yea-a-ah?" drawled Lightning. "Unhappy, eh? He stood down there at the gate and fired me. First time I ever got fired at that distance."

"Fired?" queried Rosie curiously.

"It didn't take," said the cook. "Jeff Kirk comes here, tryin' to tell me how he wants things done. Me! I was feedin' men when he was wearin' three-cornered pants and eatin' from a bottle. Ask me what I done, will you?"

"What'd you do?" asked Rosie.

"What'd I do? Well, I smote him, hip and thigh, I did. I hit him on the ear, and I hit him on the nose, and I hit him on the eye. Then I got me a meat-cleaver and I chased him out of the house. He jist hit the ground six times between here and the gate, and as he was a-hittin' the ground he says, 'If—you—wasn't—so—damn'—old—' and there he was at the gate. Then he turned around and fired me."

"Ungrateful son-of-a-gun," murmured Rosie. "After all you'd done *to* him! Sometimes I lose faith in human nature, Lightnin'."

"Go ahead and be funny," sighed Lightning. "He said he was firin' both of you fellers, and Brad Ellis, jist as soon as he got around to it. I—" Lightning craned his neck, looking down the road. "By the holy horned toad!" he exploded. "What's comin'?"

It was Rheinlander Pollinger, lately known as Shorty, walking up the dusty road. He had left the stage at the forks, and was coming to the ranch on foot.

"That," replied Rosie, "is the Mystery of Dry Lake Valley."

THE three men sat in silence, while Shorty came up to them, with an apologetic smile on his lean face.

"I am sorry to intrude," he said. "But the driver of the stage said this was the road to my uncle's ranch; so I walked over. There was really no need for me to go on to the city."

"Uncle?" queried Lightning. "Whose uncle?"

"Mine," replied Shorty. "Jim Strong."

Lightning stared at Rosie, one eye closed tightly.

"His uncle—that's all I know," said Rosie, shrugging.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Shorty. "That whisky made me queer."

"Blame it on whisky," sighed Cinch.

"Well, hell!" exploded Lightning. "Will somebody explain things? All this talkin'! I'm beginnin' to think it was me, instead of Jeff Kirk that got hit. Rosie, you bug-headed, bat-eared rannahan, will you explain all this to me? Quit laughin', will you?"

Lightning reached for the cleaver, and Rosie sobered quickly.

"You tell him, Shorty," urged Rosie. "Tell him who you are, where you came from and why you came."

"Well"—Shorty sat down on the steps and wiped his brow. "My name is Rheinlander Strong Pollinger."

"Gawd!" breathed the cook.

"I beg your pardon?" said Shorty.

"Don't mind him," said Rosie. "He's full of sody."

"Oh, I see. I came here from Chicago, where I was working in a bank. That is, I worked one day. I received a peculiar letter, and—well, I would rather not tell the rest of it."

"Down in Oro Grande you spoke of bein' a fugitive from justice," reminded Cinch.

"That is true—I believe," agreed Shorty.

"Disturbin' the peace?" asked Rosie.

"Oh, no—it may be possible that I killed two men."

Lightning opened his mouth, closed it tightly, and after a few moments' silence he asked:

"Have you ever had any expert instructions?"

"In what?" asked Shorty.

"Plain and fancy lyin'."

"Why, I—I really didn't know one could get instructions in lying."

"I reckon I better cook supper," said Lightning. "I need somethin' to take my mind off things."

He went shuffling back to the kitchen.

"Well," said Rosie, "yo're here, Shorty—win, lose or draw. Come on back to the bunk-house, and I'll show you where we do our sleepin'."

Some one yelled a warning; the buggy-horse almost sat down in the shafts, trying to avoid a collision—but too late.

"Show him a front bunk," said Cinch. "I sure don't want to be between him and the front door, in case anythin' breaks."

The combination of whisky and stage travel had tired Shorty, who stretched out on a bunk. Rosie and Cinch left him alone, and went down to the stable.

"I dunno," declared Rosie. "He's got me fightin' my hat, Cinch. He's funny to look at, and he sure acts dumb, but—I dunno. Two guns—and Tex's pocketbook. Killed two men—mebbe."

"Nobody but a damn' fool would admit that," said Cinch.

"Not if it was true. I dunno. He don't seem like a bad sort of a feller. Mebbe he *is* Jim Strong's nephew. Jist between me and you, I hope he is, 'cause I'd hate to see Jeff Kirk get this ranch."

IN the Cascade Saloon in Dry Lake, the stage-driver, Exactly Wright, was telling about his latest fare from Oro Grande, when Jeff Kirk came in. The men looked curiously at Kirk, who offered no explanation for his condition.

"This here half-breed orstrich was stewed to the gills," declared Exactly. "Him con-sortin' with Rosie O'Grady and Cinch Cutter, over in the Pay-day Saloon; and I has to go git him. He confides that he never took a drink before, and I says: 'Well, you've made up for yore long dry spell.'

"He's got a hawg-leg in each hip pocket, and when he starts to climb up over a wheel, his suspenders busted and he almost lost his pants, them guns saggin' awful heavy on his rear end. He wanted me to sing with him, but I didn't know any of his songs; so he sang alone.

"Then he tells me his name. But he's pretty drunk, and mebbe he made a mistake or two in the tellin'. Then he says he's a nephew of Jim Strong, comin' out here to claim the Seventy-six."

"What name did he give you?" asked Jeff Kirk sharply.

"I don't remember, except that the middle name was Strong."

"Where is he now?"

"Out at the Seventy-six, I reckon. I let him off at the forks."

"He's an impostor and a damn' liar," said Kirk. "I'd like to know what his game is, and who sent him in here. I'm the only nephew Jim Strong had, the only relative."

"I just been thinking," said the bartender, and the interest turned quickly to him. "Several weeks ago—mebbe a couple months—Jim Strong was in here, havin' a drink with Lige Blackstone, the Sheriff. They got to talkin' about relations. Lige said he had so many he couldn't remember half of 'em. Jim Strong said: 'I thought I only had one, but I reckon I've got two.' He took out a letter, and was goin' to show it to Lige, but somebody came in at that time, and the talk changed."

"That's news to me," said Jeff Kirk. "But it don't change things, as far as I'm concerned. Let's have a drink."

"What's to be done about the Seventy-six?" asked Exactly, after they drank. "There aint nobody runnin' it, is there?"

"No—damn it!" snapped Kirk. "Them cow-punchers are layin' around doin' nothin'. There aint nobody bossin' the outfit. Judge Reid is lawyer for the outfit—but he aint here."

"What about Harvey Good?" asked the bartender. "Aint he Reid's pardner?"

"Mebbe he is," growled Kirk, "but he aint got no authority to do anythin' about the Seventy-six. I've got a good mind to move my outfit over there and take charge."

"Before the law gives it to you?" queried Exactly. "You mustn't forget that the ownership aint been settled. If Jim Strong left a will—"

"He never left no will," replied Kirk. "The Seventy-six is mine."

"What became of Tex Cole?" asked Exactly. "I aint seen him around for quite a while."

"He pulled out," replied Kirk. "Got tired punchin' cows, I guess. Tex is sort of a rambler. I'll buy another drink."

LIGHTNING LEWIS wiped his face with his flour-sack apron and went to the doorway, where he stood looking toward the corrals. He had noted the expression on Rosie O'Grady's face when Shorty Pollinger mentioned learning to ride horseback; and he had seen the tenderfoot going down to the stable, with Rosie, Cinch and Brad.

He saw several horses circling the corral, and he saw Rosie toss a loop around the neck of a dun-colored gelding known as Smoky. The old cook nodded with evident satisfaction. Smoky was well broken and reliable. At least the boys were not intending to play any jokes on Shorty. Not that Shorty meant anything to Lightning, but he hated to see a tenderfoot take a bad spill.

Lightning rolled a cigarette and leaned against the doorway. The boys were saddling Smoky now, and Cinch was holding tightly to the hackamore. Lightning thought that was queer, because Smoky was gentle.

"Mebbe they're jokin' with the kid," he thought. "Tryin' to make him think Smoky is a bronc."

SHORTY was wearing a pair of Rosie's big bat-wing chaps, which were too short for him. Brad went over and opened the corral gate, while Rosie seemed to be giving Shorty some last-moment instructions. Lightning grinned. From a corner of his eye he saw a horse and buggy coming through the big gate.

He glanced back toward the corral. Shorty was in the saddle, while Cinch still clung to the hackamore. The horse and buggy were nearing the house, when Lightning heard one of the cowboys yelling. The dun-colored horse and his tall rider were coming out of the corral; and in range parlance, the horse was gnawing at his own tail.

It was the gentle Smoky, gone wild; and strange as it may seem, the tenderfoot was still in the saddle, but grabbing with both hands. Some one yelled shrilly in warning; the buggy-horse almost sat down in the shafts, trying to avoid a collision, but too late. Smoky and his clawing rider tried to pass between the horse and the front of the buggy.

A shaft splintered; one front wheel dished, upsetting the buggy; and Shorty Pollinger landed sitting down, almost against the house. The other shaft broke off square, and the frightened buggy-horse headed straight for the corral-gate, where it entered, skidded to a stop, and stood there kicking blindly.

The cowboys and the cook ran to the wrecked buggy, where a man and a girl were trying to get out. Neither of them was injured. The girl's hat was knocked down over her face, but she cuffed it

back and wanted to know if the cyclone had gone past. The man was indignant, spluttering, feeling himself all over. Shorty Pollinger still sat there in a semi-daze, a queer expression on his long face. Smoky stopped against the front porch, and was looking around as though wondering what it was all about. Dangling from the rear of the saddle was a narrow strap, which had broken.

"My Gawd!" breathed Rosie O'Grady. "You aint hurt, Ann?"

"I'm all right," laughed the girl. Cinch was talking fast, trying to alibi them.

"Can you imagine Smoky actin' thataway? Never bucked before—not since he was broke. I can't figure what happened. You see—"

"Must have been somethin' he et," said the girl soberly.

"I jist can't understand it," declared Brad. "Are you hurt, Harvey?"

"No thanks to anyone around here," replied Harvey Good. "You might have killed all of us—both of us. Are you all right, Ann?"

"I'm not hurt," replied Ann Reid, looking at Shorty Pollinger, who was getting carefully to his feet.

"Miss Reid," said Rosie, "I'd like to make you used to Shorty Pollinger. Shorty, this is Miss Reid."

Shorty adjusted his glasses, and smiled foolishly at the girl.

"It is a pleasure, I assure you, Miss Reid," he said. "You are really the first young lady I ever ran across. I'm sorry, Miss Reid—but that was my first horseback-ride."

Then Shorty became red of face and embarrassed. He began backing away from the group, backed into the kitchen steps and sat down hard. But he got up, climbed the steps backward, fell into the kitchen and disappeared, leaving the crowd to stare after him.

"Knocked loco!" exclaimed Rosie.

"Mebbe his rudder is busted, and he thinks he's goin' ahead," suggested Brad.

"The right answer," said Lightnin' soberly, "is that he discovered that you can't slide very far on the seat of yore pants, and still retain said seat."

"Well, what the devil is it all about, and who is the freak?" asked Harvey Good, looking with disapproval at Ann Reid, who was convulsed with mirth.

ANN REID was not pretty, but she was attractive. Eighteen years of age, a decided brunette, capable of riding a horse or cooking a meal, she was easily the most popular girl in the county. Rumor said that she was to marry Harvey Good, who had studied law, and was now working with her father, Judge Reid. However, no engagement had been announced. Good was twenty-four, a tall, blond young man, who took law studies seriously, played poker occasionally, and was not adverse to an occasional drink.

"The freak," replied Rosie, "is Rheinlander Strong Pollinger, late of Chicago, who claims Jim Strong was his uncle."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ann softly.

Good looked curiously at her. "Did you ever hear of him, Ann?" he asked.

"How could she hear of him?" asked Rosie. "Nobody around here ever heard of him. I doubt if Jim Strong ever heard about him."

"An impostor, eh?" said Harvey Good.

"I never said he was," replied Rosie. "I never call a card until it's turned, Harvey."

"But that claim must be ridiculous, O'Grady."

"I reckon I better dig up a pair of pants for the lad," said the cook, and went into the house.

HE found Shorty sitting in a chair, and found a pair of overalls for him.

"Is her name Ann?" asked Shorty as he changed.

"Yeah," nodded Lightning. "But she'll prob'ly want you to call her Miss."

"Certainly," agreed Shorty. "I'm sorry for what happened—really. But I had no control over that horse. I—I hope it wasn't injured."

"Them Levis are a little short in the waist for you, but they've got a good seat in 'em," said the cook, as he inspected Shorty.

"Thank you very much, Lightning. I—I hope they won't expect me to go out and talk with them again. That's the most I ever talked with a girl. Perhaps I was a little dazed. Would you mind giving them my regrets?"

"Give 'em nothin'," replied the cook. "They never came out here to see you. The man is Harvey Good, a lawyer, and the girl is the daughter of Judge Reid, who was lawyer for Jim Strong. Hell, they didn't even know you was here."

"I suppose you are right. No apologies necessary; so I'll sit here."

Lightning went outside, where Harvey Good and Ann Reid were talking with Rosie. Brad and Cinch had caught the buggy-horse and were examining the smashed buggy.

"I just got a letter from my father, Lightning," said Ann. "He was leaving the next day; so he should be here tomorrow or next day."

"I wanted to speak to you about a certain matter, Lightning," said Harvey Good. "Jeff Kirk was in my office last evening, and he said—"

"I know what he said," interrupted Lightning. "And you can tell him for me, in case he don't hear very good, that he can keep away from the Seventy-six until he's got a legal right to come here."

"But," protested the young lawyer, "you must understand that it is merely a legal formality. As far as the Seventy-six is concerned, it belongs to Jeff Kirk. I advised him to come out here and see that things were running right."

"What authority have you got to advise him?"

Good's face flushed hotly. "In the absence of Judge Reid, I believe it is my duty to handle such things."

"He didn't wire you to take charge, did he?"

"Oh, what's the use arguing with a bull-headed cook?" sighed Good.

"No use," admitted Lightning. "But just the same, Jeff Kirk aint runnin' this ranch—yet."

"We can't fix that buggy," asserted Rosie. "You'll have to take the ranch buggy to go home in, Ann."

"Well, that's all right, Rosie," said the girl.

"That clumsy ox!" said Good disgustedly.

"I thought he was quite graceful," said Ann. "He made a perfect flip-flop. I'm glad he wasn't hurt. Anyway, I'm not blaming him."

"You're not? Then who is to blame?"

"The party who put that flank-strap on the horse. It apparently busted in the smash-up."

"Guilty," said Rosie. "It was a joke that kinda backfired."

"So you put a flank-strap on the horse, eh?" said Good. "You deserve a good kick for that, O'Grady."

Rosie's eyes narrowed quickly. "Do I?" he asked softly. "Well, I wish *you* would try it, Harvey."

"Stop it," said Ann quickly. "I'm not hurt, and I'm sure Harvey isn't. Anyway, as long as no one was hurt, it was fun."

"I fail to see any humor in the situation," said Good. "If you boys will let us have the other buggy, we will go back to Dry Lake."

He walked down to the shed, to help Brad and Cinch run the buggy out into the open. Ann looked seriously at Rosie for a moment, and they both laughed.

"Rosie, what do you know about that young man—Pollinger?" she asked.

"Just about as much as you do, Ann. He's iggerent of everythin' down here—but he aint dumb. I can't figure him out. I tell you, he had me stumped. One reason I put that flank-strap on Smoky was to find out if he was lyin'. If he was a puncher, he'd have seen the strap; and if he was playin' 'possum, he'd have rode Smoky. Now I feel sure he's a plain tenderfoot, pure and simple."

"Didn't he tell you anything about himself?"

"Not much—except that Jim Strong was his uncle. But I'm tellin' yuh somethin', Ann: he's got Tex Cole's pocketbook, and he's got two guns. One is one of them bulldog guns, worth about two-bits; but the other is a real man-sized one, which has been used a lot."

"Tex Cole's pocketbook?" queried Ann. "What would that mean?"

"You answer it," said Rosie seriously.

"Where is Tex Cole?"

"Quien sabe?"

"Does Jeff Kirk know about him?"

Rosie shrugged his shoulders. "I'll be glad when yore father gets back, Ann; mebbe he can straighten all this out for us. We'll all be lookin' for jobs, when Jeff Kirk gets the Seventy-six."

ANN nodded and looked toward the stable. "I guess Harvey is about ready," she said.

"I wish I'd studied law," sighed Rosie.

Ann smiled at him. "Why, Rosie?"

"Well, you—you kinda took up with a lawyer, you know, Ann."

"Took up?"

"Well, you know what I mean, Ann. They're sayin' that you are goin' to marry Harvey Good—and that's why—" Rosie grinned sourly. "Oh, well, I'd make a hell of a lookin' lawyer, anyway."

"At least," replied Ann softly, "you'd have a sense of humor, Rosie. Tell Mr. Pollinger I hope he is not hurt, and that I hope to see him again."

"Yeah, I'll tell him, Ann. He'll prob'ly polish his glasses and say, 'My goodness!' That's all the profanity he knows."

"Give him time," smiled Ann. "He'll acquire plenty."

Shorty Pollinger stood in the front doorway and watched them drive away. Rosie came up on the porch.

"I'm sorry about that flank-strap," said Rosie. "You see, Shorty, I was tryin' an experiment."

"An experiment? Oh, I see. Well, did it work?"

"Yeah, I reckon it did. Yo're a queer sort of a jigger, Shorty. Here we play a dirty joke on you, and you don't even git sore."

"No one made me get on that horse."

"I know that. But we told you he was gentle."

"Yes, I believe you did, Rosie."

Shorty went back into the house, picked up Rosie's chaps and brought them out on the porch.

"I must get me a pair of those things," he said, examining them at arm's-length. "But I'd prefer a pair with a seat in them."

Rosie choked, and a tear glistened in his eyes.

"Shorty, I'm for you," he managed to say.

"In what way?" queried Shorty.

"All four ways from the jack, feller. I don't care who you are, nor who sent you here—I'm backin' yore play. And you'll get along all right in this country, even if you are a tenderfoot, so long as you mind your own business. That's the one thing to remember: no matter what you see, nor how queer it looks, you just keep on 'tendin' to your own affairs, and you'll get along O.K."

"That is nice of you, Rosie," said Shorty simply.

"Nice, hell! Listen, Shorty; I'll learn you to ride—and no foolin'. Smoky *is* gentle. We put a flank-strap on him to make him buck. Pull on them chaps, and I'll give you a lesson. I'll learn you how to dab a loop on a horse, how to cinch on a hull, and how to set on a saddle."

"Will you, really?"

"Yeah, I will," drawled Rosie thoughtfully. "But before we start the lessons, you've got to tell papa somethin', Shorty."

"Tell you something?" queried Shorty.

"Yeah. I want to know where in hell you got Tex Cole's pocketbook."

"Tex Cole's pocketbook? Oh, you mean this one?"

Shorty took it from his pocket and handed it to Rosie.

"That's her, pardner. See them initials, *T. C.*?"

"I noticed them," nodded Shorty. "Who is Tex Cole?"

"Don'tcha know him?"

"I'm sure we've never been introduced."

Shorty examined the chaps. "I'd prefer a pair with a seat in them," he said.

"Uh-huh," drawled Rosie. "But you've got his pocketbook."

"Well, you see," said Shorty, "the man who owned that pocketbook came to murder me, I believe; so I—I whipped him, took his gun and pocketbook, and —well, here I am."

"Lovely dove!" breathed Rosie. "You whipped Tex Cole?"

"He may have died," said Shorty. "I —I knocked one man down with a chair; and this—this Tex Cole—I didn't have any chair—then."

"Let's go learn somethin' about horses," said Rosie. "That is, unless you already know more than I do about 'em."

"Well," Shorty smiled weakly, "I don't know much. You see, I've only had one short ride—and most of that was in the air."

IT was the second day after Shorty's disastrous ride; and Shorty, wearing a new pair of overalls and new chaps, was sitting on the kitchen steps, trying to master the art of rolling a cigarette.

Lightning Lewis leaned lazily against the door jamb, a smile on his leathery old face.

"When I was yore age, Shorty, I could roll 'em with my toes," he said.

"I haven't tried it with my toes yet," replied Shorty. "Oh, goodness! Spilled it all again!"

"No stick in yore spit," said the old cook. "Shorty, why don't you learn to cuss, like a man?"

"It sounds like hell," replied Shorty dryly. —"There! That's not so bad."

Shorty held up his latest cigarette creation for the cook's admiration.

"I can roll a better one out of sage-brush and tar-paper."

"With your toes, Lightning?"

"Yeah—one foot."

"I guess it isn't so very good, then. Perhaps I'd better go for a ride."

"If you only knowed how many dudes I've seen ride away, and never come back. Dozens of 'em. If their bones was laid end to end, they'd—they'd surprise you, Shorty."

"I'm not hard to surprise. Here comes somebody."

Two men were riding into the yard. Lightning squinted hard at the two riders and said sharply to Shorty:

"If yo're guilty, either start runnin' or shootin'! Here comes the law."

"Hello there, you old bat-eared dough-puncher!" yelled one of the riders.

"Bloodhounds of the law!" snorted the cook. "Hyah, Lige. Well, well, well! If it aint Irish McClung, the handsome deputy!"

Lige Blackstone, wiry little Sheriff, swung down from his saddle, dropped his reins and came up to the doorway. Irish McClung, the deputy, six feet, two inches tall, red-headed, with a moonlike face besprinkled with freckles, came along, slapping his dusty hat against his chaps.

"Hyah, Lightnin'," he grinned. "How's the bur-r-rnin' question?"

"I never burned food in my life, you red-headed rannahan."

IRISH grinned widely and looked at Shorty with open curiosity.

"Gents," said Lightning seriously, "I'd like to make you used to Shorty—Shorty—well, what the hell is yore name, Shorty?"

"My name is Rheinlander Strong Pollinger," replied Shorty.

"Git used to him," said the cook. "Shorty, this is Lige Blackstone, the Sheriff, and Irish McClung, his deputy."

"Oh, yea-a-ah!" exclaimed the Sheriff. "You're the tall tenderfoot they was tellin' me about in Oro Grande. Exactly Wright was tellin' about you. Are you workin' here now?"

"I'm thinking of owning the ranch," replied Shorty.

"You aint aimin' to buy the Seventy-six, are you?" asked Irish.

"You see," explained Lightning quickly, "he *thinks* he's a nephew of Jim Strong."

"Well, that's all right," said Irish hastily. "I knowed a feller once who thought he was Napoleon. He was a awful big thinker. I was awful strong for him, until he mistook me for a feller named Wellin'ton. The way he acted about it, you'd think that Wellin'ton had pistol-whipped him sometime, when his hands was tied."

"Wellington bested Napoleon at Waterloo," said Shorty.

"When was that?" asked Irish.

"On June the eighteenth, eighteen hundred and fifteen."

"Now," said Irish triumphantly, "I know he wasn't Napoleon. This feller wasn't over thirty. Well, how are things goin' since Jim Strong died, Lightnin'?"

"Oh, jist fair, Irish. We're kinda sparrin' around, waitin' to see who owns us."

"You won't have to wait long now," said the Sheriff. "Judge Reid's back. Got in last night at Oro Grande, and drove in from there. We thought we'd ride in and see how things are goin'."

"Huh!" snorted the cook. "In my day, a Arizona deputy had to be a *man*. All you fellers have to do these days is ride back and forth! Why, doggone you, Irish, I remember the time—"

"I know," interrupted Irish. "Yo're the feller that loaned George Washin'ton the silver dollar he throwed across the Rio Grande."

"The dollars I've throwed away down on the Rio Grande!" sighed Lightning.

"Let's go, Lige," said Irish. "This danged old doughgod burner is wound up like a clock. Pleased to have met you, Mr. Rollinger."

"The name is Pollinger," corrected Shorty. "And it wasn't the Rio Grande. Historians disagree, classing that episode with the one about the cherry tree."

"Yeah, I guess we *better* be goin'," agreed the Sheriff. *"Adios."*

"They are rather ignorant of history," declared Shorty as the two officers rode away.

"Still," replied Lightning reflectively, "you can't say that it makes 'em unhappy. The way I look at it is this: if Washin'ton wanted to throw silver dollars across the Rio Grande—let him do it. If the biggest battle of the Boer War

was fought on the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas—let it be there. Shorty, yo're goin' to find that geography aint worth a damn down here."

"I don't believe I understand," said Shorty.

"You don't, eh? Well, you ought to hear Shotgun Slim tell about the Battle of San Juan Hill. Shotgun don't even know where San Juan Hill is; so he makes it jist outside Flagstaff. Shotgun tells it good, and we can all understand it, 'cause we *know* them hills. Do you see what I mean now?"

"In other words, you localize it."

"Localize? Oh, yeah, I reckon that's it. Well, I've got cookin' to do."

"I think I shall ride out to Sidewinder Springs," said Shorty, "where Rosie and Brad went—I know the way there."

After some experimenting Shorty managed to cinch the saddle on Smoky, and rode slowly away from the ranch.

Brad had loaned him a belt and holster, and he was wearing a pair of glaringly new chaps. Rosie had pointed out the trail which led to Sidewinder Springs, but he neglected to tell Shorty that it would be easy for the uninitiated to get off on a wrong trail. Two miles from the ranch, Shorty ran into a maze of cattle-trails, but blithely took his pick, continuing as nearly as possible a straight line, which led him to the southeast, when he should have turned northeast.

It was Shorty's first horseback ride alone. He stopped to look at the queer-shaped rocks in the cañons, admired the ocotillo blossoms—and almost lost his horse, when a rattler buzzed from beside the trail, and Smoky leaped nimbly aside. The afternoon shadows were very long when Shorty discovered that he was not on any trail and that he did not know the way back to the ranch.

SHORTY sat there and considered his problem calmly. Somewhere he had heard that if you give a horse its head, the horse will go home. But Smoky merely lowered his head and began cropping the sparse grass, showing no desire to go anywhere.

"Another theory exploded," said Shorty. "Horse-sense merely means a desire for a full stomach. Go home, Smoky!"

Smoky shook his head and reached for more grass. Shorty stood up in his stirrups and considered the sun.

"That must be the west," he told the horse. "Standing thus, with arms extended, the right hand points north. That is perfectly simple. If I only knew which way I had traveled to reach this point—which I do not. Undoubtedly I am north of the road, which runs from Oro Grande to Dry Lake. Therefore, if I travel south, I must strike that road. Simple reckoning. Proceed, Smoky."

AFTER traveling a few hundred yards due south, he came to the rim of a cañon. Rather than lose his direction, Shorty spurred the horse down a worn cattle-trail into the depths of the cañon, where they were far below the last rays of the sun. They crossed the floor of the cañon and struck another old trail, which led up a side-cañon, through a jumble of boulders and tangled brush.

They broke into a wide opening, and to the left, in against the wall of the cañon, was an old dugout, half cabin, half cave, built years ago by a varmint hunter. Shorty's unpracticed eye did not perceive that it was an abandoned place. It looked like a human habitation, and there might be some one there to guide him back to the Seventy-six ranch.

He halted Smoky at the front, dismounted heavily, and walked over to the half-closed door, hanging on one hinge. He shoved the door open, and said:

"I beg your pardon—"

A muffled sound from inside the dugout caused him to step inside the doorway. In the dim light he saw the figure of a man on the floor; a man bound with ropes and with a cloth gag covering his mouth. As Shorty stared at him, the man made queer, gurgling noises behind the gag.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Shorty, and backed outside hurriedly.

Rosie O'Grady had repeatedly told Shorty:

"No matter what you see down here, keep yore mouth shut and mind yore own business—unless it affects you personally."

"This surely doesn't affect me personally," Shorty told himself, and climbed quickly into his saddle. Giving Smoky his head, they were soon out of the cañon, but with plenty of hills and brush ahead. That man in the dugout worried him plenty, but it certainly was not his business. Probably he was some criminal arrested by the Sheriff and left there for safekeeping.

It seemed only a few minutes since sundown, but the stars were already

twinkling overhead, and as far as directions were concerned, Shorty was thoroughly lost. An hour later they found the road. Smoky turned left, and Shorty was willing to leave directions to the horse—which, several hours later took him to Oro Grande, at least twenty-five miles from the Seventy-six ranch.

Shorty had foresight enough to put his horse in the livery-stable and make his tired way to the hotel, where he paid a dollar for a room, and went to bed, wondering what the boys at the ranch would think, when he did not come home.

AS a matter of fact, the Seventy-six outfit was worried. The three cowboys had come straight home from Sidewinder Springs, but they had not seen Shorty Pollinger.

"Well, don't blame me!" snapped Lightning, as he dished up supper. "I aint dry-nursin' this So-and-So Pollinger. If that slab-sided, owl-eyed high-pockets wants to git himself lost, it's his business. I told him not to go alone. What the hell do you reckon I should have done—cut off one of his legs? Set down and eat it, before I throw it out."

"We don't want to lose him," said Rosie. "He's m' inspiration."

"Inspiration? What do you mean?" asked Brad.

"Well, every time I git to feelin' that I don't amount to much, I look at Shorty Pollinger."

"You could work the same idea with a jackass," said Lightning.

"Well, *I* like him," declared Rosie.

"Tastes differ," remarked Cinch.

"Well, you iggerent, hard-hearted scorpions!" blurted Rosie. "Not a damn' one of you seem to care about this lost child. You can all go to the devil. As soon as I finish my supper, I'm goin' huntin' for him."

"Aw, he'll show up," grinned Brad. "He can't git lost."

"The hell he can't! How many miles square does a feller need to get lost in?"

"Yeah, that's true. If he went north—it's a long ways. Yeah, and he could go a mighty long ways west or east. If he went south, he'd cut the road. Mebbe we better go to Dry Lake after supper. If Lige Blackstone and Irish McClung are there, they'll have to help us hunt."

"I'll start out too, as soon as the dishes are washed," offered Lightning. "I kinda like the damn' fool myself."

But there was no use of their going to Dry Lake, because the Sheriff and deputy came to the ranch before the boys had finished their meal.

"We just dropped in to tell you that we'll be needin' you boys in the mornin'," announced the Sheriff. "Judge Reid came to Oro Grande last night, hired a rig to come home in—but he aint never got home. We've been huntin' all afternoon for him. Jeff Kirk, Dave Hall, Blizzard Storms and Harvey Good have gone on to Oro Grande to start searchin' this way early in the mornin', while we start from this end."

"Well, my Gawd!" exclaimed Lightning. "We're gittin' to be the most careless people on earth, Lige. We lost a feller today too."

"You lost a feller? What you mean?"

"Shorty Pollinger strayed away today," said Rosie. "We was comin' to Dry Lake to ask you to help us find him."

"I'm goin' to open a bureau of missin' men," said Irish. "Say! That grub smells awful good, Lightnin'."

"Grab a chair!" grunted the cook.

Both officers obeyed quickly, while the cowboys plied them with questions about Judge Reid, who was a general favorite.

"There aint a single reason for anybody to harm the old Judge," said the Sheriff. "My the'ry is that he drove off the grade."

"Didja talk with Ann?" asked Rosie.

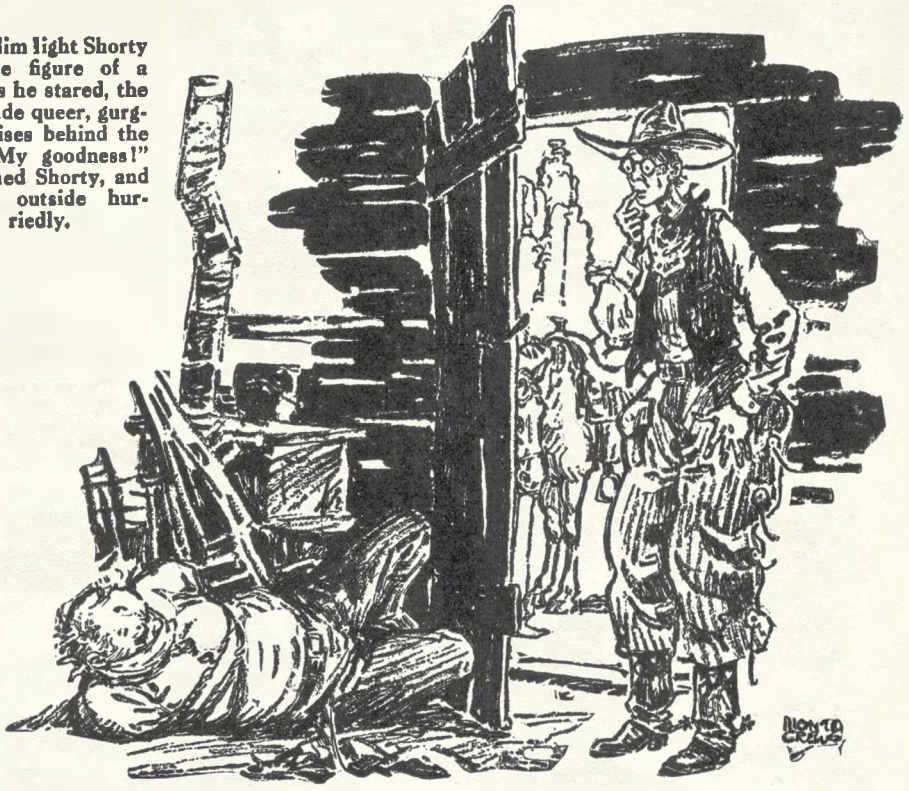
The Sheriff nodded. "She wanted to ride with us. Early in the mornin' we'll make a good search. With a bunch of us workin' both ways on the road, we'll sure find him. Mebbe we'll find yore missin' man too."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Lightning. "He's jist damn' fool enough to git lost, ride all over hell's half-acre to find the road, and then fall off the grade."

SHORTY POLLINGER awoke fairly early that morning. He wanted to start back to the ranch as soon as possible; so he got his horse at the livery-stable, tied the animal in front of the hotel and went in to get his breakfast.

Fifteen minutes later he stepped outside—and ran face to face with the man he had knocked down the stairs in the rooming-house. The man looked rather seedy and dirty, but Shorty recognized him in a flash. Apparently the recognition was mutual. For an instant they stared at each other. But the smaller man was the first to make a move.

His right hand jerked to the waistband of his pants, flinging his old coat aside, and grasping the butt of a revol-



In the dim light Shorty saw the figure of a man; as he stared, the man made queer, gurgling noises behind the gag. "My goodness!" exclaimed Shorty, and backed outside hurriedly.

ver; and at the same moment Shorty's right fist, swinging in a wild arc, struck the man abaft the jaw.

The shock of the blow shook the man to his heels, and his hand fell away from his gun. The force of the blow turned Shorty halfway around, but he came back, swinging with all his power, but with his left fist this time, and it crashed true on the man's chin.

Down went the man, knocked cold, the gun falling from his waistband. Like a man in a daze, Shorty picked up the gun, put it into his pocket and stepped over to his horse, which he quickly mounted. Men were coming across the street and up the street. Hammering Smoky's ribs with his heels, and clinging tightly to the saddle-horn, Shorty rode out of town at a mad gallop, heading back for the ranch.

The man was just coming to, when the crowd gathered around him. Jeff Kirk and his two men, Dave Hall and Blizzard Storms, were among the crowd. The man was recognized as Tex Cole.

They helped Tex to his feet, and he looked around blankly, feeling of his aching jaw. He swallowed heavily, and tentatively wiggled his lower jaw.

"Where's my gun?" he asked weakly.

"I seen that tall feller put it in his pocket," said a man who had seen the incident from the hotel window.

"Again?" wailed Tex. "That's two!"

"Two what?" asked Jeff Kirk. "You mean—teeth, Tex?"

"Na-a-aw—two guns!"

"C'mon with me; I want to talk to you, Tex," said Kirk. "Yo're all right, now?"

Tex nodded, and they walked slowly away from the crowd.

"I spent the last cent I had for that gun," said Tex painfully, "and I had to hobo my way back. That sand-hill crane took my money and my other gun, after knockin' me colder than a bartender's heart."

"Forget it, Tex. I'll buy you a good gun."

"If you do, I'm goin' to hide it where that funny-lookin' jiggernaut can't git his hands on it. I tell you he's bad medicine, Jeff."

"He'll be soothin' syrup, when I git through with him."

"And I'll be a corpse," groaned Tex. "Buy me a breakfast. That damn' human orstrich took all my—"

"That's all right, Tex. Brace up."

"I aint et for three days—how the hell can I brace up? I tell you, that feller is a hoodoo, Jeff. My back is—"

"All right. Let's go down to a Chink restaurant, where we can have a talk. I've got a lot to tell you."

"Well, I've only got one thing to tell you, and that is—look out for that long-legged accident, 'cause if he happens to you like he's happened to me twice—Gawd help you."

It was about nine o'clock that morning when Judge Reid, pale and weary-looking, slid down through the brush and got to his feet on the grade about three miles from the Seventy-six ranch. Rosie O'Grady, Lige Blackstone and Irish McClung, searching along the road, saw him at a distance, and hurried to reach him.

The Judge was a short, heavy-set man, his round face stubbled with gray whiskers, his clothes dirty and torn. He told them a queer tale of starting out alone from Oro Grande, and only proceeding a few miles, when two masked men stopped him and made him prisoner. They unharnessed the horse and turned it loose, after hiding the buggy behind a mesquite thicket. They had searched the Judge for weapons, gave him back his wallet, which contained considerable money, and then took him to a dugout in the hills, where they tied him up and talked with him regarding a ransom.

He had assured them that there was no possibility of anyone's paying any amount of money to them for his safe return; but they did not seem to believe him. They had left him alone, without food or water.

"Last night," he said, "one of them came back, looked in on me, but went away. Later two men came. They gave me a drink of water and went away. Several hours later one man came back, heavily masked. He said they had quarreled, and that he was turning me loose. After cutting the ropes, he disappeared. Since that time I have been trying to get out of the hills."

THE old Judge was quite exhausted; so they put him on the deputy's horse, while the deputy rode double with the Sheriff, and they all went back to Dry Lake.

Brad and Cinch had ridden toward Sidewinder Springs, trying to get some trace of Shorty Pollinger; and old Lightning was the only one at the Seventy-six when Shorty came home.

"Jist about where in hell have you been, feller?" yelled the cook. Shorty unsaddled and came up to the house.

"Oh, I went for a little ride up to Oro Grande," said Shorty. He took Tex Cole's gun from his pocket and placed it on the table.

Lightning looked at the gun in Shorty's holster, and at the gun on the table.

"Where didja get that gun?" he asked.

"Oh, I got that in Oro Grande."

"Did you buy it, Shorty?"

"No, I didn't; I knocked a man down and took it away from him."

"You—uh—did, eh? I'll be a dirty name! Who was he?"

"I believe his name is Tex Cole."

"Tex Cole? You knocked—wait a minute, Shorty! I happen to know Tex Cole; *and you never took no gun away from him.*"

"Sorry," replied Shorty stiffly, "but this is the second one I have taken away from Tex Cole. I have also whipped him twice."

Lightning looked sadly upon Shorty.

"You ort to lay down and try to git some sleep," he said kindly. "This here Arizony sun is shore hard on you, when you aint used to it. Are you hungry?"

"Not very," replied Shorty. "I am a little fatigued. Perhaps I should lie down and take a little nap, before luncheon."

Lightning shook his head sadly as he watched the lanky young man going to the bunk-house. A few minutes later Rosie and Irish McClung came back from Dry Lake. Lightning ran down to meet them at the stable.

"We found the Judge," said Rosie. "He was kidnaped, but one of the kidnapers turned him loose."

"That's fine," replied Lightning. "But here's more news: Shorty Pollinger's back—and he's as crazy as a bedbug."

"What?" snorted Rosie. "Crazy, you say, Lightning?"

"The Imperial Sword Swallerer of the Loco Lodge," nodded the old cook. "Rode in like Napoleon at the battle of Bunker Hill. He throwed a strange forty-five on my table, and he says:

"'I've whipped Tex Cole twice, and that's the second six-gun I've took away from him.'"

"Gawd's sake!" murmured Irish.

"I knowed I had to humor him," continued Lightning, "so I says: 'You better lay down and take a little rest.' He says: 'Perhaps I should, 'cause I'm a little fatty-gued.'"

"What did he mean by that?" asked Irish.

"I dunno," replied Lightning. "I tell you, he's crazy."

"Where is he now?" asked Rosie.

"Over in the bunk-house, restin' his fatty-gue, I reckon."

"You better let me talk to him alone, boys."

"Can you handle him alone?" queried Irish.

"I think I can, Irish."

"He's as cracked as a hotel wash-basin, I tell you," insisted Lightning. "Him lickin' Tex Cole, and takin' away his gun!"

"It don't sound accordin' to Hoyle," agreed Irish. But Rosie was apparently unafraid, and went boldly up to the bunk-house, where he found Shorty stretched out on his bunk.

"Hello, Rosie," he grinned. "Were you worried about my absence?"

"No," lied Rosie. "We never gave you a thought. What's this I'm hearin' about you whippin' Tex Cole and takin' away his gun?"

"Entirely correct."

"Did you really whip him, Shorty?"

"I suppose I did. He tried to draw a gun, and I struck him with my right hand, and then with my left hand—and he—I suppose he fainted. At any rate, I took his gun and—and came home."

Rosie's expression was one of mystified amazement.

"Did anyone else see this, Shorty?"

"There were several men around there. I really did not wait to ask them if they observed the incident. I suppose I was a trifle perturbed. You see, I am not used to that sort of thing."

"Lovely dove!" breathed Rosie. "Took his gun!"

"I left it on the kitchen table," said Shorty wearily. He yawned and blinked.

"Well, you better wrap up a yard or two of shut-eye," said Rosie, as he left.

Irish McClung was telling Lightning all about the kidnaping of Judge Reid, but they stopped their conversation to hear about Shorty Pollinger.

"He'll be all right," said Rosie, as he sat down with them.

"Never!" exclaimed Lightning. "Even a damn' fool can tax his brain too far, and it'll snap jist like a fiddle-string. I've seen a lot of 'em go thataway!"

AFTER supper that night Shorty wanted to go to Dry Lake.

"I have been thinking things over," he told Rosie, "and I would like to have a talk with Judge Reid about my inheritance."

"Shorty, can you prove that Jim Strong was yore uncle?" asked Rosie.

"I don't really know, Rosie. I have always taken it for granted. I wrote him sometime ago, but I never received any answer. It is a queer situation—really. Perhaps Judge Reid might be able to tell me how I could prove my relationship."

"Well, it's worth tryin'," admitted Rosie. "We'll ride in tonight."

They left their horses at the Cascade Saloon hitch-rack, and went down to Judge Reid's home, where Ann welcomed them. Shorty grew red in the face, stammered and hesitated.

"Shorty wants to see yore father, Ann," explained Rosie.

"Yes," said Shorty, "that is it, Miss Reid. You see—"

"Well?" said Judge Reid brusquely, stepping into the room.

"Howdy, Judge," said Rosie. "How you feelin' tonight?"

BUT the Judge did not answer, for he was staring at Shorty—staring and scowling, his hands clenched. Shorty shuffled his feet and backed hastily away, alarmed at the Judge's menacing attitude.

"You!" exclaimed the old jurist. "You damned rascal, I'll have you hanged, sir!"

"Father!" exclaimed Ann. "Why, what is wrong?"

"Wrong? Wrong? Why, damn it, that man is one of the kidnapers! Seize him, O'Grady!"

Rosie did not seize him, because of the fact that Shorty had whirled, flung open the door, and was galloping toward the little picket fence, which he cleared by several feet, and went pounding toward the main part of Dry Lake.

"Get the Sheriff!" yelled the Judge. "Don't stand there like a damn' ninny!"

"Wait a minute, Judge," begged Rosie. "That boy aint no kidnaper."

"No?" roared the Judge. "Damn it, O'Grady, he was the only one of the bunch that forgot to put on a mask. Would anyone mistake that face and figure for anyone else? I tell you, I saw him. I can positively identify him. He came into the dugout last night, looked at me and then rode away."

"Well, I'll be an uncle to a horn-toad!" blurted Rosie.

"But you know where he was last night, don't you, Rosie?" asked Ann.

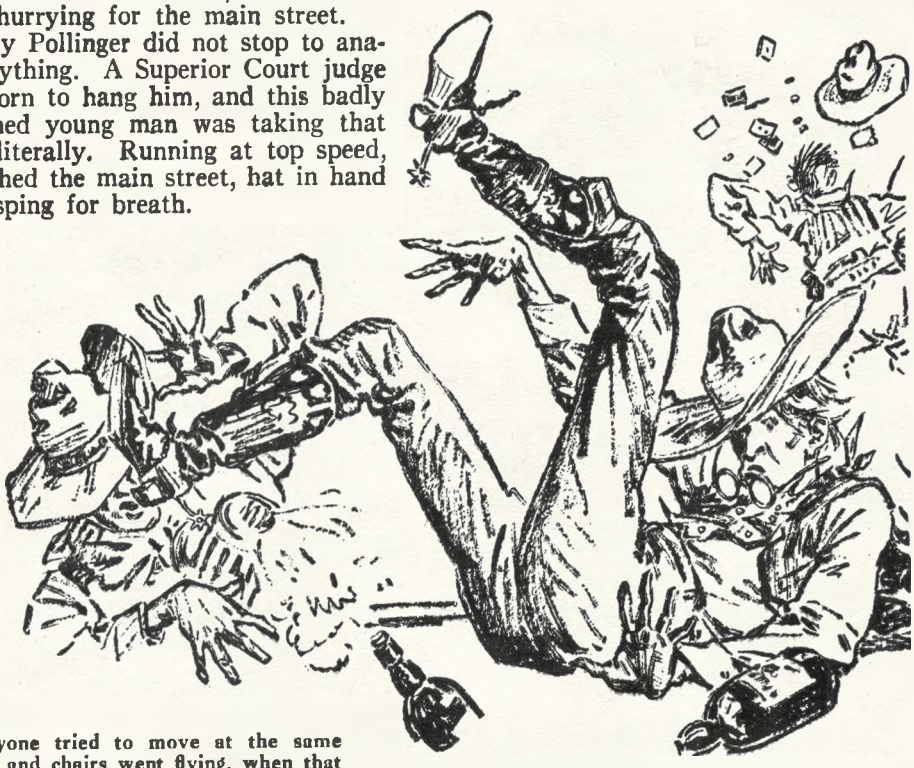
Rosie shook his head slowly.

"He wasn't at the ranch, Ann. We think he got lost."

"Don't think!" roared the Judge. "Act! We must make an example of that rascal."

"I—I'll do what I can," stammered Rosie, hurrying for the main street.

Shorty Pollinger did not stop to analyze anything. A Superior Court judge had sworn to hang him, and this badly frightened young man was taking that threat literally. Running at top speed, he reached the main street, hat in hand and gasping for breath.



Everyone tried to move at the same time, and chairs went flying, when that squealing dun bronco landed among them.

Moonlight aided the illumination of the street, and it seemed to Shorty that everybody in Arizona was on that street. As a matter of fact, there were possibly a dozen people in sight. The lights from the Cascade Saloon illuminated the hitch-rack, where a dozen saddle-horses were tied.

Shorty had but one idea—flight.

Running blindly to the hitch-rack, he yanked the tie-rope on a dun-colored horse, paying no attention to the horse, other than the color, and no attention to the riding rig. The animal snorted at him, which, in his normal senses, would have frightened Shorty; but he whirled the animal around and got into the saddle.

Somewhere a man was yelling;

"Git off that bronc! Git off that bronc, I tell you!"

Two cowboys were running across the street toward him. Shorty spurred his horse, which promptly bucked straight toward the two cowboys. Shorty was about to be pitched off over the animal's right shoulder, when one of the cowboys threw his big hat into the animal's face, causing the bucker to switch directions and literally jerk Shorty back into the saddle.

Two more lunging bucks flung Shorty forward on the horse's neck, and they lurched across the flimsy sidewalk, straight into the wide doorway of the Cascade Saloon. There were several men at the bar, two five-handed poker-games in operation, and four cowboys playing pool at the far end of the room.

Everyone tried to move at the same time, and chairs went flying, when that squealing dun bronco landed among them. Shorty was flung aside, landed sitting down on top of the polished bar, where he skidded its full length at high speed, with legs and arms flying, and catapulted halfway to the back door.

The room was a kaleidoscope of movement for several moments. The bucking horse broke through the flooring, crashed through a card-table, turned over and stopped upside down, with its rump against the pool-table, where it proceeded to do a thorough job of upside-down kicking.

A cowboy dived in and fell across the animal's head, pinning it down, and yelling for ropes. Men picked themselves up from corners. One man was walking in a circle, with the back of a chair hung around his neck. Gradually order was restored. No one seemed to know who had bucked the horse into the saloon.

One of Kirk's cowboys was trying to tell that it was his horse, and that somebody had tried to steal it. Jeff Kirk was walking around, his left eye swollen and purple. Tex Cole was sitting on the floor, his head and shoulders against the wall, rubbing his throat with both hands.

He looked up at Jeff Kirk and made funny noises.

"Horse kick you?" asked Kirk painfully.

"That—damn'—thing," whispered Tex. "He—kicked—me—in—the—neck."

"Pollinger?"

"Yuk," choked Tex. "Didn't—I—tell —yuh?"

The boys were getting the frightened horse to its feet, and the crowd was giving it a wide berth. Rosie O'Grady was trying to check up on what had happened, when in came Judge Reid. Some one pulled him aside, while the horse was led through the doorway.

"It was Pollinger on that horse," declared Jeff Kirk.

"Where is the Sheriff?" asked the Judge. "I want him to arrest that man."

"You mean Pollinger?" asked Kirk.

"That's the man I mean. He was one of the men who kidnaped me, and I want him arrested."

The crowd forgot the damage wrought by the bucking horse, and gathered around the Judge. By that time the Sheriff and his deputy had arrived and listened to what the Judge had to say.

"But where does Pollinger fit into the deal?" asked the Sheriff. "He's a stranger here. Who could the other men be, I wonder?"

"I don't care for theories nor explanations," spluttered the Judge. "I saw this man last night at that dugout. I'm not mistaken. I'll swear on a stack of Bibles that he is the man. He came alone, to see if I was still a prisoner, I suppose. Go and get him.

SHERIFF BLACKSTONE scratched his head and looked around.

"Did anybody see where he went?"

"I did," replied one of the pool-playing cowboys. "He dived out that back winder, and he took the sash right along with him."

True enough, the window had been smashed out, and part of the frame was missing. Lige Blackstone turned and looked curiously at Rosie O'Grady.

"What do you know, Rosie?" he asked.

"Not a thing. Pollinger wanted to see Judge Reid; so I came with him. Judge Reid accused him of bein' one of the kidnapers, and the tenderfoot cleared Reid's four-foot fence by five feet. That's the last I seen of him."

"Well, damn him, he tried to steal my bronc," declared Dave Hall, of Kirk's outfit.

"They hang men for that," said Kirk.

"Kidnapin' and horse-stealin'," murmured the Sheriff. "Not to mention the fact that he smashed up the Cascade Saloon."

"Yeah," said Jeff Kirk; "and if you don't git him, we will."

"I don't guess he'll be hard to get," said the Sheriff. He turned to Rosie O'Grady.

"He'll go back to the ranch, won't he, Rosie?"

"Don't ask me what he'll do, Lige."

"You might ask me," suggested Tex Cole painfully, as he leaned against the bar. "He kicked me in the neck, when he slid down the bar. Damn' near killed me."

"He must have it in for you, Tex," said Rosie. "Didn't he knock you out in Oro Grande this mornin'?"

"So he's braggin' about it, eh?"

"C'mon, Tex," said Jeff Kirk; "we're goin' home."

"Put some raw beef on that eye, Jeff," grinned Rosie.

"What did that slat-shaped pelican have to say about me?" demanded Tex.

"Never mind what he said," interrupted Jeff. "C'mon."

"Well, I'll tell you," grinned Rosie. "He asked me what the hell you was doin' in Chicago."

"I never was in Chicago—the damn' crazy galoot!" snapped Tex.

He turned on his heel and followed Jeff Kirk out of the saloon. Lige Blackstone looked curiously at Rosie.

"Well, are you going to do something about capturing Pollinger?" asked the Judge testily. "Or are you going to stand around in this saloon and—"

The Judge's question was interrupted by the sound of a shot. It came from out by the hitch-rack. Following the first shot were two more, closely spaced. Everyone ran toward the doorway. They could hear some one yelling, running. One—two—three shots, spaced at regular intervals. They ran out to the hitch-rack. Several horses had jerked loose their tie-ropes, and were milling around the street.

Flat on his back on the ground near the rack was Tex Cole, shot through the chest. Some distance away, two shots rang out. A lighted lamp was brought from the saloon, and the Sheriff examined Tex. There was no need of sending for a doctor. After calling the attention of everyone to the position of the body, the Sheriff had it carried into the saloon.

They had just placed the body on the floor, when Jeff Kirk came stumbling in, panting heavily.

"I—I couldn't—catch—him!" he panted. "Tex—did he get Tex?"

"Who was it, Jeff?" asked the Sheriff.

JEFF KIRK shook his head, as he gasped for breath.

"I didn't see him, Lige. He was there—at the corner, in the dark. He fired the first shot, and Tex was fallin' into me. It scared me for a moment, but I drawed my gun. He shot and missed me, and I—I reckon I missed him. It was too dark.

"Then I—" Jeff stopped to catch his breath. "Then he started runnin', with me after him. But you can't hit a man in the dark, when both of you are runnin' thataway."

"He got Tex all right," said the Sheriff grimly. "Hit him dead center. Was it that tall tenderfoot?"

"I tell you, I couldn't see him. But I do know he can run like hell."

"Now," said the Judge coldly, "will you make an effort to get that man, Sheriff?"

"Why would he kill Tex Cole?" asked Rosie.

"Don't ask me," replied Jeff Kirk. "I don't know that he did."

"You couldn't tell anythin' about his height, nor anythin', eh?" said the Sheriff.

"Not a thing," admitted Jeff. "It was too dark."

"C'mon, Irish; we've got a job," said the Sheriff.

"If yo're goin' out to the Seventy-six, I'll ride along," said Rosie.

"How about more of us goin' along?" asked Kirk.

"No," replied the Sheriff. "I'll handle this, Jeff."

THE three men mounted and rode away, after assuring themselves that Smoky was not at the hitch-rack.

"Another tenderfoot gone wrong," said the Sheriff. "Or is he a tenderfoot, Rosie?"

"I wouldn't swear to anythin'," replied Rosie as they galloped toward the ranch. "I wouldn't even make a guess, Lige."

"It looks like his goose was cooked—if we catch him."

"Yeah, it does look thataway. But damn it, Lige, I like the feller. He talks like a dictionary, and he acts so danged iggerent! He's either the best actor, or the biggest darn' fool, I ever met."

"What did he want to see Judge Reid about?"

"Oh, about provin' he was a nephew of Jim Strong."

"What proof has he got?"

"None—I guess. Oh, I don't know anythin' about it. But why would the feller dry-gulch Tex Cole? That shore makes me paw my hat."

At the entrance to the Seventy-six ranch they found Smoky. The tie-rope had been looped around the saddle-horn, and Smoky was coming home alone. They caught the animal and unsaddled him at the stable.

"You won't find Shorty Pollinger here," declared Rosie.

"Anyway," said the Sheriff, "it's a good place to spend the night. And if he comes later, we'll get him." . . . .

"Didn't I tell you he was crazy?" said Lightning, pointing a frying-pan at Rosie next morning. "You can't tell me nothin' about crazy people; I know 'em from A to Z. How do you like yore eggs, Lige?"

"Fried on the flat side," replied the Sheriff.

"Another candidate for the Loco Lodge," grunted the cook.

"Gee, I wish I'd been there!" exclaimed Brad. "I'll bet there was a scramble, when that bronc came into the saloon."

"But can you imagine that four-eyed dude upsettin' the whole town! Man, he's a dinger, that feller!"

"Crazy as a loon," declared Lightning. "He'll never hang; they'll send him to the asylum. The first time I ever set eyes onto him, I says to me: 'Lightnin', if that dood aint loco, yore eyes need fixin'.'"

"He aint crazy—he's playful," said Rosie soberly. "Pass me the fried latigo."

"That bacon aint so awful good," admitted Brad, as he passed the dish to Rosie.

"She's reg'lar hawg bacon!" snorted the cook.

"Cut off a Texas javelina, you mean."

"Well, I've got to be movin'," said Irish, shoving back from the table. "Got to ride to Oro Grande and git the coroner."

"Are you aimin' to inquest Tex Cole?" asked Lightning.

"The law says you have to do it," nodded the Sheriff.

"Lige, what's the penalty for kidnapin'?"

"I dunno—about twenty years, I suppose."

"Uh-huh. And a hundred years for murder. How much for ridin' a bronc into a saloon?"

"Thirty days in jail," replied the Sheriff.

"Gawd! A hundred and twenty years and thirty days."

"They'll prob'ly knock off the thirty days for good conduct," said Irish.

"Well, I suppose every little helps. Here comes somebody."

IT was Judge Reid and Harvey Good, driving up to the ranch in a buggy. The boys went out to meet them.

"You mean to say that you haven't captured him yet?" asked the Judge.

"He never came out here, Judge," replied the Sheriff.

"I suppose he will," remarked the young lawyer sarcastically.

"Yeah," nodded Rosie. "He wouldn't think of goin' away without tellin' us good-by. How are you, Harvey?"

"I'm disgusted over the way things are handled," he replied.

"We need efficiency in the Sheriff's office," said the Judge.

"There's no use of us quarreling, Judge," said Sheriff Blackstone. "I'll get the boy."

"At least, make an effort," said Good. "When you did not find him out here, why didn't you look elsewhere?"

"Since when did you buy a stack of chips in this game, Good?" asked the Sheriff. "Wait'll yo're dry behind the ears, before you start asking questions of men."

"Turn the horse around, Harvey," ordered the Judge. "We are going back to town."

Good nearly upset the buggy in making a short turn. The Sheriff looked sourly after them and shook his head.

"I have never seen the Judge that mad before. Irish, you go to Oro Grande and get the coroner; I'm goin' to Dry Lake."

ROSIE, Cinch and Brad all decided to go with him, and in a few minutes the four rode away. Lightning went into the kitchen and was washing the breakfast dishes when a shadow darkened the doorway, and he looked up to see—Shorty Pollinger.

"Aw, for gosh sakes!" exploded the cook. "Are you back here?"

Shorty nodded slowly. "I waited until they were all gone."

"Waited? Where was you waitin'?"

"In the hayloft. I slept there last night. Oh, it wasn't bad. But my feet are very sore from walking out here last night."

Lightning leaned against the wall and considered Shorty.

"Why didn't you ride Smoky, instead of turnin' him loose?"

"I didn't turn him loose. Didn't you hear what Smoky did in the saloon?"

"That wasn't Smoky; it was a dun-colored bronc from the JK."

"You—you mean, I got the wrong horse?"

"You shore did. But didn't you turn Smoky loose, after that?"

"Certainly not. I was too busy getting out of town."

Lightning hitched up his overalls, spat through the doorway and turned to him.

"Why did you kill Tex Cole, Shorty?" he asked bluntly.

"My goodness!" Shorty straightened up quickly. "Did Tex Cole get shot?"

"Shorty, are you crazy?"

Shorty's eyes wandered about the room, but came back to the old cook.

"Now that you mention it," he replied, "I wonder."

"Wait a minute, now. Think hard. Do you remember helpin' one or two other men kidnap Judge Reid?"

Shorty rubbed his nose, adjusted his glasses and cleared his throat.

"Lightning, have you gone crazy too?" he asked huskily.

"'Too?'" countered Lightning.

"Judge Reid is crazy," confided Shorty. "He accused me of the same thing."

"Yeah, and you ran like hell."

"You would run, too, if a judge swore to hang you, Lightning."

"Yeah, mebbe I would, at that. Are you hungry?"

"I really am, Lightning."

"Set down and rest yore feet, feller; and don't forget that this might be the last meal you'll ever eat on this side of the bars."

"Tell me about Tex Cole."

"All I know is what I heard, Shorty. Somebody dry-gulched him at the hitch-rack. They also took a crack at Jeff Kirk, but missed."

"That is really too bad."

"You mean—missin' Jeff Kirk?"

"I mean the killing of Tex Cole. Murder is deplorable."

"I dunno," sighed the cook, turning back to the stove. "You've got me whipped, Shorty. I'd hate to see you hung for killin' Tex Cole."

"So would I," replied Shorty thoughtfully. "Do you know, sometimes I wish I had never come to this country. I seem to do everything wrong. I'm really sorry about that horse, you know. I never intended riding the animal into that saloon. It must have been disconcerting to the inhabitants, to say the least."

"It scared hell out of 'em, too," said Lightning. "You go and take a wash, and by that time breakfast will be on the table."

Lightning sat down across the table from Shorty and explained the situation which confronted him.

Shorty ate calmly as he listened.

"WAS my uncle very fond of Jeff Kirk?" he asked after a while.

"Fond? Hell, he hated Jeff Kirk. They never got along."

"This ranch is really valuable property, isn't it, Lightning?"

"I'd tell a man! The cattle alone are worth thirty, forty thousand dollars. The deed covers ten sections. I'd say it was plenty valuable."

"I am very dumb—don't you know it, Lightning?"

"Well, yeah, I wouldn't say you was overly bright, Shorty."

"You're very charitable, Lightning. If I'd only been born a nephew of somebody else! Fate is a queer thing. After all, I was contented with being a filing-clerk in a small bank. I didn't ask to own a ranch. In fact, if a good fairy had granted me three wishes, I would never have thought to wish for a ranch. My whole life has been changed."

"You'll git another change, soon as they catch you, Shorty."

"I suppose they will—" Shorty got quickly to his feet. Some one was dismounting at the kitchen doorway. Lightning stepped over quickly and looked outside.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed softly. "Ann Reid!"

"Hello, Lightning," she said, and came into the kitchen. Shorty was standing beside the table, staring at her.

ANN was dressed in riding-clothes, and carrying a quirt, looped to her wrist.

"Gug-good morning, Miss Reid," said Shorty.

"So you *are* here!" she said, after taking a deep breath.

"Anybody comin' after him?" asked Lightning quickly.

"There is plenty of talk," she replied. She turned to Shorty.

"Why does my father accuse you of being one of the kidnapers?"

Shorty drew a deep breath, and smiled widely.

"Miss Reid, I have figured that all out. That night, I—I got lost. I found that dugout, and went there to see if anyone could direct me back to the ranch. There was a man in there, gagged and bound. I—I—well, you see, Rosie told me that any time I saw or heard anything that did not directly concern me, to not do or say anything—so I went on about my business."

Ann stared at him, a curious expression in her eyes. Suddenly she choked, and tears filled her eyes. Lightning looked as if he were suffering from an attack of cramps.

"I'm sorry if I have hurt you," said Shorty soberly.

Ann held both hands over her heart and blinked at Lightning.

"I should have explained it to your father," said Shorty.

"Mine's hay-fever, Ann," wheezed Lightning. "I git it every year."

None of them heard another rider come up to the door. Harvey Good, the young lawyer, stepped into the kitchen, and Ann turned to see him. His eyes shifted to each one of the three, but he spoke directly to Ann.

"I suspected that this was your destination," he said coldly.

"So you followed me out here," said Ann accusingly.

"I did."

"Why?"

"I heard you talking to your father last night, trying to excuse this impostor. Even after your own father positively identified him as a kidnaper, you defended him. You know he is a fugitive from justice, hunted by the officers; and still you sneak out—"

"I don't like that word, Harvey," interrupted the girl warmly. "I did not sneak."

"Well, you came secretly."

"Is it any of your business what I do, Harvey?"

"Well, I felt that—"

"You felt!" said Ann angrily.

"Ann, I don't want to quarrel with you," he said. "But you don't understand. What will folks think of you coming out here to see a man, who is already as good as convicted as a kidnaper, murderer and an impostor. They will say you came to warn him."

"I am sure she did not come to warn me," said Shorty blandly, as he came toward Harvey Good. "Miss Reid did not even know I was here. How could she, when the officers do not even know it?"

"I suppose she came to see Lightning Lewis!" sneered Good.

SHORTY stopped near Good, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"You are a lawyer, are you not?" asked Shorty.

"I am, sir," replied Good stiffly.

"In the practice of law, I believe you are influenced by precedents, are you not?"

"In many cases—yes."

"Then find a precedent for this!" said Shorty, swinging a haymaking right fist, which connected solidly with the lawyer's chin.

Ann screamed softly, as Harvey Good took three stiff backward steps and fell out through the kitchen doorway, knocked cold.

"Lovely gosh, what a punch!" exploded Lightning.

Shorty stepped quickly to the kitchen doorway—where, as though by magic, a crowd of men seemed to pour through

the doorway, knock him down, and fall on him in a heap. As they untangled, it was easy to identify them as Jeff Kirk and four of his cowboys. They yanked Shorty to his feet, his nose bleeding, one cheek gashed, his glasses hanging by one bow. Jeff Kirk held him tightly to the wall, while some one roped his elbows.

"There!" exclaimed Jeff Kirk triumphantly. "How do you like that?"

"Will one of you straighten my glasses?" asked Shorty. "Without them it is difficult for me to know who to thank for this."

Kirk jerked them roughly into place. He turned and looked at Ann and Lightning.

"So the heroine came out to see him, eh?" he said.

"That's about all from you, Jeff," warned Lightning. "I busted you up once, and I can do it again."

"I owe you somethin' for that," replied Kirk savagely.

HARVEY GOOD was sitting up, nursing his sore jaw.

"You bit off more than you could chaw, eh?" laughed Blizzard Storms.

"Well, now that you've got him roped —what's the next move?" asked Lightning.

"We're takin' him to Dry Lake for the inquest," smiled Kirk.

"Takin' the law in yore own hands, eh?"

"Don't let that worry you, feller. And while yo're restin', you might as well pack up yore *own* stuff. By this time tomorrow, you and them other three misfits will be goin' down the road, lookin' for jobs."

"I'll saddle up a horse for this rooster," offered Storms, indicating Shorty, and hurried down to the stable, where he saddled Smoky.

Kirk jerked Shorty outside, and they boosted him into a saddle.

"You must be afraid of him," said Ann. "Five of you—and him all roped tight."

"Don't let that worry you," laughed Kirk. "We've got him, and we'll keep him."

Harvey Good went with them, still a trifle dazed. Ann and Lightning watched them ride away.

"I aint goin' to wash no dishes," declared Lightning. "I'm goin' to hook on my old gun and ride to town with you, Ann. As long as I'm fired, I aint beholden to anybody—and I'm tired of dirty dishes, anyway."

THE arrival of Kirk's outfit with Shorty Pollinger caused plenty of interest in Dry Lake, where they were preparing for the inquest. Lige Blackstone took charge of Shorty, warned the Seventy-six boys to behave themselves, and went ahead with their preparations. Harvey Good told his troubles to Judge Reid, at their office.

"Do you mean that Ann went out there to see that fellow?" asked the Judge.

"That is where I found her," replied Good miserably. "He hit me on the chin."

The Judge scowled and drummed on his desk-top with his fingers.

"Harvey," he said, "I've discovered that the Strong will is gone from my safe."

Harvey Good's eyes opened widely. "Gone?" he parroted. "Why, that is impossible, Judge."

"I put it in there the day you and Ann witnessed the signature—the day before I left for the East. A few minutes ago I opened the safe, and the will is gone."

"But—but I don't understand, Judge. You have the only keys."

"There are two keys," said the Judge. "Ann has one. I gave it to her to use in case anything should happen to me. It would require dynamite to open that safe. But Ann would not open it—and I have my key."

"That is very queer, Judge. You see, it happens that this Pollinger is the man named in that will."

"You read the will, Harvey?"

"No, I never read it; but you told me the name."

The Judge's bony fingers drummed on the desk-top.

"R. S. Pollinger," he said thoughtfully. "But why the devil did he try to kidnap me? I don't understand it. Why did he kill Tex Cole?"

"Did Jim Strong give everything to this Pollinger?"

"Everything. He hated Jeff Kirk. All he knew of Pollinger was that letter he received from Chicago. But he knows that his sister married a Pollinger."

"Well," sighed Good, "I'm afraid the will would never do Pollinger any good, because he's slated for a mighty long term in prison."

"Which doesn't prove what became of the will," said the Judge. "It is mighty queer. I'd almost—" The Judge's eyes squinted thoughtfully. "Harvey!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose, when I was

kidnaped, that they took my keys—and brought them back—later? Maybe the ransom talk was only a blind."

Good shook his head and felt of his sore jaw.

"I'm going to that inquest," said the Judge, getting to his feet. "You better go and have a talk with Ann."

"I'm afraid not, Judge."

"You didn't quarrel with her, did you, Harvey?"

"The conversation was not exactly pleasant."

"Hm-m-m-m. Well, we'll fix that up. You better come along to the inquest; it might be interesting."

A dance-hall on the main street had been selected as the place to hold the inquest. Dozens of benches and chairs had been brought in to accommodate the crowd, and the seats were filled, when the Judge and his assistant came in. But the coroner invited the old Judge to sit with him, and some one produced another chair.

Seated near the coroner, and beside the Sheriff, was Shorty Pollinger. His nose and cheek were swollen, which did not add to his appearance. He was wearing a pair of faded overalls, tucked into the tops of his fancy boots, and his shirt had been torn in his scuffle at the ranch.

ON one set of front seats were Jeff Kirk and his men, while on the opposite side sat Rosie O'Grady, Brad Ellis, Cinch Cutter and Lightning Lewis. Behind them sat Ann Reid. Shorty tried to smile at her, but it was only a grimace.

The coroner rapped for order, and got to his feet, calling the names of six men to act as a jury. None of the JK nor Seventy-six were included in the jury. As soon as the six men were sworn, the coroner said:

"This inquest has been called to try to determine the responsibility for the murder of Tex Cole last night. Will Lige Blackstone, the Sheriff, please take the witness chair."

The Sheriff took the brief oath and sat down.

"I don't know much about it," he admitted. "I was in the Cascade Saloon, when the shots were fired. We rushed out and found Tex Cole, layin' beside the hitch-rack, shot through the heart. I asked the men to note the position of the body, and then we packed him into the saloon."

"In your opinion, was he killed instantly, Sheriff?"

"Just as dead as a forty-five can kill any man."

"Have you ever heard of any reason for any man killing Tex Cole?"

"No, I don't reckon I have."

"That is all, Sheriff. I shall ask Jeff Kirk to take the stand and be sworn."

"What good's an oath to him?" whispered Lightning, loud enough to be heard.

"That's plenty, Lightnin'," warned the Sheriff.

Kirk scowled at Lightning, as he took the oath. The crowd was inclined to chuckle over that whispered question, but sobered at his dramatic tale of the shooting of Tex Cole.

"It was too dark for me to see the murderer," he admitted. "I don't see how we missed each other, but we did. Then he started to run, and I took after him, but I wasn't fast enough. I took some more shots at him, but I don't reckon I hit him."

"Mr. Kirk," said the coroner, "do you know of any man who might have a real or fancied reason for shooting Tex Cole?"

Jeff Kirk looked at Shorty Pollinger for a moment, but turned to the coroner.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't."

"Cole worked for you?"

"For about six months. He was a top-hand."

"With a six-gun," muttered Lightning.

"Another remark from you, and out you go," said the Sheriff.

"That is all, Mr. Kirk," said the coroner. He looked at Shorty, and his brows lifted slightly, as he said:

"Mr. Pollinger, the Sheriff told me that you would testify."

"Why—" Shorty stammered. "I—yes, I do not mind."

He walked to the witness-chair, was sworn and sat down.

"Wait a minute," said Rosie, getting to his feet. "This boy has been accused of lots of things, and I want you all to understand that he aint on trial for any of them. If he knows anythin' about the killin' of Tex Cole, let him tell it—but anythin' else is out."

"Still backin' a loser?" Kirk sneered.

"The cards aint all been played yet, Jeff," said Rosie coldly.

The Sheriff realized that they were very close to open trouble.

"Proceed with the inquest, Doc," he said quickly.

Shorty gave the coroner his full name, and added that he was a nephew of Jim Strong, deceased. Kirk laughed, but sobered quickly, when the coroner said:

"Mr. Pollinger, will you tell us how you happened to come here, and just what you know about Tex Cole."

He turned quickly to the crowd.

"I am asking that question, because of the fact that Pollinger's name has been connected with the shooting of Tex Cole. Proceed, Mr. Pollinger."

"I met Tex Cole in Chicago," said Shorty huskily. It was his first public speech, and he was having trouble with his vocal cords. "He came there to murder me."

The crowd sat up straight. This was getting interesting.

"I got a letter," continued Shorty. "It said that a small dark man, who looked like a cowboy, was coming to kill me. It also said that my uncle was dead, and had left me the Seventy-six. I had no idea what the Seventy-six might be."

"Who was that letter from?" asked the Sheriff.

"Well,"—Shorty smiled queerly,—"I would rather not say, because I am not exactly sure. However, the small dark man, who looked like a cowboy, came to find me, and I—I knocked him downstairs. In the excitement, I—well, I found later that I had his wallet and gun. In the wallet was a return-ticket to Dry Lake. That is how I came here."

The crowd murmured amazedly.

"Who sent Tex Cole to kill you?" demanded the Sheriff.

"The letter did not state," replied Shorty.

"That's a lie," declared Jeff Kirk. "Tex Cole wasn't out of the State."

Rosie O'Grady was on his feet, eyes flaming angrily.

"Then how did Tex Cole recognize Pollinger in Oro Grande, and try to pull a gun on him?" he demanded. "Where did Tex Cole ever see Pollinger before—unless it was in Chicago? Where did Pollinger get Tex's pocketbook—if he didn't get it in Chicago? Go ahead and answer that, Jeff Kirk."

The coroner rapped sharply on his table.

"This is an inquest—not a guessing contest," he stated.

Shorty was fumbling nervously with the top of his left boot. He crossed his legs, still tugging nervously.

"Then you met Tex Cole again in Oro Grande, did you, Pollinger?" queried the coroner.

"Yes sir," said Shorty. "It—it was the morning after the night I got lost."

"Lost?"

"Yes," admitted Shorty. "Foolish of me, I'll admit. That was the night I found the dugout, where Judge Reid was held captive. I saw him."

Judge Reid got quickly to his feet.

"You say you were lost?" he asked.

"Well, I—I didn't exactly know where to go. I suppose I was lost."

"You saw me there, and did not offer to release me?" roared the old Judge.

"You see," replied Shorty hoarsely, "Rosie O'Grady told me that the way to get along in this country was to mind my own business. He said that no matter what I saw or heard, as long as it did not directly affect me, I must ignore it."

"My God!" exclaimed the Judge, and sat down heavily.

"What happened when you met Tex Cole in Oro Grande?" asked the coroner nervously.

"He tried to draw a gun, and I knocked him down," replied Shorty.

"What was said? What caused him to try to draw a gun?"

"Nothing was said."

"Neither of you spoke?"

"There—there wasn't anything to say," stammered Shorty, still fussing with the top of his left boot.

"What has all this to do with the killin' of Tex Cole?" snapped Jeff Kirk.

"Keep yore shirt on," advised Rosie.

The coroner rapped for order again, and the crowd quieted.

"Mr. Pollinger," he said slowly, "where were you, when Tex Cole was killed?"

Shorty swallowed heavily, started to point, but changed his mind.

"Why, I was beside the saloon, right near the hitch-rack."

"You were? Near where Cole was killed. Did you see him killed?"

"Yes, I saw him killed," replied Shorty calmly.

"Do you mean to set there and tell us you saw Tex Cole killed?" demanded the Sheriff.

"Why, yes, I do."

"You saw the man who killed him?"

JEFF KIRK was on his feet, tense, white-faced, jerking out his gun, as he came to his feet. He whirled so that his back was to a blank wall, the cocked gun balanced in his right hand.

"Go ahead and tell 'em who shot Tex Cole, you damn' lyin' tenderfoot!" gritted Jeff. "You might as well talk fast, 'cause I'm goin' to down you. Steady, everybody. Don't move. I'm goin' to kill this horse-faced hoodoo, and then I'm

goin' out that window; and I'll kill anybody that tries to stop me."

Jeff Kirk was panting, trying to watch everybody. He came a step nearer Shorty Pollinger—too close to miss. The crowd tensed, waited. Jeff Kirk shifted his eyes to Shorty, and started to elevate the muzzle of his gun, when a forty-five crashed out, the concussion rattling the windows. But it was not Jeff Kirk's gun; it was Shorty's—and he had fired the shot over the top of his left boot. . . .

Jeff Kirk buckled at the knees, turned half around, clawing for support, and pitched back among his own men. The Seventy-six outfit were on their feet, guns drawn, yelling at Kirk's men to keep their hands off their guns. Blizzard Storms had started to run up the aisle, but somebody tripped him, and he fell heavily, his gun falling under the chairs.

Irish McClung had been watching Bliz, and now he vaulted into the aisle and fell upon Blizzard, while some of the spectators gave him able assistance. The room was in an uproar. The coroner was trying to find out how badly Jeff Kirk was injured, and Kirk was cursing him and everybody else. But in all this uproar Shorty Pollinger still sat in the witness-chair, gazing curiously at the efforts of everyone trying to help some one else.

During the excitement Harvey Good left the room—and was never seen in Dry Lake Valley again. Order was partly restored, when Ann Reid came over beside Shorty and shook hands with him. The heavy bullet had knocked Jeff Kirk down, but the coroner said he had a good chance of recovery. Men crowded around Shorty Pollinger, questioning him further. The Judge and the Sheriff shoved their way to him, and Ann handed her father a sealed envelope. He glanced at it, and looked at her in amazement.

"It is Jim Strong's will," she said. "I overheard Harvey Good giving Jeff Kirk some advice on how to beat the will. Harvey told him there were two ways to get the Seventy-six. One was to kill Pollinger, before he knew anything about it, and the other was to get your keys and rob the safe of the will. So,"—Ann took a deep breath,—"I wrote to Mr. Pollinger, and then I stole the will out of the safe and substituted a dummy envelope. That is what they stole."

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed the Judge.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Shorty. "So you are Ann Unknown!"

"What I want to know is this," said the Sheriff: "Pollinger, you saw Tex Cole murdered, and yet you didn't say anythin'. What was yore idea?"

"Well," replied Shorty, "Rosie told me the way to get along down here was to pay no attention to things that didn't concern me; so I didn't say anything. Blame Rosie, if the code is wrong."

"I'll be—" began the Sheriff.

"What *I* want to know is this," said Irish McClung: "You didn't have any gun on you, when we brought you in here, Shorty. Where did you get that six-gun?"

"Oh, that!" Shorty smiled weakly. "I had that gun inside the waist of my trousers, when they jumped on me at the ranch, and it slipped down my pant-leg, and into my boot-top. I was trying to get it out, because it was hurting my ankle."

"I give up!" snorted Lightning. "I thought I had seen everythin', but I was all wrong."

"Are they all through asking me questions?" queried Shorty.

"Yes," said the Sheriff, "we're through —at least, I am."

"Thank you, Sheriff."

SHORTY got off the stand and walked over to Ann.

"You are a wonderful girl," he told her bravely.

"You are rather wonderful yourself," she laughed.

"Not wonderful," Shorty said slowly. "Merely dumb, foolish and fortunate. The Bible says that the meek shall inherit the earth, you know. I'm starting in with the Seventy-six ranch, which is quite a piece of the earth for one person to inherit; and if it had not been for you, I'm sure such good fortune would never have been possible."

"But don't be too meek," she smiled.

"Oh, I'm not. I'm even learning to swear."

"You are?"

"My goodness—yes."

And they both laughed, looking each other straight in the eyes.

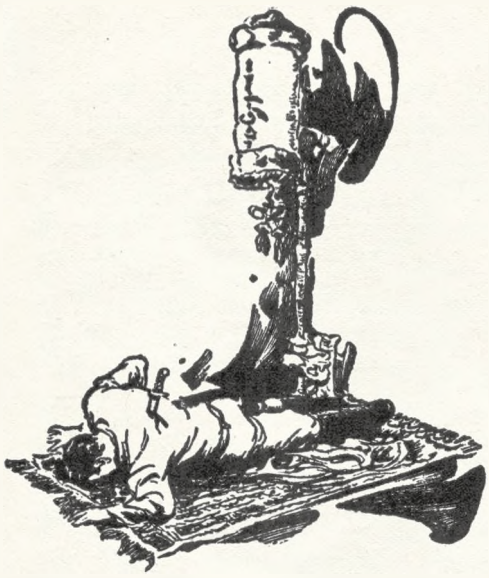
Lightning, Rosie, Cinch and Brad were standing in a group, looking at the two.

"See nothin', hear nothin', say nothin'," muttered Lightning. "He's crazy, I tell you."

Rosie looked at Ann sharply, sighed and nodded.

"I suppose he is—I wish I was."

THE END



A Dead

A fascinating mystery of the white man's Orient, set forth by the able writer who gave us "Gods Guard the Brave" and "The Breath of Peril."

CARTER was a quiet, inoffensive little man with spectacles, who had lived in China all his life, and was a deep student of the Chinese language. He had written books about it, or rather monographs. Barringford had heard of him before coming to Swatow, and now was interested in the man, as much as in the financial deal under way.

"We got in this afternoon from Shanghai," said Barringford, when Carter had read the two letters of introduction from mutual friends in the north, and laid them down. "Shafer went around to cash our Shanghai checks, and will join me here presently. We figured that the way things are, cash would talk."

"Lord!" exclaimed Carter, taking off his spectacles and rubbing his eyes. "Barringford, cash talks with a loud voice right now, let me tell you! I've been getting together every cent I could borrow, beg, steal or raise, to put through a deal two days from now that will make me a rich man! Yes, I got your cable. I've looked into the *Hangwa* matter."

He paused to rise and close the door.

Carter's office was in the native city, like most foreign business establishments in Swatow. It was a dim, cool, pleasant office, the shades over the windows made of fitted shell that looked like old stained glass. Carter was a steamship-agent and general broker, with a finger in many pies.

Barringford liked the man's looks. He himself had come out to China at eleven with his parents, had been here ever since, and knew the language and people intimately. Wiped out by the war in and around Shanghai, Barringford and his partner Shafer had come south on the word of a profitable deal, bringing what money they could raise.

"Where are you staying?" asked Carter, resuming his seat.

"At the hotel." Barringford stretched out easily, his thin features holding the shadow of a whimsical smile. He remembered afterward that Carter had frowned, seemed about to speak, then checked himself. Probably had meant to ask him out to his bungalow, for Carter lived across in the foreign suburb of Kia-lat, around the curve of the bay.

"Yes," went on Barringford, "we heard about this steamer, the *Hangwa*. If we could pick her up for the right price, we'd start fresh in business. Shafer is a good sort. He was with the consular people up in Manchuria until he went into business for himself. Solid chap. So we wired you about the deal, and here we are."

Carter nodded. "Everything is arranged," he said quietly. "I have an option here in my desk. If the price suits you, excellent. Hand over your cash; I'll close the deal first thing in the morning, and the ship is yours. I'll make over the option to you, as evidence of good faith."

"That's not necessary," said Barringford. The other shrugged.

"You never can tell. I don't trust even the banks in these days. I keep my money where I can get my hands on it. If my own deal goes through, I'll need the cash in a hurry."

"Shouldn't call that very safe," observed Barringford. "People who don't trust banks usually get burned."

Carter laughed. "Not a chance. . . . Hello! This is your partner, eh?"

Shafer had arrived. He lacked the lean grace of Barringford, but was broad, muscular, bronzed, his sturdy honesty transparent, an excellent man to lean upon. He had been out here for some years, but made no pretense of being any

Man Tells

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

student of Chinese people. His line was business, and he was efficient at it.

So Carter got out his option. Shafer whistled incredulously when he heard the price of the *Hangwa*, and Barringford's thin-chiseled features displayed pleasant surprise.

All this was prelude. . . . Looking back at it later, Barringford wondered at the stage-setting, marveled that he should have missed so many clues. . . . Not that the truth eluded him long, but Barringford was accustomed to sharp, swift action.

They arranged to meet Carter for tiffin next noon and take over the papers for the *Hangwa*.

But Carter was not destined to meet anyone for tiffin again, ever.

BREAKFAST over, Shafer went out to get the latest war news from the north, and Barringford went up to the hotel room they shared, to write letters.

He was startled when he looked at his watch and found that it was getting on toward noon, and no sign of Shafer. He hurriedly finished the last letter, signed and sealed it, and was affixing stamps when the door was flung open by Shafer.

"Well, Carter's dead," said Shafer bluntly, in his usual headlong fashion. He slammed the door and threw his sun-helmet into the corner. "Whew! It's a hot day. Yes, Carter shot himself last night. Heard about it downtown and went straight over to his bungalow. You know how news travels."

Barringford whistled softly. "Accident?"

"No. Suicide." A scowl settled on Shafer's bronzed features. "He'd been gambling and was all washed out. Blasted coward!"

"Hold on, hold on!" exclaimed Barringford. "Steady all! He didn't shoot himself."

Shafer dropped into a chair and stared at him gloomily.

"And what the devil do you know about it? Listen, feller. This was a clear case. The pistol was still in his hand. I beat the police there, you see."

Barringford gave him a sharp look, lifted one eyebrow quizzically. He knew his partner, knew what these words meant. The native police in Swatow were something of a joke, in any case.

"That means something, eh?" he observed. "What do I know about it? Nothing, and everything. Carter had been gambling, eh? Not much. Well, let's go! Cough up everything."

He knew that Shafer might be right, of course. There was always the chance that Carter had lied, but he did not think so. If this were true, if Carter had killed himself because of gambling losses, then he and Shafer were wiped out, almost to the last dollar. It was a distinct jolt.

"I know how you feel," said Shafer slowly. "He left a short note on the table, saying that his gambling losses had smashed him. I didn't touch it. Said that all he could beg, borrow or steal was gone."

"You heard the news and hopped right up there, eh?" said Barringford, with a nod. "Good work! Was the note in his writing?"

"Looked like it to me. Nothing else occurred to me, of course. But there was a smoking-stand beside him. On top of the ashes in the bowl were a lot of paper scraps. I brought them along, on the chance that they might show something."

"Servants?"

"His boys had all cleared out," said Shafer with a morose shrug. "They had probably spread the news downtown. If Carter had any family, they weren't on hand. He had a wife, to judge by the woman's picture in his room."

On the writing-desk Shafer deposited a mass of torn paper scraps. Barringford turned them over with his finger, meditatively. He knew Shafer, knew that if there had been anything else, it would not have been missed. Shafer was methodical, thorough.

"Looks like Chinese characters," he murmured, eying the pencil-marks on the scraps of paper. "Hm! You know, Carter was a student of the language. He's written a couple of analytical monographs on the written characters. They're vastly interesting."

"Not to me," said Shafer. "One thing more, I forgot to mention. A glass was on the table and on the floor was an overturned bottle of Vichy."

"Still full?" queried Barringford dryly.

"Partially. Not close to Carter's feet, though."

Barringford shot him a look of comprehension. A bottle on the floor beside one would not be readily overturned, unless by another person.

"Another chair? Any sign of another person having been there?"

"No. I couldn't ask his boys, of course; they had scattered, left the bungalow deserted. Absolutely nothing else. No marks on the table. Nothing."

If Shafer said there was nothing, then there was exactly nothing. Barringford nodded.

"All right, then. Let's get to work on this puzzle picture you've provided."

"Chinese hen-tracks? They won't mean anything."

"They may mean everything," said Barringford quietly. Shafer shrugged, and drew up a chair for himself.

"All right; but I can't see that it'll do us any good, even if we find anything. There's no foreign jurisdiction here. The Chinese run this city in their own way."

"Granted. But we can get our money back, and that is important."

"Eh?" Shafer frowned in a mystified way, then uttered a harsh laugh. "Bet you ten dollars we don't!"

"Done," said Barringford. "Get to work, you loafer!"

THEY began to sort out the scraps of paper, Shafer resignedly, Barringford with a rapidly growing absorption. The paper consisted of a number of sheets from a small scratch-pad which, together with a pencil, had been on the table at the dead man's elbow. On the pad had been written the few words giving the reason for Carter's suicide.

Barringford, however, could not assent to the theory of suicide. Clear as the case seemed, he could not reconcile it with the man whom he had visited the preceding afternoon. Nor did he deem Carter a gambler. Carter might have staked small sums, and probably did, for in Swatow gaming-houses exist openly and brazenly on every street; but Carter was not the man to wager very much, or to be cleaned out. And Carter had been saving every cent for the business deal that was to make him rich. Or, after all, had Carter lied? Had he really expected to get rich off the gaming-tables? Barringford shrugged. Hard to say. His hunch was that Carter was straight, however.

IT was characteristic of both Shafer and Barringford that neither of them made any further reference to their own staggering loss. The money had been turned over to Carter in cash, and if he were really wiped out, his receipt would be valueless against his minus estate.

"It's odd," observed Barringford as he tried piecing the scraps together. "No writing on the paper, apparently. Nothing but Chinese characters penciled there."

"Aren't Chinese characters writing?"

"Not necessarily." Barringford's keen eyes lit up suddenly. "Hello! Here's a complete character, at any event. This scrap fits in here—now we have another! Look here, this is beginning to look promising!"

"You're an optimist," grunted Shafer disdainfully. "What's the big idea? Do you think that Carter left some message before he shot himself?"

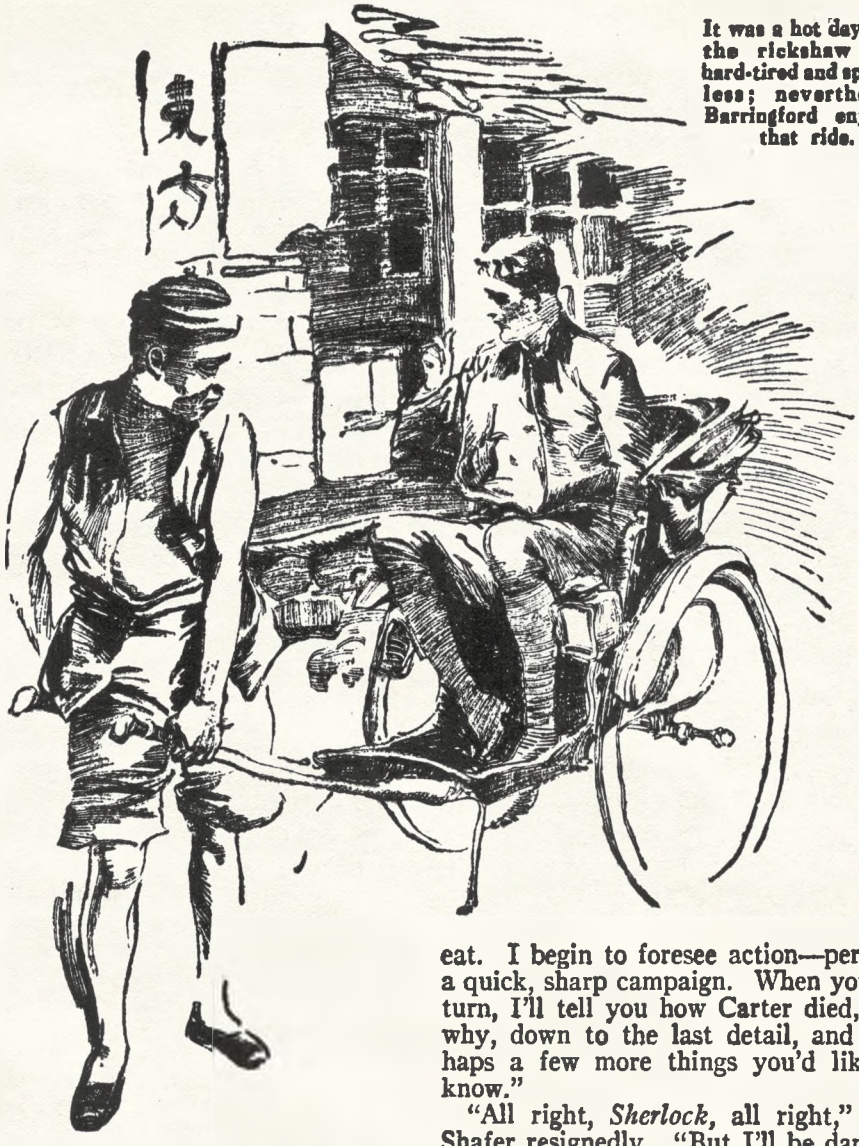
"Certainly not afterward!" And Barringford grinned in his cheerful fashion.

"Well, never mind being so blamed precise about words. You know what I mean. He wrote in Chinese, eh?"

"He did not," said Barringford flatly. He leaned forward, utterly absorbed in fitting together the scraps of paper, his eyes glowing, his thin lips tightly compressed. A flash of exultation leaped across his face. "Ha—it fits! Now we're getting somewhere at last! Where's my pipe? Hand it here, like a good chap. Thanks."

He abandoned the work abruptly. Filled his pipe and held a match above it. Then he relaxed, leaning back in his chair and regarding his companion.

"Shafer, I'd love to inspect the sights of Swatow, but right now there's no



It was a hot day, and the rickshaw was hard-tired and springless; nevertheless Barringford enjoyed that ride.

time. I believe Carter was straight. He wouldn't have taken our money if he had contemplated suicide. Now, suppose you see the British consul, and if necessary go to the *yamen* of the Chinese governor. Find out what you can learn, discover what action's being taken in regard to Carter's finances, then go down to Carter's office. Probe his native clerks and above all the comprador. What I want is information."

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Shafer in injured accents, staring blankly at him. "Don't you know it's a hot day, and noon not so far away? What'll you be doing?"

Barringford lifted one quizzical eyebrow.

"My son, I intend getting a bite to eat. I begin to foresee action—perhaps a quick, sharp campaign. When you return, I'll tell you how Carter died, and why, down to the last detail, and perhaps a few more things you'd like to know."

"All right, *Sherlock*, all right," said Shafer resignedly. "But I'll be damned if I like running errands this weather!"

"You'll be broke if you don't, so take your choice," Barringford chuckled. "By the way, make inquiries about a chap with a large nose, a very pronounced nose, a regular *Cyrano de Bergerac* nose, will you?"

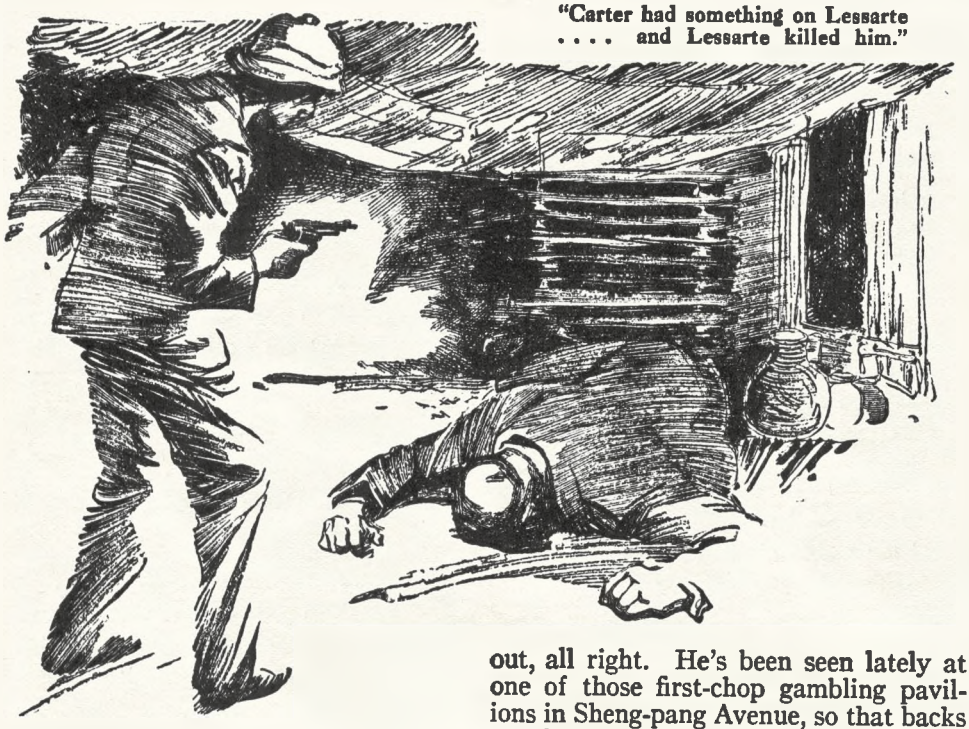
"What's his name?" Shafer scraped back his chair and rose.

"That's what I want to learn."

"Chinese or white?" asked Shafer ironically.

"White." Barringford puffed away with the utmost composure. "Probably a very large chap."

"Oh, all right! For two cents I'd have a lunacy commission investigate you into the bargain. I thought you were going to get our money back?"



"Carter had something on Lessarte .... and Lessarte killed him."

"When you return, I'll tell you where it is."

"Bet you another ten that you don't."

"Done," Barringford nodded. "That makes two bets. On your way! And don't forget the fellow with the big nose."

With a growling oath of exasperation, Shafer picked up his sun-helmet and made his exit.

Barringford leaned over the table again and resumed his occupation.

IT was an hour and a half later, and the heat of noon was beating on the roof of the Swatow Hotel, outmoded but more comfortable than the modern foreign hostelry uptown, when Shafer returned. Barringford had obtained a bite of lunch and was now stretched out luxuriously on the bed with his pipe, when Shafer slammed the door angrily.

"Lord! I'm about melted. Well, I've got news, you lazy loafer!"

"So have I," observed Barringford complacently. He rose, slipped into his shoes, and took one of the chairs at the table.

Shafer dropped into the other chair. "Say, do you know what the temperature is outside?"

"Is that your news?"

"Shut up. Don't be more of an ass than you can help," growled Shafer. "Here you are, now: Carter was cleaned out, all right. He's been seen lately at one of those first-chop gambling pavilions in Sheng-pang Avenue, so that backs up the note he left. And say! These Chinese here are strictly up to date. They fingerprinted the gun and nailed it on Carter. Also the glass. It was suicide, and no mistake."

Barringford's eyes twinkled. "That's your story, anyhow. What about our money?"

"Gone." Shafer threw out his hands. "He's cleaned—washed up. Borrowed heavily from the bank on all the collateral he could raise. I saw the Tai-koo outfit, and they admitted it frankly."

Tai-koo was the Chinese firm name applied to an old British house whose branches exist in every treaty port. Here in Swatow they represented a number of foreign banks.

Barringford merely nodded at this information.

"That's no great news. Carter told us he'd been raising all the cash he could, to get in on some deal he was handling. What about that option on the *Hangwa?* He made it over to us, you know."

Shafer slapped his pocket. "I thought of that. The option's good; I showed it to the consul. But what the hell good is it to us, if we haven't the money to put through the deal? We're broke, you know."

Barringford's eyes twinkled.

"Any real news? So far, all you've ascertained is that Carter had been raising cash, which we already knew; and

that he had been frequenting a gambling-house, which doesn't mean much here in Swatow."

"My Lord, aren't you a grateful cuss!" exclaimed Shafer, and lit a cigarette. "But see here—I did find out about that bird with the big beak! You were right there, anyhow. Frenchmen run to noses, if you've ever noticed. This chap is one Lessarte, who deals heavily in marine insurance and does a bit of importing on the side. He's rather famous about these parts for that nose of his. Big chap, too; quite solid with the natives and the local governor. He has an office down the street past the British Post Office, and lives more or less alone in a bungalow across in Kia-lat, back of the French consulate. Private life would not please missionaries. Suit you as a report?"

"Eminently." Barringford's blue eyes gleamed avidly. "You're a good workman!"

"Well, how about those bets?" demanded Shafer. "You said you'd tell me where our money is. Do it, or pay up!"

"It's in the pocket of Lessarte."

"The devil you say! Prove it."

Barringford laughed easily and lit a cigarette.

"Readily enough. We've just time before I leave."

"For where, in the name of Mike?"

"To get our money. I've had a bite to eat. You can get tiffin at your leisure. Now, let me tell you just what happened last night in Carter's bungalow: Carter was sitting there, doing some figuring on his scratch-pad. The sheet's gone and doesn't matter. One of these others still carries the impression his pencil made; it was a rather hard lead."

BARRINGFORD indicated three rectangles of paper on the table. They had been formed from the torn scraps, laboriously pieced together and backed, the scraps pasted down.

Shafer looked at them, and his brows went up.

"Hello! You've been sweating after all, have you?"

"A gentleman never sweats, venerable ancestor! He perspires." Barringford chuckled. "Well, now to business: Carter was figuring away when Lessarte, who had silently entered, appeared before him. This was after ten at night. There was some sort of bad blood between the two men. If we look it up, I imagine that we'll find Carter had showed up Lessarte in some sort of rascality. Carter had no weapon at hand, and Lessarte had a gun. Thus, you see the tableau, the stage all set, the actors ready. Carter is looking up at the big Lessarte."

SHAFER scowled across the table. "Where'd you get all this bologny, anyhow?"

"Carter sat there, pencil in hand, fully realizing that he was going to be murdered," went on Barringford, unruffled by the gibe of his partner. "He dared not move, lest he provoke the shot. Lessarte undoubtedly talked for some time, working himself up to the act—it's not so easy to murder anyone in cold blood. He must be a regular animal type.

"Meantime, Carter scribbled on the scratch-pad, apparently quite idly, one sheet after another. Perhaps he was trying to divert the attention of Lessarte, perhaps attempting to keep himself in hand. What did he scribble there? Being what he was, he drew Chinese ideographs."

"You mean, he told all this out in Chinese?" exclaimed Shafer eagerly.

"No. He knew that Lessarte could read Chinese, and he wanted desperately to leave some record of what happened if he were really murdered. So he scrawled characters which apparently had no meaning: The ancient form of our modern characters; these, in turn, were derived from still more ancient pictures or pictographs. Carter, you know, was an expert at this sort of thing. Come over here and look at the top sheet, the one that carries the impression of his ciphering! That's the one he did first. These ancient characters, not written with a brush as are the modern characters, were not shaded. A pencil can draw them perfectly."

As he spoke, Barringford selected one of the three patched-up sheets. Shafer came and leaned over his shoulder, frowningly intent. He knew just enough of the written language to follow the explanation that the other now gave.

"Here are two characters Carter drew first," said Barrington, pointing. "First is the ancient form of the modern character *tzu*, meaning the beginning of anything. This is simply the picture of a nose, represented by two short lines, in a womb; because in Chinese embryology, the nose is the first portion of the body

formed.[1] Hence this character has come to mean the commencement or beginning.

"Beside it is the character *ta* or *great,* in its primitive form, originally the pictograph of a man.[2] And now you must consider what was in Carter's mind. Undoubtedly he was thinking of a great nose, a huge and remarkable nose; at the same time, he might have had a big nose and a big man in view, as I guessed he did. This character is used frequently in the make-up of Chinese phrases and words. Draw another cross-stroke over the top, to stand for the hair-pin worn by a married man, and we have the character meaning *husband.* Get it?

"Next, Carter drew this figure here,[3] which is really the same thing, only slightly changed. The modern character of *yao* is derived from it; a pictograph of a man bending his head forward, ready to jump. In other words, standing threateningly. I trust this is clear to your alert brain?"

Shafer grunted.

"Clear or not, it sounds reasonable! However, I reserve my opinion. What's this one, that looks like a chessman?"

"Not a bad guess." Barringford broke into a laugh. "That's a simple combination. First, is the picture of a pestle, which from the idea of grinding or crushing, stands for crime in Chinese minds. Put two dots above it to indicate repeated crime, and over these the figure of a man.[4] Therewith Carter shows us a man of repeated crime, a criminal, as is the meaning of the modern character *nieh,* derived from this combination. In other words, Carter knew something about Lessarte, had something on him—"

"Oh, I say!" broke out Shafer impetuously. "I forgot all about that, old man! You were dead right about it. There's a story about Carter having showed up Lessarte at some rascality about marine insurance. A chap at the consulate mentioned it, but didn't know the details. I forgot to report it before; when you plumped out your theory, it knocked everything else out of my head. But do you seriously think Carter was trying to tell all this? Then why didn't he simply write it out and have done?"

WITH a shrug Barringford took a fresh cigarette.

"Remember, Lessarte was standing there, covering him with a pistol, threatening him. He knew that if he did write anything, Lessarte would simply destroy it. And you see that he was dead right, from what did take place. Lessarte killed him, sure enough, and snatched up these sheets. They conveyed nothing to him—looked like the scribblings of a man trying desperately to divert his mind. Only a highly educated Chinese could read them or see what lay in them, or some person who had studied such things. However, just to make sure, Lessarte tore them up and threw them into the ash-bowl. They didn't look important enough to burn, and he was probably in a hurry to clear out, after that shot."

Shafer considered this reflectively.

"Your theory sure sounds plausible, as they always say to the great detective," he said with a wry grin. "But you've not finished. There's one more of these characters—this hen-track. What is it?"

"*Chao—the right hand,*" answered Barringford, but now with some hesitation. "It's one of the most ancient characters known, merely a picture of the right hand with palm down, resting on the fingertips. It indicates a hand that is pressing down a seal, or affixing a seal to a document. The modern form of the character is turned on end, thus—"

Taking up his pencil, he drew the ideograph.

"However, I can't figure out what Carter meant by this," he added slowly. "I just don't savvy it. And yet it must be the most important of all, probably being the last one drawn."

"Perhaps," suggested Shafer, "he and Lessarte had some contract or business deal."

"That's possible, of course—but not definite enough. Well, at all events we've settled one bet. We know Lessarte has our money. He killed Carter, took his

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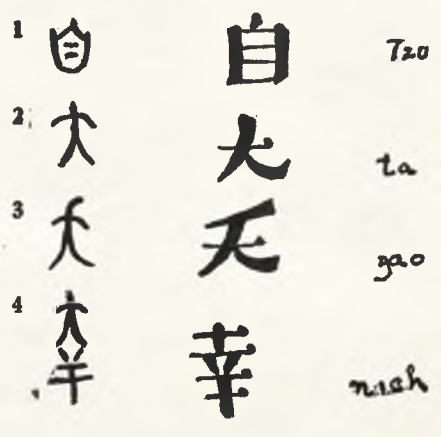


cash on hand, made the job look like suicide, and then cleared out after writing that note. Either Carter had his money in sight, or Lessarte made him tell where it was hidden. Carter was not a combative sort of chap, you know.

"That final character puzzles me, though," went on Barringford. "Carter was driving at something important, but I don't get it. However, it's plain that Lessarte now has Carter's money—including ours. Probably he knew that Carter had been raising cash; this thing was premeditated. So, if you're satisfied, hand over the ten iron men you owe me."

Shafer produced his none too plethoric roll, and paid the bet.

"How did you figure it was after ten at night?"

Barringford chuckled. "Because the house-boys had gone home. Don't yours usually go home about that hour?"

"Yes, confound you! But it's not legal evidence."

"Hm! Don't be so sure. In a Chinese court, I believe it might be legal evidence," said Barringford thoughtfully. "However, I've no intention of going into any native court."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"Get back our money and collect another ten dollars from you."

"I suppose," said Shafer with heavy sarcasm, "you mean simply to go to Lessarte's bungalow and ask him for it?"

Barringford's eyes widened.

"Upon my word! That's exactly my idea! How did you guess it?"

"Oh, cut out the slapstick. This is serious! You'll need help, then—"

"No, brains," said Barringford whimsically. "Yes, Lessarte would be at his bungalow about now, all through the heat of the day. Siesta hour. But I'd like to know what that final character meant in the mind of Carter! Somehow, I can't help thinking it's the most important clue of all."

SHAFER shook his head gloomily. "Man, you've produced a theory that has hypnotized you. There's not one atom of evidence, other than presumptive, to show that Lessarte is the fellow we're after. Plenty of people have a big nose. And Lessarte is no criminal, as presupposed by your hen-tracks, just because he got shown up in some crooked deal."

"Correct, my son," Barringford rose and stretched himself cheerfully. "You are invariably correct. You would sooner be right than be President; but I'd sooner be President. Well, I'm off for Kia-lat."

"Seriously?" asked Shafer with a disgusted air.

"Absolutely. While I'm gone, I wish you'd do one or two things for me: Step down the street to the English bookshop by the postoffice, and get any of Carter's works they may have on sale. His monographs on the analysis of Chinese characters. We may have to dig for a bit before we unravel that final ideogram of his. Then drop in at Taikoo and see if they've any record of the bank-notes they gave Carter."

"Very well."

"And one thing more," added Barringford. "It's highly important. You know, Lessarte was devilish clever in removing all his own prints from that gun and using Carter's dead hand to make others. He probably knew that the local police are up to snuff. Well, get me copies of Carter's prints. You can wangle it somehow at the *yamen*. Tell them you're a correspondent, and they'll fall for it."

"Damn it, don't you know it's a hot day?" exclaimed Shafer. "Clear out before you think of something else. And I hope you melt."

Barringford laughed, waved his hand, and was gone.

IT was a hot day, sure enough; and the Swatow rickshaws were hard-tired and springless; but none the less that ride was a joy to Barringford.

It took him clear around the head of the bay, past the polo-ground, past the temples and schools under the long hill, and around the sickle-sweep of shore to Malo Road in the Kia-lat suburb, where lay most of the foreign buildings. Then they went on along the rocky coast to the French Consulate, near the huge oil tanks. Here Barringford alighted and bade his rickshaw man await his return.

Only a drowsy clerk, an Indo-Chinese, kept the consulate open at this hour. Without the least compunction, Barringford slipped him a note of the Taiwan Bank, and then asked for certain information.

"It is about one M. Lessarte," he said with the quick, eager smile that men liked, for it seemed to take them into his confidence. "I have certain business with him, but I desire to know whether he can be trusted, whether his word is good. Tell me, my friend. No one will know, I promise you."

The slim brown man shrugged, and pocketed the money.

"M'sieur, he does not stand too well, I happen to know. Do not trust him too far. At the same time, he is most influential among the natives in this town. He has supplied the governor with certain things under the guise of imports. At least, so we believe. You comprehend?"

"Perfectly. He has been running arms now and then, eh? Wasn't he in some sort of trouble a little while ago?"

"Yes, but nothing that could be taken up and made into a case," said the other. "He is not in good odor. Still, he is a good business man."

"Thank you. And where is the bungalow of M. Lessarte?"

The proper directions gained, he went back to his rickshaw and passed them on to his runner. Five minutes later he was dismounting before a pleasant hillside bungalow, shaded by pines and wisteria and great cryptomeria trees.

The consulate clerk had confirmed the report of Shafer. Evidently Lessarte was unscrupulous and not at all in good standing with his own people, but was strongly entrenched at the *yamen* of the governor. And with sufficient influence among native officials, a white man can well afford to thumb his nose at consulates and clubs—if he is that kind.

Barringford mounted the long flight of steps that ran up the terrace, and on to the pleasant, shaded veranda. There was no sign of life, although the door stood open inside the screen. No houseboys appeared. There was a cool breeze off the water; and after knocking, Barringford bared his head to the coolness.

No response. . . . He knocked again, more sharply. Then, on the open door inside the screen, he perceived a large brass knocker.

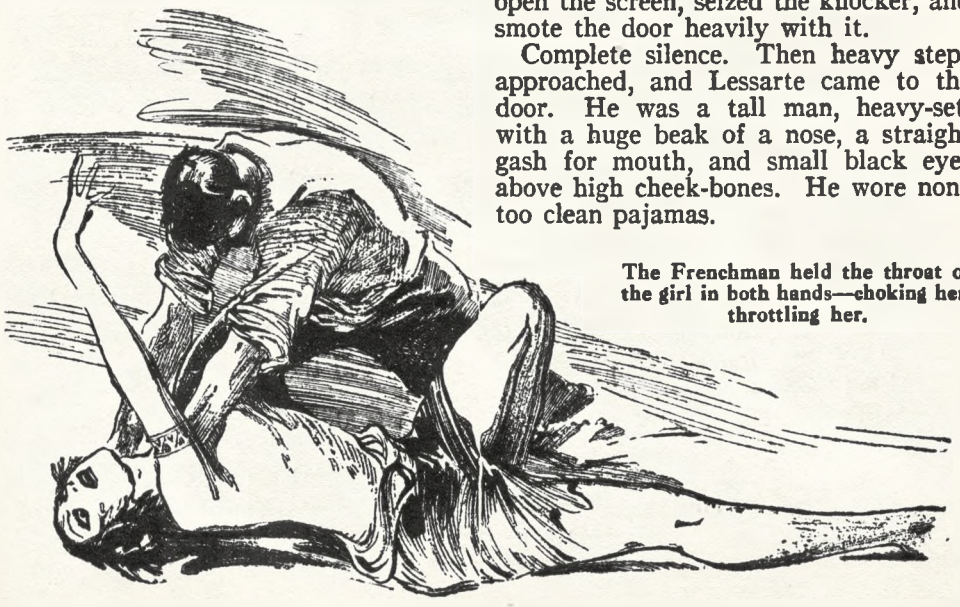
He was in the act of opening the screen to reach for it, when somewhere inside, a door slammed shut. Next instant, as though another door had opened, a woman's voice leaped out abruptly in mid-speech. It was the voice of a woman speaking Mandarin, a strange language down here in the south; evidently she was very angry.

"May you lie in the tenth hell, despised son of turtle ancestry! Do you take me for an old-style woman who binds her feet and reverences her man as another Son of Heaven? Not so! When you bought me, it was against my will. I told you that I would bring nothing but trouble to you. Why did I nurse you when you were sick? Not to earn your gratitude. You have none. It was that you might get well again, to feel my hatred and contempt. Foreign devil that you are, utter barbarian, to think you can buy a daughter of the Manchus and make her your slave!"

There was a growling undertone of response, then a woman's laugh. Barringford shivered a little as he heard it, for that laugh was like the edge of a knife. Evidently he had barged into some domestic scene. This woman was a Manchu, then, and from the north.

With no more delay, Barringford drew open the screen, seized the knocker, and smote the door heavily with it.

Complete silence. Then heavy steps approached, and Lessarte came to the door. He was a tall man, heavy-set, with a huge beak of a nose, a straight gash for mouth, and small black eyes above high cheek-bones. He wore none too clean pajamas.



The Frenchman held the throat of the girl in both hands—choking her, throttling her.

"Hello!" exclaimed Barringford with breezy radiance. "Hope I haven't broke in upon you at the wrong time. You're M. Lessarte, of course? My name is Barringford. I'm a bit of a newcomer in these parts, and am most anxious to see you on a matter of business. You know, we Americans are always in a hurry! But if it's not convenient, I'll return— "

"I am enchanted, m'sieur," returned Lessarte, with no great evidence of enchantment. "Yes, it is entirely convenient. I do not return to the office for another hour or more. If you will enter, I'll join you in a few moments, and will be at your disposal."

"Thank you," said Barringford, and entered.

He found himself ushered into a large living-room, heavily decorated with Chinese embroideries and more or less useless art objects; then Lessarte excused himself in order to get a hasty bath and change of clothes.

Alone, Barringford conjectured rapidly upon the absence of any house-boys and the presence of a Chinese woman who was evidently Lessarte's slave—not at all an unusual thing with men of his type. It was clear that she hated him with the virulence that only a Chinese woman can display; a cherished, patient venom, terrible to contemplate.

"I shouldn't like to be in his boots," mused the visitor, "but then, he's clearly a brute, just as I imagined him. But why aren't there any boys about? That's really a most extraordinary thing. Sickness can't explain it, for they'd send substitutes. Hm! Nothing can explain it, unless they were deliberately sent away. Lessarte might have sent them—"

He perceived that he had indeed intruded at a moment of domestic strife. Lessarte was probably delighted that he had come. It was not hard to imagine that such a woman as the one whose voice he had heard could make things hot; perhaps she had sent away the house-boys in order to utter things she would never say in their presence.

ON the instant, Barringford altered his plan of campaign. He had come here with the idea of talking shop, feeling Lessarte out. Instead, be ready for anything! Here were most unusual circumstances. Turn them to advantage! Barringford lit a cigarette, his eyes keen, as the spur of impulse pricked him.

"Please sir, you maybe like some tea?" said a feminine voice near by.

Barringford swung around, and rose in very real astonishment. Coming forward and carrying a large tray was a child of perhaps fifteen, a girl gorgeously attired in Chinese costume, laughing merrily at his surprise.

"So you speak English, eh?" he asked, sparring for time.

"Oh, yes, plenty good teacher at mission school," was her gay response.

SHE put the tray on a stand, drooped beside it, and arranged the teacups—tiny eggshells of porcelain. Barringford stared down. He knew that Lessarte had sent her in to entertain this American visitor, this breezy stranger who had no more sense than to look up a business man at the siesta hour.

Yet this child, this slim little willow-wand, was undoubtedly the same whose voice had floated out to him in bitter invective. She was the Manchu girl whom Lessarte had bought somewhere in the north for a handful of silver. This realization stunned Barringford for a moment, versed though he was in the unpleasant aspects of Chinese life.

Grim thoughts drummed at his brain. The girl poured tea into a cup, lifted it, and looked up. A little cry came to her lips at sight of his white features, the cold blaze in his eyes. But he reached down and took the cup from her, and smiled a little.

"You are from the north, then?" he said softly, in Mandarin as clear and fluent as her own.

The saffron features changed. It was her turn to be swiftly astounded. A flash of inward lightning seemed to quiver across her face, then was gone. She nodded. Between them, in this instant, passed a singular wave of comprehension, of wordless understanding. It escaped Barringford almost at once, for your Nordic can glimpse the instantaneous flashes but cannot analyze or act upon them; but the Chinese are different.

The girl came to her feet, still gazing at him, her oblique eyes distended. He had the uneasy feeling that she had read his very mind; perhaps it was he who had projected his thought to her. Then she spoke, under her breath.

"There is danger here. You tread upon a tiger's tail."

"It will be quickly done," he answered, then caught a sharp warning gesture and switched to English. "Thank you. The tea is delicious, young lady."

She turned away. Lessarte appeared at the doorway, knotting his cravat. With a sweeping inclination of her body, she went past him and left the room.

"Mission girl who comes in at times and takes care of the place for me," said Lessarte carelessly. "My boys are all off today. You're a stranger in China, Mr. Barringford?"

"In these parts, at least." Barringford regarded the Frenchman with swift, careful appraisal. Lessarte was volatile, given to hot impulse—good! "Do you know," he went on, in his assumed breezy manner, "there's one thing that puzzles me, and that nobody has explained in a satisfactory manner?"

Lessarte laughed. "Only one thing? You're lucky. Most of us who have lived in China a long time find plenty of puzzling things. What's your one query?"

"Well," said Barringford easily, "I don't quite understand why a man of your cleverness was content with merely tearing up those three sheets of paper, when you might have burned them and been done with it."

THE blow fell with terrific impact. Lessarte's laugh withered. His shaggy black brows drew down, his eyes widened with comprehension. For an instant the blood ebbed from his cheeks.

"I—I don't understand you," he said with an effort. Barringford lifted one eyebrow, regarded him quizzically, humorously, apparently with negligence.

"Do you happen to know whether Carter left any family?"

Lessarte was quite motionless. His big hands gripped the arms of his chair, his black eyes bored into Barringford. The latter could well imagine what a chaotic tumult of wild surmise was seething in the man's brain, what a frightful torrent of conjecture, of questioning, was surging up within him.

"Carter?" he repeated. "Oh, you mean the broker! Yes, I knew him slightly. His wife is back in the States, isn't she?"

"So he has a wife, eh?" said Barringford easily. "I never met him before yesterday. I heard that you had taken over his affairs. Or rather, the notes he left indicated you were responsible—"

Lessarte suddenly shot up out of his chair, fingers closing and unclosing.

"What do you mean?" he demanded fiercely, his face darkened by a flood of passion. He glared at the slender, nonchalant figure before him. "Are you accusing me of anything?"

Barringford regarded him with open astonishment.

"I? Accuse you?" He laughed lightly. "My dear fellow! And you didn't know that I was asleep in the other room when you came along last night? If you'd only talked to Carter a little longer, I might have intervened."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" snapped Lessarte. "Quick! Answer me!"

The bluff had not worked. A bit clumsy, decided Barringford. He had followed the wrong line, and had failed. The Frenchman had admitted nothing.

"What do I want?" asked Barringford, "Well, to be quite frank about it, I'm after money."

"So!" For a moment Lessarte stood poised, as though ready for anything. Barringford remembered the pictograph of a man about to spring—a perfect description of Lessarte's attitude. Then the man relaxed, dropped into his chair again, stared at his visitor.

"So you want money," he said in a dull voice. "Who sent you, m'sieur?"

"It was Carter who sent me," replied Barringford, and now spoke in Mandarin. This was a second stiff jolt.

Sharp apprehension flashed in the deep black eyes. Here was no "griffin," no tenderfoot as he had supposed, but a man who spoke fluent Mandarin, who had somehow fooled him neatly! Apprehension, surmise, doubt, struggled in Lessarte's face. He dared ask no further questions, lest he learn too much. He drew a deep breath, and his head drooped a little.

"All right, all right," he mumbled listlessly. His gaze no longer drove challengingly at Barringford, but struck here and there about the room, desperately. "How much do you want?"

"What about a thousand Mex for a starter? Got that much in cash?"

"Can do," muttered Lessarte, and his head jerked in assent. "I've got the money here. I—I'll get it for you."

HE tried to rise from the chair, failed, and only at a second effort did he gain his feet. His mouth hung open. His face was ghastly pale again; his eyes were closed, and he seemed trying hard to get himself under control. He staggered suddenly. Barringford, thinking the man was about to collapse before his eyes, half rose to help him.

Then, swift as the flash of a cobra's strike, Lessarte lashed out.

His fist struck Barringford between the eyes and knocked him back into his chair. Almost with the same motion, the Frenchman swept up a glass decanter from the table and brought it down across Barringford's head. The glass crashed into flinders. Barringford relaxed in his chair, his head lolling sideways, his hands falling limply.

LESSARTE stood glaring at him, then threw away the stem of the decanter. A harsh laugh burst from him.

"You fool!" he cried out vibrantly. "Blackmail me, will you? Come here for money, come at me time after time, until you milk me dry? Not if I know it. Name of a black dog, you have your answer! And when you wake up, I'll be far from here."

Laughing again, he strode out of the room.

Barringford's lids fluttered open. That crack over the head had nearly done for him—nearly but not entirely. His iron will gripped at his fleeting senses, fetched him back from the brink of darkness. After a moment his brain began to clear. He lifted one hand and gingerly touched his aching head, and then winced. The quick stab of exquisite agony shot through him, wakening him fully.

Already a lump was rising over one ear. Blood showed on his fingers. He could feel the warm trickle of it down the side of his neck. A thin, ironic smile curved his lips; that he should have been caught in such a trap! He heard the voice of Lessarte coming from the adjoining room, but his brain was still too fogged to distinguish the words.

With a supreme effort, Barringford gripped the chair-arms and swung himself to his feet. He came erect, reeling, then steadied himself. That blow had taken all the strength out of him. He had no weapon, and his errand here had failed completely.

For a long moment he stood hesitating over a decision. His first impulse was to follow Lessarte, meet him face to face, settle matters with him. Yet this, as he could see, would be the worst kind of folly. In his present condition the big Frenchman could manage him with one hand, and would not hesitate to kill him. No, Lessarte would not stop at murder now—another murder!

Then something flicked Barringford's brain—a queer, wordless sound had come from the next room; it was the voice of Lessarte, uplifted in a sharp, incoherent cry that went through Barringford like a whiplash. Next instant came a roar of furious anger.

"You she-devil! Come here—*nom de Dieu!* I'll break your damned neck—"

A low, wrenched shriek of agony in a woman's voice, the voice of that slim little girl. Then it was abruptly choked off.

Barringford's hesitation was ended abruptly. He started to leap for the doorway, only to stagger, barely save himself from falling headlong. Still, a moment later he gained the door, caught at it, leaned against it. Then he kicked it open and took another step forward, into the next room.

An oath of fury burst from him.

There, only six feet away, was the big Frenchman. He held the throat of the girl-child in both hands, bending her across his knee, choking her, throttling her. At Barringford's oath, he lifted his head, saw the intruder, uttered a snarling growl. He dashed her limp body to one side and flung himself forward.

Barringford met him halfway—met him with a staggering, futile blow and a sob of rage. Even as he struck, Barringford realized his own helplessness. He drove home his fist, though the shock of the impact left him reeling. Drove it home to that great beak of a nose, then rallied to take his medicine—

But nothing happened.

To his utmost amazement, he saw that Lessarte had halted abruptly, as though that one blow had driven the life out of him. The man opened his mouth, gasped something inarticulate, and then his knees loosened. He pitched forward, clawed spasmodically at the floor, twice, and then his clawing fingers relaxed and were motionless.

BARRINGFORD glanced at the girl. He saw that she had fallen across a divan, face up. She lay there unconscious, but her bared breasts were rising and falling; air was being pumped into her lungs. She was all right, then, not dead after all.

Alert now, Barringford turned back to the sprawled figure of Lessarte, lying there on his face. He half stooped, then straightened up. On the left side of the Frenchman's back protruded the sha-green-covered haft of a native knife.

"So that's it!" muttered Barringford, somewhat aghast at this discovery. "She drove the knife into him—that's why he cried out. Then he grabbed for her,

caught hold of her, would have murdered her—"

He looked quickly around the room. On the table lay an open steel box, such as French folk use to hold their valuables. Beside it on the table were three thick sheaves of bank-notes held by rubber bands. Barringford went to the table and inspected the box. It held some gold sovereigns and other coins, a heap of miscellaneous jewelry, and a number of papers. Nothing else.

Barringford pocketed the bank-notes, left the other things, and departed. His sun-helmet hid the gash on his head, and he wiped the blood from the side of his neck as he went. The girl, he knew well, could take care of herself.

SHAFER threw open the door of the hotel room and strode in. Barringford was sitting at the table, turning over the leaves of a paper-bound booklet.

"Hello!" exclaimed Shafer. "I got the book and left it here, then skipped out to finish your blasted errands. You look cool and— Good Lord! Where did it come from?"

His jaw fell, his eyes widened, at sight of the money on the table. Bank-notes were scattered about like heaps of fallen leaves. Barringford regarded him with an amused twinkle.

"Came from Lessarte, of course. Yes, I found the book, thanks. It gives everything I want to know. By the way, did you get Carter's fingerprints?"

"Yes, and had a devil of a time getting them. Here you are."

Shafer handed over a carefully rolled sheet of rice-paper. With an exclamation of eager delight, Barringford seized upon it. He caught an enlarging glass from the table and examined the prints carefully. Then, triumph in his eyes, he laid down the glass, took up a cigarette, and lit it.

"What about this money?" exclaimed Shafer. "Whose is it?"

"After we take what belongs to us, the balance can go to Carter's widow."

Barringford launched into his story. Shafer heard him with growing concern, glanced at his cut and swollen head, and then scowled.

"My Lord! Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"Not by a damned sight!" said Shafer with emphasis. "He's dead. He never admitted one thing that would make us certain, much less be legal evidence!"

"Not a thing," said Barringford coolly.

"Then there'll be the deuce to pay over this! How do you know that this money belonged to Carter? You don't. You haven't proved one blessed thing in all that balderdash of ancient characters or ideographs! You may be accused of knifing Lessarte yourself, and robbing him—"

"When you get all through drooling, I have something to say," observed Barringford. "By the way, what about the bank-notes? Were any numbers on record?"

"No," said Shafer disgustedly. "Not one. Not a clue in sight anywhere. No way of proving one blasted thing—"

"Except Carter's way." Barringford picked up the paper-covered monograph, one of those written by Carter on the subject of Chinese characters, and opened it. "You recall that final character he drew, which baffled me? The word *chao,* showing the right hand resting on the fingertips, presumably affixing a seal to a paper?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Listen to what Carter here says about that identical character: 'It also may indicate the imprint of finger-marks as a seal. The Chinese have long used fingerprints on bank-notes.' You see?"

Barringford's eyes blazed suddenly.

"Think of it!" he pursued eagerly. "Carter started to leave the final clue here, but was killed in the very act, before he could write another character. He was telling that he had fingerprinted all those bank-notes himself, just as in England one who cashes a large note usually signs it—"

AN exclamation broke from Shafer. He shuffled over the notes on the table —notes of the Bank of Taiwan, of the Kwangtung government, of the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation, and silver notes issued by the leading Swatow silver houses. All of them bore the marks of fingerprints, some more, some fewer.

Shafer looked up excitedly. "Then it is proved after all! This shows it was Carter's money, if you've recognized his fingerprints among these! What's more, it proves that Lessarte murdered him and took the money! Even in a Chinese court—"

"Especially in a Chinese court," corrected Barringford. "And what's more, it proves that you owe me another ten-spot. Suit you?"

Shafer grinned, and paid his bet.

A vivid and living story of the newspaper business, by a talented writer new to these pages—

By WALTER MARQUISS

Front Page News

JIM BLAKESLEE never should have been managing editor of the *Alarm* or any newspaper. He wasn't hard-boiled. He didn't believe that a news story was the most important thing in the world.

Jim had a queer notion that he was serving a private profit-seeking corporation instead of a Great Public Institution. He was skeptical of reporters' divine right to go nosing into the secret affairs of citizens; he doubted the virtue of loyalty to the paper, right or wrong. He even admitted that the paper *could* be wrong.

But he kept his unorthodox, outrageous views to himself. To stay in the city, he needed the job. And he had to stay, or give up Faith Stone, who was the daughter of Robert Burns Stone, the publisher of the *Alarm*. . . .

Robert Burns Stone walked solidly past Jim's desk in the news-room and said without pausing: "Come in a minute, Blakeslee."

Jim got up and followed, looking at the publisher's impeccably tailored back. Stone was a red-faced, heavy man with a paunch, but he always looked trim as an athlete. He was a sartorial marvel to Jim, who had never learned to wear clothes, or to keep that shank of thick brown hair from falling down his forehead across his left eye.

In his office, Stone sat in a big leather chair behind a huge desk, tore a paper match out of a folder, put the match between his teeth and bit through it, making a sharp click. Stone always bit paper matches, and frowned, when preoccupied or annoyed. Perhaps he fancied that he was biting Governor Brown.

"Well, what have you got on Brown today?" he asked tersely.

It was a question which had been put to Jim every morning for two weeks, like a ritual. And Jim responded with the ritualistic answer:

"Nothing, R. B."

The publisher's scowl darkened. He tore out another match with a vicious little jerk; the click of his teeth was louder, and ominous.

"Look here, Blakeslee, are you sold on the *Alarm's* policy?"

"Why, of course, R. B." Jim gulped. "As soon as we get something on Brown, I'll print it. But I can't run the *Alarm* into a libel suit."

"Trouble with you, Blakeslee," Stone said, between clicks, "is you're not a fighter; and I want action. Election's only three weeks off, and the *Alarm's* endorsed Brophy for Governor. I'm not going to let Matt walk on me—not if I have to get me a new managing editor!"

"We'll dig up something," Jim said hastily, doubtfully and uneasily. He went out to his desk, and drummed on it with his finger-nails.

Even to save his job, Jim was unable to work up a lather over the sins of Governor Brown. Jim surmised cynically that Robert Burns Stone's suspicion of misfeasance in the Capitol had been inspired by an anemic condition in the *Alarm's* circulation department. The *Alarm* needed treatment, fat capsules of reader-interest. Just the proper stimulant, Stone had thought, was a sensational exposé, such as that the Governor's company was providing most of the cement for the twenty-million-dollar expansion of the State's highway system.

An indignant editorial, with veiled hints of corruption in high places, and endorsing Brown's opponent for election, was to have been followed up by a two-column broadside on the front page, with a banner head. But just before press-time, the *Alarm's* private investigation had revealed that the Governor had sold his stock in the cement company two years before election. Since then Stone had acted as though he thought Governor Brown had double-crossed him.

An hour or so before noon, Stone came out into the news-room and dropped a sheet of scribbled paper on Jim's desk.

"Here's a letter," he said. "New line on Brown. Maybe you can dig up something on that."

ORDINARILY, a glimpse of Faith Stone's brown eyes and spun-copper hair was enough to make Jim forget all the irritations of a managing editor's existence; but today, even when he climbed in beside her in her rangy tan roadster, he remembered, moodily, that he stood an excellent chance of being fired.

"What's the matter?" Faith asked with a keen look as she meshed the gears.

Jim tore out a match and tried to bite through it. Then he felt annoyed with himself, and threw the match away.

"This politics business," he said unhappily. "Just because the *Alarm* went off half-cocked and endorsed Brophy, we've got to do something to discredit Brown, and save our face."

"I know," Faith sighed. They had talked about it before, and Jim knew that she sympathized. It was sweet of her.

"Far as I can see, Brown had a decent, honest administration. There's nothing there—so we're to go after his private life. But what I can't get—even if Governor Brown has amorous tendencies, what's that got to do with his job?"

"Amorous tendencies?" said Faith.

"Yeah. Some muck-raking moralist wrote in, hinting that the *Alarm* could nail Brown's hide to the barn door if we'd check up on his capers while his wife's in Europe."

"You mean dig up scandal?"

"That's what it amounts to. Get him lined up with some woman, and drag 'em both in the mud."

"And if you did—you'd print it?"

"I don't know, I s'pose so," Jim said; and after a moment he added: "Even if I didn't, *he* would."

Faith nodded, and sighed again.

"Yes. Dad's not like Grandpa. He's positively a fanatic on what he thinks is news, and the integrity of the *Alarm*. Sometimes I think he loves the *Alarm* more than he loves me."

Jim went to bed late, and lay awake regretting the good old easy-going days when the *Alarm* was dedicated to dignity and friendliness. That was when kindly old Nathan Stone was the publisher, and the *Alarm* went out of its way to print nice things. Unpleasant doings were not news unless authenticated by police action or court proceedings, and even then they were soft-pedaled and sugar-coated.

It was what Robert Burns Stone called journalism. Stone sniffed when he defined it.

"I don't want journalism around here; I want newspapering!"

Jim had been a contented managing editor until Nathan Stone's son had ascended the throne, with his habit of biting matches and his thirst for reader-interest, and his howls for the kind of news stories that would *make* 'em take the *Alarm*.

"I feel as if I'd been crawling through a sewer," Jim had told Faith after he had smeared the intimately lurid details of the Davis divorce all over the front page, with pictures. It had salved his restive spirit very little when Stone had slapped the front page with a heavy palm, booming:

"You're catching on, Blakeslee! Keep it up! That's what I mean when I say I want newspapering around here!"

But for Stone's accidental status as Faith's father, Jim might have been able to hate him. Responsibility for the existence of such a girl atoned for a lot of commissions and omissions.

JIM had not been the same since the first time Faith walked into the news-room and smiled at him. She had inspired him to be even more kindly toward unfortunates who got into front-page jams. One of these days he was going to ask Faith to marry him; and judging from recent warming indications, Jim was confident that the answer would be—

The telephone's jarring jingle broke into his thoughts. He recognized the excited voice of Harry Collins, the night city editor.

"Mr. Blakeslee! There's been a bad crack-up out at Five-mile Turn. Governor Brown's car went in the ditch!"

Just before press-time, the *Alarm's* private investigation had revealed that the Governor had sold his stock in the cement company two years before election.

The tires of Jim's coupé hummed on the concrete pavement, the sound they made when the car was doing sixty. He rounded Five-mile Turn, and stopped with squealing brakes.

Four or five machines were parked on the gravel shoulder, and flashlights winked and danced in the dark declivity ten feet below the edge of the road. A twenty-foot section of guard-rail had been ripped away; a whitewashed plank lay splintered on the ground.

Jim scrambled down the bank and found a dozen men around a heavy sedan wedged against a tree, and smelling of hot oil. Two highway policemen answered Jim's questions: the Governor, driving alone, evidently had skidded and lost control. A passing car had picked him up and rushed him to the hospital. No, they didn't think he was badly hurt.

It looked as if there wasn't much of a story, after all; except that even a slight mishap to the Governor of the State was news. Jim was starting back to his car, when some one touched his arm. He recognized Paul Tierney, the *Alarm* police reporter.

"Look, boss." Tierney held a bright object in his hand. It was a woman's necklace.

"I didn't show this to the cops, because I thought it might mean something. Found it hanging on a locust twig thirty feet from the wreck. Looks to me like the Governor wasn't riding alone, after all. Four o'clock in the morning! Wow!"

"Gimme," said Jim. He dropped the necklace in his coat pocket, and returned to his coupé.

Back home, Jim examined the trinket under a reading-lamp. It was jeweled platinum, obviously worth a lot of money. Jim smiled, a little sourly, and visualized a seven-column headline in the final edition which would make Robert Burns Stone crow with delight and triumph over the thoroughly cooked goose of Governor Brown.

IN the morning Jim wrote a couple of editorials and sent them to the printers. Then he put on his hat and went out. A call at Lee's jewelry shop in Main Street proved fruitless; but at King's, in Tenth, Jim garnered fact.

White-haired Benjamin King squinted at the necklace through thick-lensed spectacles, and nodded vigorously.

"Why, yes; I sold that going on a year ago, to Arthur McAllison; birthday present for his wife."

Jim went back to Main Street and sat in his car, parked before the *Alarm* office. He was frowning, for he hated the task of prying into private affairs. He knew Mrs. McAllison, and he knew her husband. There wasn't a more highly respected family in the city. News of her

being in Governor Brown's company at four in the morning would just about shake the foundations of the moral-minded town.

He had an impulse to go up to the news-room and send one of the reporters to the McAllison house. The impulse shamed him. It would be cowardly to assign a subordinate to a job he feared to do himself. Jim stepped on the starter-button.

THE McAllison house was a spacious brick one in a superb garden, a mile and a half out Main Street. Jim parked at the curb, and sat blinking at the quiet peacefulness. With squeals of laughter, two children went racing across the lawn, a little girl and a little boy. They were happy, in the innocence of childhood.

Jim turned his eyes away. It hurt him to look at them.

With a manner of holding his courage with both hands, he went up the walk, across the wide veranda, and pushed the bell-button. He could hear his heart beating, and feel it too.

A maid opened the door, and listened to Jim's question. "Mrs. McAllison is ill," she answered.

"Tell her I want to see her about the necklace she lost last night." He felt melodramatic, rather like a villain in a movie.

The maid left him waiting in the hall, went through a door. She reappeared, and asked him to come this way. He followed, and found Mrs. McAllison standing in the middle of the large living-room.

The maid hadn't lied. Mrs. McAllison was ill: it showed in the frightened brown eyes, amazingly large in her pale face. She was small and slender, with dainty hands clasped before a pale blue house frock. Everything about Mrs. Arthur McAllison was dainty, lovely. There was a trace of perfume, so elusive that Jim might have imagined it.

She said nothing in greeting. Jim couldn't tell whether or not she remembered him. He had met her only once, at the country club.

Ill at ease, he fiddled with his hat. He laid it on a table, and took the necklace from his pocket.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

She looked at the necklace, and moistened her lips with the point of her tongue, cleared her throat.

"Yes, it's mine." Her voice was husky, tremulous.

Jim laid the necklace beside his hat, and pushed the tumbled hair up from his left eye.

"I'm from the *Alarm,* Mrs. McAllison," he said.

"Yes, I know. You're Mr.—Blakeslee, aren't you?" There was a breathless quality in her tone. Her cheeks lost the very slight color which had remained in them.

Jim felt like a predatory brute.

"That necklace was found, Mrs. McAllison, a dozen feet from where Governor Brown's car was wrecked this morning."

She sank slowly onto a divan, among brightly tinted pillows, looking at him through wide wistful eyes. The elusive perfume was suddenly stronger in Jim's nostrils.

"You were with Governor Brown when the wreck happened."

"You—you're going to print that?" It was evident that Mrs. McAllison was not the kind to deny the truth.

"I can't help myself," Jim returned. "It's news."

"Why is it news?"

Jim had no answer to that. "Because it happened," seemed a silly thing to say. "Because I found it out," would be brutal. He kept silent.

MRS. McALLISON leaned a little toward him, looking very tense, and very earnest. She said, low:

"There's no good denying I was with Governor Brown, Mr. Blakeslee. But there was nothing wrong in it. Nothing."

"I see," Jim murmured. He believed her. Whether it was true or not, he believed her.

"He is a gentleman, Governor Brown. When we—crashed, he told me to run before some one came. And I ran. I suppose my necklace—" She paused, biting her lip, and went on: "We went for a drive last night—my husband is away on business. We—we stopped at our summer place, on the lake. I had no idea it was so late when we started back, and— There was nothing wrong, please believe me!"

"Honestly, I'm sorry," Jim said miserably. "But—you understand that anything that happens to some one as prominent as the Governor is news. The point is, you were with him when it happened. We can't change that."

"You can't change it—but why do you have to print it—disgrace me, and my—my family!"

"It's news," Jim said, like a parrot. "I'm not acting as an individual, Mrs. McAllison, but a representative of thirty thousand readers who look to the *Alarm* for all the news." He hated the smug speech, and himself for speaking it.

"It's the Governor!" Mrs. McAllison cried. "You're fighting him—the *Alarm* is—and this is a chance to besmirch his reputation. You don't care whom you hurt!"

"I'm sorry—"

"The old *Alarm* wasn't like that!"

The shot told: the old *Alarm* hadn't been like that.

"I wish there was something I could do," Jim began.

"You mean—you're going to print it." There was a calmness in her tone now, the calm of despair. Jim's eyes smarted.

Feet pattered on the porch and a door slammed. Mrs. McAllison got up as the little girl and the little boy came running in from the outside. The children hesitated when they saw the strange man, and sidled over to their mother, round eyes on Jim. The little girl smiled at him, and hid her face bashfully against her mother's skirt.

Mrs. McAllison put her hands behind the two small heads, and pushed the tots a little forward. She stood between them, eyes like stars. She looked like a tired Madonna.

"These," she said simply, "are my children." . . . .

Jim got out of the house, and back to the car. He drove slowly through Main Street, feeling as though he were going to be sick. He took deliberate time in parking before the *Alarm* building, and started reluctantly up to the news-room, dreading it.

ON the stairs he met Faith, coming down.

"You look," she called cheerily, "as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I have," said Jim. "That wreck Brown had this morning—there was a woman with him."

"A woman, Jim?"

He nodded wearily.

"Mrs. Arthur McAllison."

"Florence McAllison!" Faith's vivid lips parted slightly. Her eyes were very bright. Jim could not look at her. He went on up the stairs; and Faith, turning back, followed.

As Jim reached his desk, Stone saw him from the private office and came out, rubbing his hands, and beaming.

Jim was starting back to his car, when some one touched his arm—Paul Tierney, the *Alarm* police reporter. "Look, boss!" Tierney held a woman's necklace in his hand.

"Get that woman's name?" he asked, with restrained eagerness. He was too excited to notice his daughter.

"Yes," Jim said absently. He sank into his swivel-chair, and brushed the hair back from his eyes. It was a weary gesture. Stone produced the inevitable paper match.

"Fine, fine, fine! I've got Brown right where I want him now!"

Jim scarcely heard him. His memory went back to the tired Madonna, standing between her two children.

"Swell story," Stone boomed. "It'll settle Matt Brown, no question about that. What can you give it, two columns?"

"I'm not going to give it an inch." Jim hardly knew his own voice. "I'm not going to print it."

"Not going— Say!" Jim heard the teeth click as they cut through the match. "Not going to print it?"

Jim wanted to get up and say: "I wish you'd quit eating matches!" He did get up, but he said:

"No."

"Why? Haven't you got it straight?"

"Yes. But—"

"This woman was with him, wasn't she?" Stone asked.

"You keep out of it!" Stone barked. "This is one time I won't be wheedled!"

"Yes. But I'm not going to print it."

Stone got exceedingly red, and batted his eyes.

"It will bring disgrace on innocent people who don't deserve it," Jim said. "The story's not worth that."

"Hell's bells!" Stone exploded. "What do you mean, not worth it? This thing happened to the Governor of the State. It will settle a State election! Not worth it? It's news, Blakeslee—the biggest news in years!"

"I know, but—"

"I'm running a newspaper!"

"I'm not going to use the woman angle," Jim said.

"You'll use it, or else—"

"I'll resign first, R. B."

"Resign?" More florid than ever, Stone all but danced up and down. He blew up. "Like hell you'll resign! You're through, Blakeslee, fired! Get out of here, and don't come back!"

Jim sat down again, flushed and flustered. "Suits me," he muttered. But Stone wasn't finished with him.

"Dammit, I believed in you, Blakeslee. I thought you were a decent— I thought you were loyal to—"

"Wait, Dad!" Faith came forward and stood beside Jim's chair. Stone scowled at her.

"You keep out of it!" he barked. "This is one time I won't be wheedled!"

"I'm not wheedling. I just— Dad, aren't you interested in knowing who the woman was?"

"I don't give a hang who she was—"

"Yes, you do!" Stone blinked at her. "Dad, Jim is just trying to protect me. Because—I'm the woman who was with Governor Brown in that wreck!"

Jim gasped. Stone stood with his mouth hanging open, staring.

"You're what?"

Faith smiled, with proud defiance.

"You know the whole story now, Dad. It's news. Why don't you print it?"

Stone made a queer strangling sound in his throat. He started to speak, but made a botch of it. He tried again.

"Of course I'll print it! What's more, I'll write it myself! Hell's bells, there's at least *one* newspaper man around here!"

He stalked heavily into his office and slammed the door. Through the thin partition came the sound of a typewriter being assaulted by a man in a rage.

Jim looked blankly at Faith, who stared incredulously after her father.

"Why in the world did you tell him that?"

"I—I didn't suppose he could do it—disgrace me—"

Jim snapped to his feet. Faith caught his arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to tell the Old Man the truth!"

"Jim, no!"

There was something glorified in the moist eyes which looked into Jim's.

"But Faith, you don't understand; he's going to print it!"

"Let him!" Her chin was up. "I can stand it better than Florence McAllison. She'd never live it down, Jim. And think of those lovely children."

Jim was thinking of them. He agonized:

"I'll not tell him who it was—"

"He'd find out, Jim. *You* did! Let him think it was I. I'm young and single—I can live it down, don't you see? After all, nobody cares about me—except Dad, and he—"

"I care!" Jim blurted out.

"I know." And Faith smiled tenderly. "But you know the truth. I want to—and if my father is as hard as that—I want to know it!"

JIM looked at her, marveling. She meant what she said; there was no use arguing. When she smiled up at him, Jim wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her. But others in the newsroom were eying them curiously, wondering what had been going on around the

boss' desk, and why the Old Man had looked so mad.

Jim didn't trust his voice. He sat in his chair again, and hid his feelings by rummaging through the desk, preparing to vacate. Faith perched on a corner, watching in silence.

The clatter of the publisher's typewriter stopped, and started up. It stopped again, and there was a long silence, minutes of it. Then the door opened, and Stone came out. He had his coat on.

Stone went past Jim and Faith without a word or glance, and went toward the outer door. His head was bowed. A peculiar droop in his shoulders made the perfectly tailored coat sag. Faith looked after him, her white brow puckered. Then she looked at Jim.

"Dad's sunk," she murmured. "I had a hunch he couldn't go through with it. Come on home with me, Jim."

"No, Faith, I—"

"Please, darling."

It was the "darling" that did it. After that, Jim couldn't have denied her anything. They went down to the street, and got into Faith's tan roadster.

AT the Stone house they found Faith's father in the library, looking old and tired. He refused to meet their eyes. Faith went across to him.

"Faith—" he began, and choked up. Jim felt sorry for Robert Burns Stone.

"I'm sorry, Dad," Faith said softly.

Stone fumbled his hands, and cleared his throat.

"I guess I—I can't do it," he mumbled. "I couldn't do that to you!"

The telephone rang, and Stone went across the room to answer. Faith and Jim stood before a window. They heard Stone's voice mumble into the transmitter, then abruptly blurt out: *"What?"* A moment later he said: "Yes, I'll tell her." He laid down the receiver, and came back. His thick-set shoulders had lost their droop.

"That was Audrey Thompson's maid, Faith. She said to ask you if you knew you left your fur-piece over there—Faith, you stayed all night with Audrey Thompson!"

Neither Faith nor Jim answered. Stone glowered at Jim.

"Stop this nonsense!" he barked. "Who was the woman with Brown?"

Jim's lips were dry. His tongue moistened them.

"I can't tell you, R. B.," he said.

The color had flooded back into Stone's face, and now it heightened. He looked like himself again: the relentless newspaper man on the trail of the news. His cheeks puffed out, and flattened as he opened his mouth to speak.

BUT a second ringing of the telephone interrupted and postponed the explosion. Stone stalked across the room.

"Don't tell him!" Faith whispered to Jim.

"I'll not. If I do, he'll print it, and—"

Once more they heard Stone's unintelligible mumble. When he dropped the receiver, and stalked back, there was a spark in his eye. It was a spark of triumph.

"It was Florence McAllison, wasn't it!" he said.

Jim swallowed noisily, and Faith whispered: "Oh, Dad!"

Stone glowered, and took out a book of matches.

"You thought you could hold out on me, did you? *Me!"* He tapped his pouter-pigeon chest with his knuckles. "That call was from Weaver on the city desk, Blakeslee. Mrs. McAllison just came in, and gave herself away. Came in to beg Weaver to suppress this yarn!"

Jim bowed his head in resignation. He thought of Mrs. McAllison, and his heart was heavy. He thought of the two bright-faced children, and he felt like crying.

Eyes glittering with tears, Faith looked at her father.

"Dad, please—" she began hopelessly.

Stone ignored his daughter. He tore a match from the folder, and addressed Jim:

"Weaver put it up to me, Blakeslee. Weaver's loyal! But—I reminded him that you're the managing editor. You'd better get him on the phone, and tell him what you want to do."

"Dad!" Faith cried as his meaning seeped in. She kissed her father. "Oh, Dad, you sweet old darling!" And when Jim, outliving his surprise, started toward the telephone, Faith put her arm about Jim's waist, and walked with him.

Stone's teeth clicked as the match parted.

"Trouble with you, Jim," he growled, "is you're too damn' chicken-hearted to make a good newspaper man!"

He looked at his daughter, with a suspicious moisture in his eyes. He took out a handkerchief, and blew his nose.

"Yeah!" he said. "And me too!"

The Man Who

By

S. ANDREW WOOD

Illustrated by R. F. James

The Story Thus Far:

THE Man of Legend, he had been called: the inscrutable John Kingdom, who was the world's greatest munitions manufacturer, and as such the most powerful man in Europe—and the least known.

This fateful night he left a dinner given by his partner Anderthal to the members of the Fifth Disarmament Conference in Geneva, and proceeded to his own villa on the shore of the lake. With him went his lovely and beloved ward Crystal Templeton. . . . During an air raid on London during the war, a Zeppelin bomb had wounded Kingdom in the head and had killed his fiancée Elizabeth Templeton—had killed her whole family, indeed, save her baby sister Crystal, whom Kingdom had adopted.

Crystal had long retired when a panel of the library wall slid back, and Chundra Dah, Kingdom's stout and able Hindu servant, stood aside to let a third person enter—a man who in face and figure was startlingly like John Kingdom.

"Wine for him, Chundra Dah," said Kingdom. "I beg to remind you that you are now John Kingdom, Brian."

"The hour approacheth," said the newcomer with an air of bravado. "Do you deliver me over to the police, Johnny, or am I to be used for experiments with one of Kingdom's and Anderthal's new poison gases? Your own blood cousin, by gad!"

"I kept my bargain," replied John Kingdom, "and you've kept yours. You asked for another year of that life you were leading. I gave it to you, and you came here. Rather, Chundra fetched you."

Sane and cold, Kingdom looked and felt. He had given Brian everything since that night he had come to him with the police at his very heels, after killing the girl in the frowsy Montmartre bedroom. Brian had accepted eagerly.

"I want to say," added John Kingdom now, "that there's not one iota of a chance of—well, shall we call it escape? Tell him, Chundra."

The Hindu said in a soft voice:

"Aconitine. Specially imported from Nepal, where it is called 'Old Man's Poison.' But it is good for the young too. I injected it early this morning when you slept, Mr. Brian. The expert can time the toxic effect. The time would be twelve forty-five, roughly speaking, if you survived present suicide episode. It is rather painful, when once it begins."

Brian Kingdom laughed huskily.

"You cunning devil, Johnny! You're mad. But a big madman."

"Possibly. It's immaterial. I do you a big honor, Brian. This is a great moment in your life, and the greatest in mine, so far. . . . Sanity is a relative thing, after all. I call a world insane that piles up death-weapons and shivers to think of the day when it will use them. It's a grisly joke. But nothing, compared with mine."

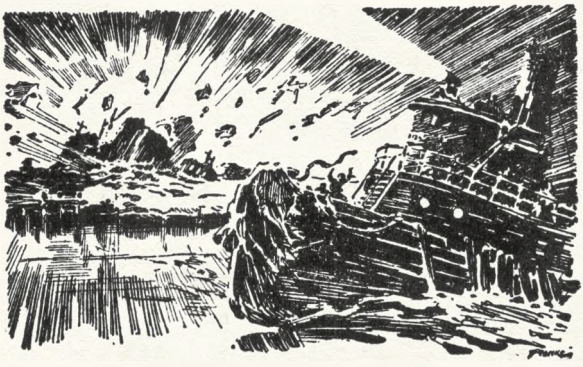
"What is that?" A forced grin of admiration was on Brian's sweating face. Plainly, he meant treachery.

"My suicide," said John Kingdom. "The self-destruction of John Kingdom, and a crash that will beat that of any previous defaulter hollow. After that—who knows what further jokes the ghost of a departed armament-king may play?"

And now John Kingdom rose, took a revolver from a drawer and laid it on the arm of the chair where Brian sat.

"Thanks, Johnny!" croaked Brian. "And here's for you! Roland for an Oliver!"

Bombed the World



A MOST unusual and impressive novel—the terrific story of a great munitions merchant who undertook to club Europe into disarmament, and of the men and women who rode with death in his service. . . . By the author of "Red Terror" and "The Frog of Moscow."

He snatched up the pistol with a shrill laugh, took aim and pulled the trigger. There was the snap of an empty cartridge; and a second pistol sprang into Chundra's brown hand where he stood behind the chair. The explosion of it at Brian's temple sounded like the crack of doom. . . .

The first sensation of John Kingdom's suicide passed through the world like a lightning-shock. Within a week it was proved that he had been a colossal swindler, who had built upon the quicksands of forgery, fraud and deception.

Far greater news followed: for London, Paris, Rome and Berlin were mysteriously bombed from the upper air with nitrous-oxide gas which did little harm, though it rendered thousands of people temporarily unconscious. Equally mysterious radio messages explained this harmless gas attack as merely a foretaste of what another real war would be like.

Only to Crystal Templeton, living in London, and to her suitor Larry Raeburn of the British Secret Service was the secret revealed: Bidden by a provision in Kingdom's will, Crystal made her way, accompanied by Larry, to the tiny island of Martos in the Ægean, purchased in the name of James Van Horn, supposedly an American—and there Crystal and Larry found John Kingdom living!

He explained his plan. The island had been equipped as fortress, a powerful broadcasting station, a naval base; more important, its hangars housed a number of planes invented in one of his munitions factories—planes capable of navigating the stratosphere. He proposed by their aid to threaten and if necessary to force Europe into a real disarmament. He invited Larry to join the staff of picked young men helping him.

Larry declined, but was detained by force. He escaped, however, and returned to Geneva with his secret. And there he was decoyed by a ruse of Anderthal's mistress the Countess Anna, captured and imprisoned in a cave. For Anderthal had reason to suspect that Kingdom was still living, and that Larry knew his whereabouts; and so now Raeburn was put to the torture to make him tell what he knew. . . . He was rescued at the point of unconsciousness by the newspaper woman Sally Allison and his friend Dick Challis. . . .

Rumors of war grew apace. Kingdom renewed his bombing attacks and radio demands for disarmament. . . . Posing as the American Van Horn, he came to Geneva; and with him came Crystal, who had married him—disguised also as the middle-aged semi-recluse Mrs. Van Horn. He was recognized by Anderthal, however, while they were sitting together in a roof-garden overlooking the lake. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AN intoxication came to Anderthal. He was greater than Kingdom. He felt a towering desire to match his wits—to play with the mouse. Mouse! The little-brained, the puny fool!

"Excuse me one moment," he said. "The Countess—"

He went across to Anna, where she sat with her chin on her white hand—it was not bandaged now. He stood over

her with his great bulk and said: "Make not one sign. I am neither drunk nor mad. I have Kingdom. Presently slip out, and tell them that all the doors must be guarded. There is no hurry."

ALWAYS he had been a big boy about boasting to Anna before he told the world, after a thing was certain. If ever a thing was certain, it was that he had Kingdom. The nations might shout for him; but it was Jacob Anderthal who had him.

He padded back, under the trombone-music of the cabaret, let himself into his chair with his characteristic grunt. The Neanderthal, big, simple, playful!

"This steel-works of yours, Mr. Van Horn: I will buy it from you some day, you will see. Kingdom, he tried for it, didn't he? But I am bigger than Kingdom. Bigger."

A tendon in Anderthal's hand flexed and moved almost invisibly. John Kingdom watched it now. And the ballroom of the Hotel de Lac Bleu, and all the people in it, melted away, and there was only Jacob Anderthal and himself.

"Bigger, my dear Kingdom!"

He could not play any longer. He was too hungry. To him, also, there were only the two of them, and a red haze of hate. He laughed, and put out his hand to pull away the other's horn-rimmed glasses, to smash the disguise, somehow.

Kingdom lifted him, lifted him bodily. A chair overturned. The light rail of the balcony cracked as their weight struck it. . . . They were in the lake.

Kingdom went deep, holding on to Anderthal. It was the first time he had put hands on a man in many years, but his body was trim and fit. He only had one thought, now, and that was to drown Anderthal, like some giant kitten. He had planned to kill Anderthal, but had not suspected it would be this way. . . .

All of it went coolly through him. Violence was novel, but exhilarating. He drove down, as terrifically strong arms went about his neck. Some recently heard words occurred to him: "The fight is between warrior and warrior." Thus Chundra, alias Mr. Akbar. . . .

Better than poison. That had been Chundra's plan. Things had been so urgent. Chundra had figured three hours, leaving time for Mr. and Mrs. Van Horn to disappear. It was th safest plan, but it had cracked, somehow. . . . Kingdom kept Anderthal under. Some current was carrying them away from the hotel. There was shouting, and the lights had gone up. But none of the excitement was perceptible in the balcony yet. Queer, that. . . . He went under, crushed by Anderthal's gulping mass, disengaged again, was on top once more. He was a very good swimmer. He wanted Anderthal drowned before they reached the seven bridges where the lake foamed out and became the river Rhone. A fist crashed into his face, and salt blood flowed down his upper lip. He was under-dog again for a few seconds.

Strange, the exhilaration, the strength! He had set out to dictate to the world what it must do. But this seemed more zestful, more important. It was. But he had hoped and prayed that he would get Anderthal without paying with his own life. So many things to do yet. He and Anderthal, both dead and locked together, rolling among the white foam and big stones of the river—a dramatic discovery!

Chundra would see to Crystal—Chundra and Larry.

He found himself hammering like a madman to keep Anderthal under, as they drifted through the silky shadows toward the distant white arches across which the lighted traffic threaded. John Kingdom, hammering. He had never used a hammer in one of his score of factories, had envied the brawny men who did. He had never touched an instrument in the stratosphere planes, had once or twice longed to. His head was throbbing. Suddenly, like a machine that started. . . . Hammers. It was white hot. The cold water would not slake it out.

He went limp, and Anderthal caught him, held him from sinking. An airman who had dropped bombs on London eighteen years before, and was now growing grapes in the Rhine valley on week-days, and shouting, "Heil, Hitler!" on Sundays, had delivered John Kingdom to his enemy.

THE band caterwauled into silence; the slender cabaret girl stopped, bewildered; the lights went up in the ballroom of the Hotel du Lac Bleu. Something had happened on the dark balcony. Somebody had fallen into the water.

Some nervous woman screamed: "Another raid!" Anna Landeck, who was close by, hit her over the mouth.

She was running into the center of the room, her red curls fallen to her neck. She did not know what she was

doing. Some one had fallen over the balcony, and it was Kingdom, trying to escape, and he couldn't. Kingdom, who had sung in her blood for the past three minutes while she savored it all, before giving the alarm. She was screaming out loud for a chair. Shouting for men to hold her on their shoulders. Cursing two of the waiters because they didn't understand what she wanted.

"Listen! Oh, listen, you fools! I've got something to tell you. A table. Lift me up!"

She found a table, clambered onto it. She wanted to do some witch's dance over the startled faces about her.

"Do you know who was in this room? John Kingdom! It was Kingdom, I tell you. He—"

And then suddenly she broke off, her eyes widening, and slid down to her knees on the polished table her little shoes had scratched. Then she rolled, quite slowly, from it. A man caught her.

"She's fainted. Stand back, everybody, please."

The man who knelt by her side drew away his hand and looked at it. It was a very low-cut frock the Countess Anna of Gerolstein had worn, and a very beautiful back that it exposed. Just where the flimsy material closed again over the smooth soft flesh, something dully shining was buried deep.

Kingdom lifted him bodily, and the light rail cracked as their combined weight struck it.

FROM the mantel-piece the buhl clock chimed the hour with a softness that matched the sleepy flicker of the fire below it. The cold *bise,* the wind from the north, was blowing in the cypresses of the garden outside, and it was chilly in the Villa Marigolda. But not in this large luxurious bedroom.

The telephone-bell rang, and Jacob Anderthal took up the receiver. It was one of his secretaries, speaking from the hotel-suite in Geneva, on a direct wire.

"I will see nobody, not even Miss Sally Allison of the London *Post-Mercury,* Zeimer. She doesn't guess where I am? Good. Nobody must know, remember. I will not have my private griefs broken into by the newspapers. The poor Countess was under some delusion. It was Akbar, that Indian, who must have been an agent of Kingdom, and she found out. He threw the knife. How could Van Horn be Kingdom? He is drowned, poor fellow, through the negligence of that hotel. Have they not recovered his body? Or got Akbar, yet? No. The police are fools. You will attend to them. . . . I have disappeared, remember."

Anderthal returned to the fire. He switched on the radio, and the "Siegfried Idyl," played by some orchestra in Berlin, came through. He loved it; it soothed him.

A portrait of Anna Landeck was on the cabinet. There was no change in Anderthal's expression. His grief was real. But he had always imagined her made for a violent death. Her husband, perhaps. Imbeciles could be jealous. But it was not her husband. It was Chundra Dah. He feared Chundra Dah a little. But this time the house was guarded like that of an American millionaire who had been threatened with kidnaping. And it was only for two days. No, thirty-eight hours or so, now.

The "Idyl" had stopped. The news had started.

"General Gerhardt said today: The good German blade is ready to spring from its

scabbard in self-defense. We await events. . . .

"More lightning raids were made by John Kingdom, last night. There was uproar in the English Parliament. The Prime Minister, in a statement said: 'It must be remembered that it is barely a fortnight since Kingdom—if it is Kingdom—started his insane operations. It is very doubtful now whether his base is in the Soviet States. Plainly, he has conquered the stratosphere, and experts have long visualized some such freebooter able to damage his fellow-creatures with such machines as this man possesses. But it is only for a limited period; the passing of each day brings the daring criminal nearer to his end. . . .

"Mr. Dohnanyi and General Bullerian returned to Belgrade from Geneva today. They stated that, if nothing untoward happened, and no casus belli occurred, there was no reason to think that the Danubian Conference would not smooth out the present strained situation among the Little Entente. . . .

"The young Archduke Francis Nicholas shot five chamois on the Wildespitze yesterday. He returns to Vienna in a few days."

Anderthal switched off the radio. He moved to the bed. The man upon it lay as though dead, save for his regular breathing.

"Kingdom!"

No answer. Not yet. Anderthal looked round the room, at the rain which drove at the windows and tear-blinded them. This was the top of the world,

"Listen!" cried the Countess Anna. "Do you know who was in this room? John Kingdom! Kingdom, I tell you! He—"

and he stood upon it. Kingdom in his hands, and thirty-eight hours or so to go! The nations snarled for him. *Hang Kingdom!* But he was here. The hangman would not get him—till thirty-eight hours or so had passed. . . .

"Kingdom," said Jacob Anderthal softly. "There is going to be war. Do you understand?"

That old shrapnel-wound in Kingdom's head! Anderthal touched the pale forehead with gentle fingers. He was concerned a little. Where did sanity end and madness begin, even without a shrapnel wound received in an air-raid over London? But he, Jacob Anderthal, was the stronger animal, the bigger man. He could sit behind the curtain, when necessary. But that was not his pretense, as it had been that of the late John Kingdom of Kingdom and Anderthal. His pretense was quite the contrary. His reality was behind the curtain.

It had not been easy to get Kingdom there, unseen. A dead weight in the cold water, hiding in the shadows outside the range of the searchlights. Then he'd found, at last, a moored electric launch, had thrust his burden into the empty cabin—dead or alive, he did not know—and feebly shouted. It was one of his own men, searching without much hope now, who had answered. He had pretended to be dazed, obstinate. No, no, he could face nothing more just then, after all that cruel tragedy. Van Horn, and now the Countess! He would go to his villa. . . . So the police prefect, as this was a very powerful man, ill and suffering grief, had let Anderthal's man take him away in the electric launch.

A man entered, silent-footed, square-shouldered. Gantlet, of the Paris po-

lice, who had found out Brian Kingdom's secret, and been corrupted and purchased for private use by Jacob Anderthal.

"I am in my own castle, guarded, eh? No one must get through this time, either by day or night. Nobody. Neither black nor white."

"It is impossible."

The rain pattered on the windows. It was nearly noon, and Kingdom still unconscious. Anderthal leaped up to the bed again when the man was gone, then breathed in relief. Kingdom would not die. Anderthal yawned. He unfastened a button or two of his waistcoat and leaned back in the armchair. Since his ghetto days, that had been his most comfortable way of sleeping. He had Napoleon's gift. A wink or two now and then was enough.

When Anderthal awoke, Kingdom had moved. He was muttering.

"SECRETS!" murmured Anderthal. "They are not very material now. But interesting."

"Crystal. . . . Larry. . . . Tim Ryan."

The listener shrugged, a little disappointed, as the murmur ceased. Yet so certain did he feel of Kingdom that he was barely curious just then. The lean texture of life was coming back to the face on the pillow. It was Kingdom, not Van Horn. And he was awakening.

Anderthal pressed a button. A servant entered. He said: "Lunch in here. For two. And the clothes I ordered laid out."

He felt childishly eager. He prayed that Kingdom's brain would snap back to normal. It would be too cruel otherwise. He wanted no mind-wandering, even if it disclosed secrets all Europe gaped to learn.

"You feel quite well, Kingdom? The salami is very good, with burgundy."

"Quite well. I went out quickly and came back likewise."

"Something to do with the lobe of the brain, eh?"

"The cortex, they call it. The surgeons warned me it might happen."

"So you wished to kill me?" said Anderthal with sudden gravity. "It cannot be done, Kingdom, I tell you. Certainly not now. And it was crude."

"Not so crude," said Kingdom. "An ancient method, I'll admit. And repulsive in an ordinary case. Chundra doctored your coffee."

"You're not consistent, Kingdom. You, the humanitarian, to try to finish another man in cold blood. As you did your cousin."

Kingdom sipped at the glass which the other refilled. He was aware of a deep fatigue. It was like the terrible depression when he stepped to earth after a stratosphere flight, but worse. A shattering doubt of his own purposes, a devilish pessimism. More than that, a strange horror at himself. Anderthal had him caught. He had not even the tiny radio mechanism which was enclosed in the gold hunter-case of his watch. No doubt it was in the clothing which had been stripped from him. If he escaped, it would be into a world that shouted for him, dead or alive. Anderthal was being ironic, he knew. But—

"'Murder most foul!' . . . . Like war itself," said Anderthal; and Kingdom caught the tone of sham unctuousness, the brutal cynicism.

"And I'm to get the *tu quoque*—the same to me?"

"Justice is not murder," said Anderthal, and added, holding a match to Kingdom's cigar: "Not even when it is privately executed. To privately execute it, might be to save another international crisis. For they all want you, Kingdom: the hangman of England, the guillotineman of France, the headsman of Germany, and so on."

"Cheap. You're not trying to make me beg for my life?" But his hands clenched. An agony of bitterness assailed him. He was named as the biggest criminal in the history of the world. Perhaps there were women who kept their children quiet with the sinister name of *Kingdom*. And he wanted to save them. Why couldn't they see? Why couldn't they?

"You will never cry out for your life, Kingdom. I am a coarse brute. I am the Neanderthal, but I respect courage. . . . And now I will proceed to crush it in the only possible way. You have failed. You are defeated. War will break out in the Little Entente within thirty hours. Nothing can stop it. Do I look as though it was bluff?"

Anderthal did not. He sat pouched, glaring with triumph. He said: "You see, I'm the bigger man, Kingdom!"

A SILENCE fell. A glint of bright sunlight came at the windows; a bird started in the garden. Crystal had liked to sit under the shade of the big lindens he could see, when the bees hummed in them.

Kingdom said calmly: "Bigger? You didn't make this war, Anderthal. You helped a little, maybe. But that's all. I could have stopped it. Even yet, my young men may stop it, you fool! You're only a vulture on the midden of war. I could have stopped it."

A vein swelled on Anderthal's forehead. He laughed.

"Your young men? Well, that is a little clue. No, they will not stop it, Kingdom."

Kingdom made no movement. It would be no use. He could never take Anderthal unaware, and the uses of violence were exhausted now. How much had he talked? Crystal—in her heart would she always think of him as a killer? But one had to, one had to! To save infinitely worse killing.

HE stood up from the table, while Jacob Anderthal watched curiously. There was a slight movement somewhere, a shoe scraping ever so little on the floor behind a piece of tapestry. Anderthal's hidden bodyguard, watching, no doubt. Kingdom looked at himself in the glass: Small, dapper, neat; the clothes fitted him well. Better than the high-shouldered cut and wide trousers he had adopted as James Van Horn. Strange, that skin he had been able to get into with hardly any artificial help. He had built it up. Built a thousand things up.... All gone now.

"Kingdom!"

"Well?"

Anderthal came close. Just a touch of the old shuffling bear. But still intent, serious. "Possibly you mistrust my word. I shall do nothing with you until war has started. You must live to know that. I could not bear it otherwise."

"You're excited, Jacob," Kingdom said coldly. Then: "I'm in your hands. What happens afterward?"

Anderthal sat down. He pushed the decanter toward Kingdom. He wished little Anna had been alive, and there. Yet he would have had to be the big genial creature if she had been. The little devil had always brought that out. She knew hardly anything of the man of affairs with half a dozen secretaries, the serious business man. And this was serious.

"I am not sure. But I will have no international crises," said Anderthal slowly. "One war at a time. And my men are as efficient with the rope as the professionals. Melodrama it may be, that I should execute justice myself, here, out of private hatred. The little Countess would have reveled in it. But war itself is a giant melodrama, Kingdom. So should its trimmings be."

"Logical," agreed Kingdom, almost absently.

He saw the picture with a touch of amusement. Probably it would take place on the sun-roof of the villa. Anderthal, who was as theatrical in his way as he suspected himself to be, would put up a real scaffold. In the old days, when the nations got his body, he would have been drawn and quartered.

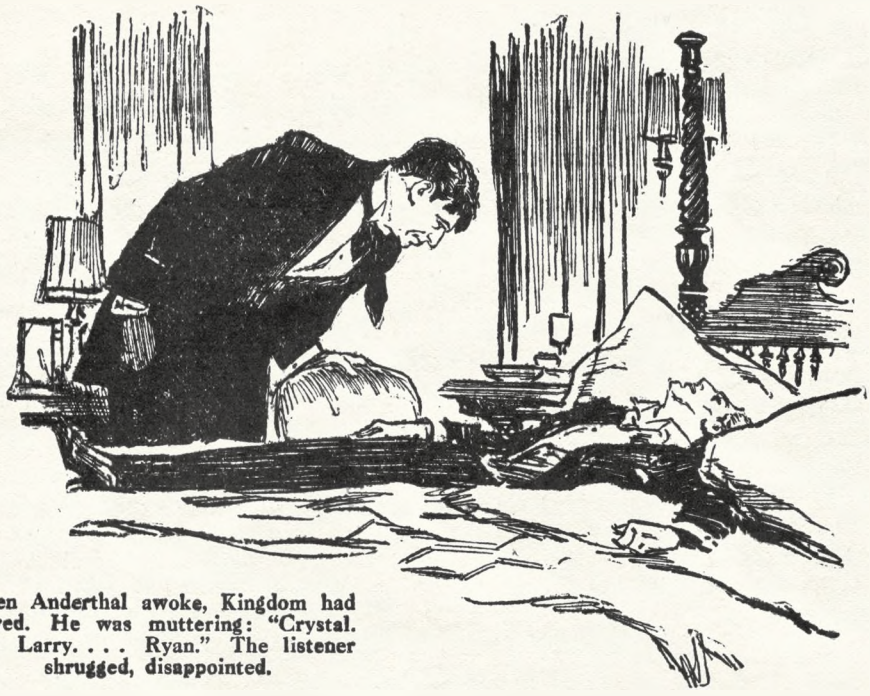
How old Anderthal looked! As old as most war-makers. He pictured youth and vigor marching to deal the holocaust and to receive the fire of it, while age sat comfortably at home, and provided the sinews. Every war-maker subconsciously had that grotesquely false picture, made up from the tiny battles of the past.

Kingdom closed his eyes. His head was clear, where before, it had always ached. He too saw youth on the march, cleansing the world of stupid terror after he was dead, taking it in strong hands and fashioning it sanely, with laughter and love. Somewhere among them marched the ghost of John Kingdom, a happy ghost. It contented him strangely.

TIM RYAN was born in New York, of Highland-Irish parents. At the age of thirteen, after his stepfather had turned him out into the streets one night, he found God—which, to him, was a big, softly singing dynamo in a waterfront power-station.

He worshiped it, and was one of its oily priests; then he was fired for breaking a leg with a gyroscope airplane that could only have come from the brain of a Bedlamite. Then he made a model helicopter that went up to the stratosphere and came down again like a falcon to the wrist.... At twenty, Tim Ryan found God again—which was John Kingdom.

Efficient lieutenant and quiet leader of men that Tim Ryan was, he wished John Kingdom back on Martos. He hardly knew why. The organization, tested at every link, went smoothly. Each night had seen at least one of those silent bullets shoot out of the island-crater, on its nerve-shaking mission. Laboratory and workshop carried on. But the sand was running out a little. John Kingdom was not there.



When Anderthal awoke, Kingdom had moved. He was muttering: "Crystal. . . . Larry. . . . Ryan." The listener shrugged, disappointed.

"Strange thing that he went at all," said Bates, the long-limbed English boy.

"Anderthal," said Tim Ryan.

"If the finish here came while he was away," said Leontov, the huge Russian, thoughtfully, "his heart would break."

Seldom did anybody talk about the "finish," either in hangar, workshop, or laboratory. They lived for the hour, as men in a front-line dug-out did, in old-time warfare. If the guns found the range, it would be a direct hit and little chance of escape. It was understood that for that purpose the stratosphere planes were useless, because there must not be the remotest chance of their falling into any nation's hands. For that reason each machine carried, as its grim iron ration of destruction, one permanent bomb which would blow it to nothing.

"He'll be back any hour," said Tim Ryan. Only Ludwig, the radio-operator, beside himself, knew that no code for Martos was among the hundreds and thousands of messages in the ether now.

Ryan saw to it that they slaved like Trojans, every one of the hand-picked thirty-five men on Martos. It eased the strain, which, though none of them realized it, was gigantic. There had been only one casualty, so far. Farozzi, one of the chemists, had committed suicide.

"That damned yacht, waiting at Brindisi for him, might set them on the scent," said Bates with a sharp irritation which made the others look up. "Once they take an interest in Van Horn—and that girl he married. It makes it unsafe. He ought to have stayed."

"Unsafe!" sneered the Russian. Then both the men flushed, and looked at each other in confusion. It was the strain. . . .

That evening Tim Ryan checked off thoughtfully the last of John Kingdom's instructions. Obviously he had intended to be back before this. Ryan found himself with a touch of panic—and that was the strain too. He missed that steadying, magnetic personality, more than any of them. He was not big enough for it. No man was, but Kingdom. Where was he? Not—dead?

"Better go easy tonight. I'll take a look in Slovenia."

It was Tim Ryan who had dropped bombs on the munition dumps behind Zagreb, and he had seen things on the magnifying screen of the tele-periscope that left a lingering sickness yet. Troops they had been, but men. . . . Was his nerve going, without Kingdom?

"Hell!" He trod on a black cat which lived in the mess-room, and that made him grin. Along with a broken periscope mirror and some salt spilled at table, it made good old-wives' stuff very suitable for a man John Kingdom trusted, he jeered to himself.

He took young De Lisle with him, let him handle the controls. De Lisle was

a French marquis in his own right, but a superb mechanic.

There would be no moon till later. They hurtled through damask darkness in their metal shell.

"Bombs?" asked De Lisle.

"Sleeping gas," Tim answered quickly. They might not start the war. What was the use of killing beforehand? Usually, when the stratosphere got him, he felt winged and uplifted to master the earth. But not tonight.

The plane seemed to hum a little less smoothly than usual. He bent over and looked at De Lisle.

"She had her inspection?" His forehead burned, because he realized he had missed checking and overseeing, himself.

"She's okay," De Lisle assured him.

ALWAYS Tim wished he could hear the mighty roar of rarefied air that was beating outside. Death like a hand on the heart it would be, he knew. But he was a poet by nature, and there might be new strange gods outside there that he would see before he died.

"We're getting there. Let me take over."

"No," pleaded De Lisle eagerly. "Please!"

The boy had to learn. His maps and instruments were all before him. It was that downward swoop which had to be watched: the helicopter button, for the second or two of hovering, and then the projectile rush back up into the air again. Tim switched on the radio. Last time, over Zagreb, he had caught little bits of useful Morse on the electric-recording cylinder. . . .

He began to focus the tele-periscope. There was light enough five miles below, in all conscience—floodlight and searchlight. They looked ready for anything in Zagreb.

"Right down on the town, this time," he said. "Give them a helluva scare. Twenty thousand people, including generals, all with sick headaches. Gee!"

De Lisle touched something as the white radiance below slid under. At that moment the Morse on the radio steadied to one tune, loud and repeated. Tim stopped and listened:

The young Archduke Francis Nicholas assassinated by Voyvodinan Nationalists. . . . Archduke Francis assassinated. . . .

"That's war," said Tim.

He looked into the mirror. They were dropping now; the light was rushing up. Some vast aviation-field that swelled from a mere white handkerchief. Things flickered above it. Airplanes. Bright eyes swiveled upward.

"Not among them, man!" snapped Tim sharply.

They were hovering. De Lisle was tugging at the bomb-release. It seemed to be jammed. Something thudded outside, and black particles flew over the mirror. A shell! One of the airplanes came climbing, like a shark snouting upward. De Lisle turned and sent a look of agony at Tim Ryan. He said nothing.

Ryan lunged forward to the controls. As he did so, there was a deeper thud, and a tinkle of metal. The cabin slewed. The whine of one of the gyroscopes changed to a harsh clatter.

Tim Ryan stood up in the reeling shell that went sliding down to earth. He ruffled De Lisle's crisp black hair with his hand. Always a good kid, and not his fault. He hoped John Kingdom would think that about himself, too.

He turned a small key above his head.

Down in Zagreb, they saw it as a copper flash that lit the sky and paled the searchlight glare. A little smoke was left, and that was all.

ASSASSINATION OF ARCHDUKE FRANCIS NICHOLAS

STABBED TO DEATH BY NATIONALISTS AT GATES OF CHATEAU IN VOYVODINA

Danubian Delegates Go Home

WAR!

DECLARATION WITHIN TWELVE HOURS

THE little dusty shop in the Old Cité had *"Uplegger, Antiques"* on its sign. Its bottle-green windows had never been cleaned. It contained, perhaps, two thousand francs' worth of appalling junk which never grew greater or less. Its owner was Marie Uplegger, a dropsical old Fribourger, and she had been packed away oozing gratitude to see her married daughter at Thun. The person who had paid all expenses was the mad young newspaper-woman who lodged above.

In the tiny kennel behind *Uplegger, Antiques,* when the shutters were closed, three people faced each other by the light of a guttering oil-lamp. The fourth, an Oriental, kept a little apart.

"Take that filthy overall off, Crystal," said Sally Allison. "There's no need for it now."

Sally looked at Larry Raeburn and then at Crystal. Her voice was taut as a fiddlestring.

"I hardly know him. But I feel him. We all do. He's—here. It's because we're young, I think. Just to be born in one war and finish up in another—it's not a fair deal. He knows it." Sally was breathing fast. "He's mad. Oh, a great madness. Killing! Let him kill a bit, if it saves the world. A—a surgical operation, to save life."

"It's too late for that," said Larry Raeburn. "I knew he was bound to fail. But—I feel him too."

"He's got us all, in some way." Crystal stared at the reddened flame of the oil lamp. Sally, who had been one of Anderthal's guests, had brought her there out of the confusion in the hotel. Sally had hidden her in the old shop, while the police searched the city for Van Horn's wife.

"You're his wife, Crystal," said Larry.

"And while we talk, please excuse, he is prisoner in villa, with ape Anderthal, and very likely in dire peril," came Chundra's voice. Perhaps he saw Crystal shrink as she remembered Anna Landeck. But his face was like carved stone.

All fugitives—save Sally; and she was watched. It gave them an unusual calmness. But perhaps that was John Kingdom. And perhaps it was black wings spreading over the City of Peace more ebon than they had ever been. Thunder in the air. After twenty years another obscure little Archduke had been murdered. The Danubian Conference was packing up. . . . Old Men's Failure. . . . . War.

"We're all booked!" said Sally, clenching her teeth. "I've chucked up my newspaper. I'm being no damned war-correspondent. I'm John Kingdom's. Has nobody any plan—just to get him, to hide him, just to give him a dog's chance? If they hanged him now, it would be brutal murder. He was the only man in the world with vision, though he's failed."

Larry waited until Sally, a little bewildered at herself, dashed her hand across her eyes. Then he began to talk quietly. And now and then Chundra Dah put in a velvety word.

THAT evening, Mr. Richard Challis, of Room D3, Scotland Yard, was in a bewildered mood too. His baggage was packed and piled, and he was awaiting departure for London, or Bagdad, or Spitzbergen. At the moment he was drinking pegs of whisky in his rooms, and trying to think that love was tomfoolery. Particularly love for Sally Allison. He was likewise cursing little suave men, mostly with black beards, who sat in a Peace Chamber and untiringly checkmated one another, then packed up their grips and politely walked out on each other.

"Tweedledum and Tweedledee agreed to fight a battle,
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee had spoiled his nice new rattle—"

jeered Dick to himself. Dick Challis was always sure that war was inevitable, sooner or later; but he had rather it had been later. Sally Allison, nursing his baby under a rain of poison-gases, was a disagreeable picture.

"Just bloody death!" he muttered. "But nobody'll keep out of it. They can't. The old 'uns'll picture all of us marching and singing 'Tipperary' and winning V.C.'s and—it won't be that."

He was badly startled at himself. Something seemed to have happened to him. He brought his feet to the floor with a bump, then started up as the door opened.

"Raeburn!"

"Okay. I'm back in the fold, Challis. Is Kingdom any use to you, now?"

LARRY RAEBURN slumped into a chair. He seemed burning with excitement. "Say the word," he said.

"Kingdom! But Larry, boy—"

"It's my stuff, fella. Don't worry. I've got him. At least, Jacob Anderthal has. That American, Van Horn, who was supposed to be drowned from the balcony of the Lac Bleu was Kingdom. Anderthal took him to the Villa Marigolda. I've rooted it all out myself. Do you tumble? I want you and your S.S. authority, and two or three Swiss policemen. Anderthal's a bit eccentric about keeping him for himself." . . . Larry paused. "You've guessed it. Private reasons, too. He married Crystal."

Slowly Challis took up the phone. Larry stayed him. "The police only. Not Shieling, till we have him."

"Why hasn't Anderthal given him up?"

"God knows. Wants to deal with him himself, maybe. Everything's crazy in this business."

"I'll say it is."

It was a quarter of an hour before the police-car came round. Challis and Raeburn said little to each other during that time. Dick Challis' mouth was tight, as the car thrummed over the lake road. He looked out at the night. Rain-

ing, and pitch-dark. A lot of nervous searchlights down in Geneva. But not for Kingdom now. The big nations would hang him for what he had done, and that would be the end of the episode—poor dreaming devil. . . . A police-captain, two inspectors and one of his own men in the rear seat. Challis was slowly beginning to realize; but he did not talk. Somehow, he did not want to talk to Larry Raeburn.

Larry said: "His guards might put up a scrap. They'll shoot, I shouldn't wonder."

"I'll see to it," said Challis curtly. His big young chin came out. The huntsman awoke. His mind was a single-track one; he was very efficient on it. He loathed Larry's obvious treachery and spite. He loathed this war which was coming. But he had John Kingdom—and wished he didn't feel so sick about it.

He stopped with the headlights glaring at the locked gates of the Villa Marigolda. A man came into the slanting spears of rain, to look through the glistening bars. He lifted a weapon in a hesitant challenge—through the windshield, the captain of police dropped him neatly in the shoulder with his silenced Mauser.

"The whole garden's wired," warned Dick Challis, tripping over something. "Take care."

They crunched in silent file down the long drive. A whistle shrilled. Three men loomed up, and were silent under the satirical stare and poised weapon of one of the inspectors.

When the door opened, Challis wedged it with his foot. He was growing angry at Anderthal, sick of it all. He could whip no thrill. But at the sight of police uniforms the footman who opened it fell back. Then Challis, Larry and the police-captain were in the only lighted room in the house, Jacob Anderthal was standing there, pulling his under-lip; and John Kingdom was sitting in a chair, looking at them.

"SO, the police to take over the prisoner! And Mr. Challis of Scotland Yard!" said Anderthal. "We have met, I think."

"And me," said Larry. "Don't forget me. Sorry to have hoodwinked you, Mr. Anderthal." He leaned against the wall. John Kingdom looked at him, and he returned the gaze. Then to Dick Challis, who bowed to him, Kingdom smiled faintly.

"No handcuffs? Thanks. I give you my word of honor, boy. Though this is too much trouble for everybody. Anderthal was about to deal with me, I believe."

Jacob Anderthal shrugged. "What nonsense!" Then he bent to Kingdom, hooded, aquiline: "Shipwreck, Kingdom," he said. "Defeat. The fool gets his reward. I am satisfied after all."

Out in the garden two sharp shots sounded. Larry Raeburn snapped to the police-captain, with sudden authority: "Better go and see. Round them up in case they attempt a rescue. We'll bring him."

"Ach!" said Anderthal indulgently. "Foolish! I recognize the authority of the nations."

HE watched them go. There was no Countess to snarl and try to anticipate justice in her primitive way. If those fool guards who had failed him once more brought Kingdom back to the gallows they had half-built, it was too late now. His chameleon mind accepted the position. Kingdom's defeat was even sweeter than his death would be. Well, well, melodrama! And melodrama was thundering its way up from every horizon in Europe, at that moment. . . .

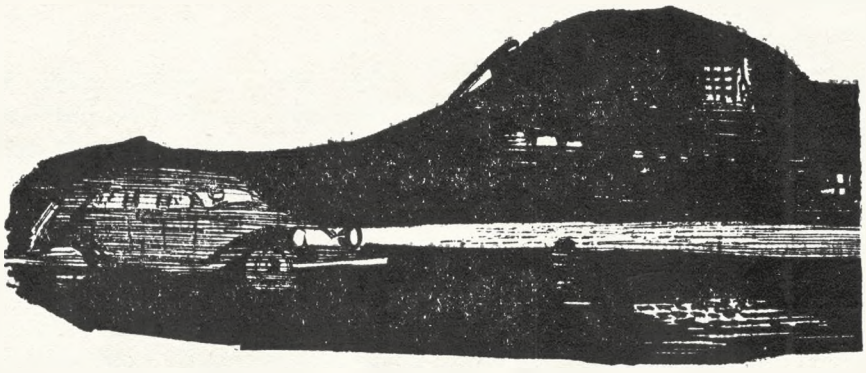
Out in the garden the rain was snoring down. There was another shot among the bushes. Kingdom, between Larry and Challis, did not turn his head. Dick Challis opened the door of the car for him, and he went inside. The three of them sat in a silence lasting more than a minute that, somehow, had a throb in it.

"Those damned policemen are getting the men," said Challis. "They ought to know—"

He broke off and turned sharply to look at Larry Raeburn. His hand went to his pocket; but "No, Dick," said Larry. He fell upon Challis with the leather noose he had ready, and pinned his arms with it. As Challis opened his mouth, he rammed the handkerchief into it. He was as quick as possible with the ether, because he discovered that he still loved Dick Challis; and there was a figure at the wheel—a woman's figure, a pair of angular shoulders that turned with a quick, "Don't hurt him, Larry!" It was Sally Allison and she called, with a catch in her voice:

"All aboard!"

John Kingdom found Crystal's fingers in his own. Crystal by his side. The engine roared. There was a yell from



behind the gates, a yell of surprise and agony. Chundra Dah's voice—not a disembodied voice, this time, for he sat there, just palpable in the darkness of the car—said:

"Electricity is swift agent. It begins to flow in the wires again. It affects both the just and the unjust and lays them out, when they run up against it. There is nobody who knows the electric-switches of the villa like me. I turn them off and turn them on at my own sweet will, please excuse swank."

THE way Sally took was out on the wide mountain road that snaked up into the darkness of High Savoy. Sally was slogging the car as though she were as intoxicated as Larry himself felt. There was a French motto, *toujours l'audace.*

Simple, once it was done! Chundra had switched off the electrified wires in the grounds of the villa at the psychological moment, and switched them on ditto, to kick silly police and bodyguard alike. Sally and Crystal had waited in the darkness by the gate. Dick Challis was left to Larry. . . . Chundra, that brown marvel, had been generalissimo. And because they were young, and knew the world was on the edge of a break-up, nothing had mattered, and they had succeeded.

"We're making for Martos," said Larry seriously. "That's the only place you'll be safe. From there, you and Crystal will be able to get away in the yacht to America, or somewhere."

Sally switched off the car into blackness, stopped. She took a number-plate from under her oilskin, and fixed it. The wind howled with a touch of derision as she did it. But she gripped the wheel again, and the car lunged on.

"Thanks, everybody," said John Kingdom.

Crystal tried to see him in the darkness. Yet she felt that she would not have dared to look into his eyes at the anguish of failure which must be there.

"We shall manage the frontier," she said. "Larry has a plan. We're aiming for Genoa where it'll be possible to get a plane."

"Might get Tim Ryan to take you to America in one of the strato-planes, sir," came Larry's voice. "Better than the yacht, perhaps. After all, Van Horn's supposed to be drowned. I guess you could land somewhere without anyone being the wiser."

The fine, the reckless young creatures! They were all wild with happiness because, in the bitterness of defeat, they had saved his body from Anderthal and the nations. They cared nothing about what might happen to themselves. They thought only of him. Kingdom smiled strangely. . . . Ahead shone the blurred lights of a small town, and then they were shooting through its empty cobbled streets.

Not so empty though. Another black car, identical with their own, snouted out at them from the gates of the old Rathaus. Sally screamed past its flanks by a hair's-breadth. Something spat red, though the sound was drowned.

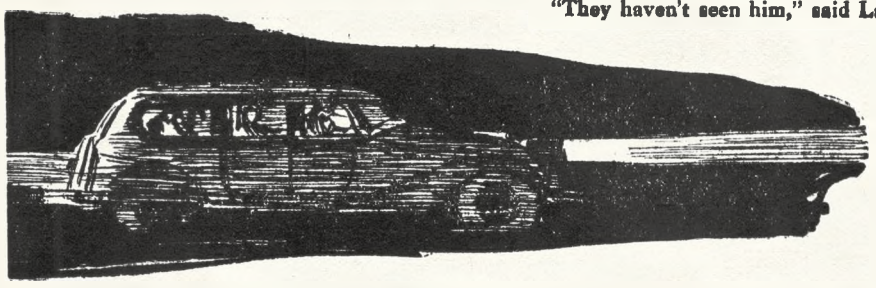
"That police-captain. Nippy with the phone!" muttered Larry. Then: "Shake 'em off, Sally! Shake 'em off, girl!"

Sally was doing her best. They were twisting up some *corniche* road that seemed to be cut out of precipices. It was a better-tuned car than the one which followed, and they were drawing away, leaving its headlights crawling and squirming below them.

And then Crystal and Larry heard Kingdom's voice:

"I'm going to leave you presently."

Larry knew that stupor dawned on his own face, and on Crystal's. Only Chun-



Sally let in the clutch again as the pursuing car came zooming up from below. "They haven't seen him," said Larry.

dra sat expressionless, as Sally whipped the flying car, and Dick Challis sagged in his corner. A blink of fleeting starlight came, and they saw Kingdom's quiet face. But it did not require that to make them feel the domination he laid upon them. If this was a broken man, then Anderthal was a holy angel.

"You'll stay, Chundra. Follow me later. Larry, keep these hounds behind on your tail as long as possible. Take them all over Switzerland if you can. But don't let them get you. That'll help me a lot. I'll take your oilskin. . . . You've some money, Chundra? I'm afraid Anderthal left me with none."

Chundra handed across a wallet.

"But you can't!" said Crystal, finding speech.

"It's easy," Kingdom said. His hand was closing, firm and warm, upon hers. She could feel its strong pulse. And then he thrust her gently to Larry Raeburn.

"Look after her, Larry. Look after each other. She's yours. She always was."

He leaned over to Sally Allison, and because at that moment he was hypnotic, Sally switched out the lights and slowed the powerful car down obediently and without question.

It seemed as though he saw, all at once, the bewilderment, the cold douche of disappointment in these young things, because he still kept himself from every human being and from them.

"They've started," he said. "But I'm going to end it. They've wanted me. But they'll want me more. And when it's all over, they shall have me. I'll give myself up to their judgment. And you'll be there. I shall look for you."

They saw his face as he opened the door, almost boyish, but gaunt with a transfiguring passion.

Then he had gone.

SALLY let in the clutch again as the pursuing car came zooming up from below. None of them had been able to resist that giant will; they were children under it. He walked alone.

"They haven't seen him," said Larry.

The car was almost on their tail. Sally put her own blind obedience into the thrumming engine beneath her, and they drew ahead again. . . . A road junction, and another automobile full of military uniforms, which almost smashed them up. The drone of airplanes overhead; that uneasy monotone which was all over the night skies of Europe at that moment. Then blackness, and the rain and the wind again.

"Merry-go-round!" threw Sally; then: "How's Dick?"

Challis had stirred. Chundra was attending to him. He was still bound, but his eyes were open.

"We'll have to leave him somewhere," said Larry. "Somewhere—safe."

"And then what?"

Larry could not answer, nor could Crystal. They were careering about High Savoy, throwing red herrings to the police. But all at once the police seemed to have lost interest, or else they had shaken them off completely. Sally dipped down into Annecy, to throw the bait. There were searchlights over Annecy and its lake. Long past midnight as it was, they crawled through a throng of conscripts. Even Switzerland was mobilizing. . . . But no police came after them.

"Too busy," said Larry. "I think—well, I guess they've forgotten us."

Only Sally laughed, and the sound was harsh and exhausted. Larry said to Crystal: "You'd better sleep a bit." He did not offer his shoulder, but Crystal took it.

"We'll never see him again, Crystal."

"I think we shall—somewhere. He

said so. Did you notice? It was a kind of prophecy."

She was asleep. Larry's arm went about her. He heard Dick Challis snoring heavily. His own eyelids dropped. Only Chundra Dah, and Sally at the wheel, remained awake. It was crazy; the night was crazy; the world was crazy. . . .

When Crystal awoke, daylight was blinking on the snow-peaks. The car was stopped outside a small *auberge;* and Sally Allison, lantern-jawed with fatigue, was giving hot spiced beer to Dick Challis. There was one of the party missing.

"Chundra's gone," said Sally wearily. "Didn't even stop to say good-by. We're forgotten, too. And now we're all going down into Geneva, and Dick's going to arrest us for assault and battery and helping a dangerous criminal to escape. Aren't you, Dick?"

Dick Challis said nothing. Including Dick, they were all looking at each other with a certain dazedness, under the light of the new dawn.

"I've offered to bribe him—with myself," said Sally. Then: "Hell! Does it matter? Does anything matter, now? It's war. They've—they've forgotten John Kingdom."

Their teeth were chattering. There was only bread and cheese and mulled beer. The road down into Geneva was utterly deserted. A mile out, in the pale daylight, they left the police-car to a sniffing dog. Nobody noticed it. There was nothing to distinguish Dick Challis as being apart from them, as they went down. But in a rather terrifying quiet little square he stopped.

"Did you mean that bribe?" he demanded.

"Absolutely," said Sally.

"I'll take it. If there's a chance to get married in this war, we will." He caught her, kissed her fiercely, then as suddenly released her again.

ROARING wings over the lake. The streets crowded with silent, pale-faced people. One of the Slovenian delegates had had his brains blown out on the steps of the Palais de Justice. Close range, judging by the marks on the white wall. Machine-guns guarding the Hall of Peace. The last of the little dark men, scooting away nervously to the water-planes on the lake. A bleak crowd round one of the newspaper-offices, and the presses thundering. The still-wet sheets, grabbed by shaking hands.

LIGHTNING BLOW

Belgrade Almost Wiped Out From Air
Within Ten Minutes of Formal
Declaration of War
ESTIMATED 80,000 DEAD
British Consul Perishes
GERMAN PLANES OVER AUSTRIA
France Mobilizing

THE biographies of Serge Leontov, the Russian, and Harry Bates, the Englishman, whom John Kingdom corrupted to his own secret madness and then landed there on the islet of Martos as two of the first stratosphere airmen, are brief: At ten, Leontov was a young Octobrist in Moscow and walked in procession to the Red Square with a banner to carry, and a handkerchief for his nose on cold days, both provided by the State, while Harry Bates was at boarding-school, learning to be a little gentleman. In due time Leontov became an airman, to protect the Soviet from the envious capitalist, and Bates bought an airplane of his own, in case the world went mad and the Soviet tried any tricks with England. They were children of one very old civilization and one very new one, but they were brothers under the skin in one respect. Somewhere within both was a passionate craving for clean adventure with ideals behind it, and a hero to worship—which they both found when they met John Kingdom.

Leontov and Bates were staring silently at each other. It was the Russian who spoke first.

"It is the end," he said dispassionately. "The war has started. Who can stop it now?"

"He could," said Bates. Bates, though once a little gentleman, had a cockney aggressiveness in his tense moments.

"He's not here," said Leontov with weary iteration. "Neither is Tim Ryan. And there is inefficiency. It was that which finished Ryan and De Lisle."

"Mine?" asked Bates, growing white about the nostrils.

"Ours. Without him. There's only one thing to do. We must form a kind of Soviet to decide what shall be done."

"Soviet? Heaven! What would it decide, do you think?"

Neither had dared to ask till then. Bates sat with his nerves on edge and bit his nails. Outwardly he and Leontov were keeping authority. Outwardly

the organization—which was as simple in its separate parts as a well-oiled gun—went smoothly, though John Kingdom was not there. . . . Nor Tim Ryan, who had gone and never returned. There was no perceptible breaking of morale. But Bates was frightened, and Leontov was frightened.

"Go away and leave it all to rot?"

"It would have to be destroyed," said Leontov in a low voice. "All of it. And possibly—all of us."

The touch of drama in Leontov's voice jarred Bates. Leontov was sincere. But he was Russian. There might come a moment when Leontov would overbalance. He would be capable of blowing up Martos in one mighty explosion then. Emotional devil! Yet when Bates went out into the amphitheater and looked up at the cool stars, there were tears in his own eyes.

On the cliff, where Bates climbed, there was a lookout post. It seemed unnecessary. The nations had forgotten John Kingdom. The Grecian seas were dark and empty when he looked. Then Bates perceived that the lookout man was flexed and motionless by his gun. A sound came out of the darkness, the whisper of engines, the drum of a propeller. . . .

"Not the *Elvira*. Too quiet."

AN unlighted shadow crept into the harbor cleft. Bates and the lookout saw it. A light sprang at its bows. It crept to the anchorage. A mooring-chain rattled.

Bates ran headlong down the rocky steps. Leontov was there first, from somewhere. A small figure threw up a gray calm face, and looked at them. It was John Kingdom. Both found themselves standing stiffly, as though his discipline had been iron.

"Ryan?" he asked.

They told him. Looking at him now, they saw that he *was* iron. No change of expression came. He listened in silence, said nothing, then moved toward the villa with another person—Chundra Dah.

In the village he said nothing to Chundra. An iron silence was on him, about which Chundra moved as silently. But when he was alone, John Kingdom looked at himself in the glass, as though he were another man. It was terrible, but he had forgotten Ryan already. He had forgotten the cunning it had required to get back to Martos. He had forgotten Gantlet, once of the Paris police, then Anderthal's man. Gantlet must have recognized him on the station at Lausanne. While the train roared in the Simplon tunnel, a man had been found strangled in his sleeping-berth, and it was Gantlet. And a little later, in his own compartment of the *wagon-lit*, while the train went on, with that trifling drama relegated to its right perspective under the greater drama outside, Chundra had quietly appeared, mild and gently protuberant as ever. . . . Chundra's and his own cunning, intertwined, had brought them to Martos.

His expression did not change. It was like gray granite. He knew that something had happened to his brain cortex. For instance, sleep was no longer part of his animal make-up. He could not sleep, yet was never exhausted. Sleep had simply gone from him, like a sloughed skin. He was awake as a sensitized magnet is, night and day.

He went out to the amphitheater, hard, silent. He sensed the new surge of energy at his return; he heard men laugh who, he knew by some instinct, had thought him dead, and begun to flag. He sent them back that gentle, stony look.

He went into the radio-shed. Ludwig, the operator, looked up with his eyes moist with joy like the sentimental little German he was, then sprang to his feet and stood woodenly to attention, to present his summary. The pile of summaries he had made every day during Kingdom's absence was neatly spiked by his side. There they were, the dramatic fragments:

All the nations of Europe stand armed for a possible conflict. . . . The good German sword. . . . What France has made safe with her blood in the past, she will hold on to. . . . We are watching, said Signor Mussolini, at a great gathering in Rome. . . . It would be impossible to keep out of a European conflict now, stated the British Prime Minister. . . .

The cities of the Little Entente, after two days of war, have sustained more terrible destruction on both sides, than a year of the last war could show. The civilian casualty list is estimated to be many times greater than that of the combatants. The theory that there is no defence in an air-war is being proved in appalling detail every hour.

Mr. Dohnanyi, of the Slovenian Government was fatally injured by a gas-bomb. Mr. Dohnanyi was carried to a microphone by which he should have addressed the country. His last words

were: "There will be no victor and no vanquished. I pray that the great nations will put an end to this unparalleled and unforeseen slaughter, as I pray that my God will forgive me."

No mention of John Kingdom. He was forgotten. They thought his madness had been washed out by their own greater madness.

And he was only just about to begin.

He glanced at the clock above the hangars, then went back to the villa. Chundra was waiting there—the servitor again. Even to him, John Kingdom was frigid, detached. Walking alone.

"You've killed for me, Chundra," he said.

"Two or three people, sir. And one—the most important—that one I missed through unforgivable botchery. I refer to ape Anderthal. It is nothing. I am of the East. We kill single spies and not battalions, and only when it is necessary—please excuse reflection on Western civilization."

"I shall not need you much longer, Chundra. I need no bodyservant, now. Long ago I promised you that you should go back to the East when you and I had finished."

"To bask in the sunset of my life, sir. It is as you please." A wholly Oriental and fatalistic gesture from Chundra. He stood waiting for orders.

BIG BEN chimed nine strokes, slow, loud, reverberating. They came down like shivering fragments through the revolving doors of the café on Whitehall, where Crystal sat alone.

She hated being alone just now. There was a touch of nightmare about London that the soul felt rather than the body. The kind of nightmare that was all waiting. But she would see Larry again, presently. He was with Sir John Shieling at the moment, in Room D3 Scotland Yard. Shieling's summons had been curt and imperious. He seemed to know the exact moment they had reached London.

Crystal felt a twinge of fear. It was martial law in London as in every country in Europe. They would shoot Larry like any other traitor, if necessary. There was one hope. They seemed to have forgotten all about John Kingdom. . . .

Crystal finished her coffee and went out into the soft summer air again. She slipped down on to the Thames Embankment to breathe the salty tang of the river, and watch London, bright and swift as molten metal, stream about her. There was foreboding over it. But, for the moment, it was like some giant, human dynamo that would purr eternally its laughter and tears, its life and death, a godlike machine which nothing could wreck.

Thunder. Very faint, but with vivid lightning-flashes. Far down the river.

Two London lovers billed and cooed a few yards away from Crystal, leaning against the parapet, feeding the seagulls, closely intertwined.

"Coo, it's going to rain!" the girl said peevishly, "and me with a new hat and no umbrella!"

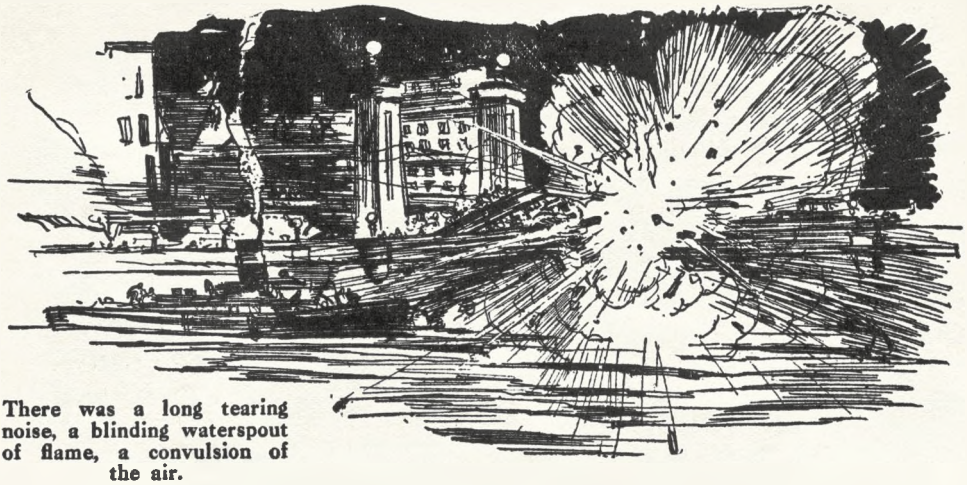
CRYSTAL noticed that the flock of screaming gulls which had wheeled greedily round the couple flashed up into the air and vanished, and the cockney youth stood with his mouth wide agape, gazing down the river. The sky was lit with pulsations of yellow light. The dome of St. Paul's and all the fretted spires of the city leaped sharp and clear as they traveled nearer. Before each thundercrash, there was a faint whining sound. An interval between each crash. Nearer and nearer.

"Gawd!" said the youth wonderingly, rubbing his hand across his face.

There was a gout of flame in the very center of Waterloo Bridge, where it sparkled down the lane of dark water. It started as a small bulb of fire and rose to a giant mushroom, scattering into the water sparks that must have been lighted busses and automobiles. Charing Cross railway bridge cracked in twain under another great splash of flame. It might have been something on the screen of a moving picture, so divorced from all reality it seemed. But the hot reverberation of it fanned Crystal's cheek, though it was half a mile away.

"Look out!" screamed the girl, pulling at her companion, stumbling, and then running away.

There was nothing visible in the dark sky. Only that preliminary sound—it was a long, tearing noise, like falling phosphorus, now—a blinding waterspout of flame in the middle of the near-by bridge, another that lit up the terrace of the Houses of Parliament and sent the Gothic spires crashing, a convulsion of the air that drove the breath out of Crystal's body. Ever afterward, she remembered the ensuing silence, broken only by the engine-beats of standing



There was a long tearing noise, a blinding waterspout of flame, a convulsion of the air.

traffic, the rustle of a plane tree above her in the wind, the roar of red flame that licked in the wounded side of Parliament. But, up the river, upon some other bridge, the swift devil-fire fell.

A feeling of great and unnatural calm came upon Crystal. This was war then. She saw a man with his eyes wide and round, and a cheek laid open by his fall, go scurrying past like a frightened rabbit. A big car came rocking from the bridge with every piece of glass splintered and its occupants screaming in the interior darkness. It tried to swing into Whitehall, and overturned. People were running, running. But there was still an odd quietness over everything, the quietness of a bad dream. Crystal found herself caught up in a great eddy of people. A man linked her arm. His soft hat was crushed on his head. He spoke out of a mouth that was all crooked with rage and fear, in his pale face.

"Don't stay there. They'll come back. With gas. . . . Damn it, who wanted war? Not them. Not us. Tell me what it's about, miss, why they're doin' this and why we'll go and do the same to them, an' maybe I'll buy a flag an' wave it."

It all impinged on Crystal coldly, without terror now. She went by the white cenotaph of the last great war, found herself running past it with the crowd, wild tears in her eyes, unable to look at that calm, pale memorial. A man lifted her as she nearly went down, a shabby, elderly man. He grinned with wry humor at her and that was the first touch of sanity.

"Okay, miss. Get into a quiet street. They gave me a mask, but I forgot it. See! No one has one. Don't believe in it. You can't have war unless you want it, and nobody wants it, sez you. If they'd took that man Kingdom's warning—"

The man faded away. People were looking up at the sky, some cursing, weeping, shaking their fists, but others very silent. The impulse of panic had swept everybody away from the river, along the length of which the stupefying raid seemed to have swooped and vanished again.

"*Who is it?*"

Crystal caught sight of a familiar yellow sports-car hooting its way out of the narrow street by Scotland Yard where her footsteps had taken her. "Larry!" she called, a little faintly now.

She saw Larry's face, drawn and anxious with concern. He caught her, swept her inside.

"I was coming to look for you. You're not hurt, Crystal dear?"

"Not hurt. Does Shieling know who it is?"

"Not a notion. It's comic. We'll know soon enough, no doubt. They got Parliament, I believe. Quite badly. I've masks. We may need them because anything might happen tonight. We'll make for high ground. Hampstead Heath."

"Shieling?" asked Crystal, more to keep her thoughts steady than anything else.

"Shieling's washed out, with every other thing now," Larry's laugh was hard. "Never mentioned Kingdom. Had a job for me in London here. Propaganda. Old, old stuff. To counteract war-weariness, before the thing started. And now it's started."

"So—it'll be the air for you?"

"I'd rather it was. It'll be easier up there. Simpler. But not tonight. I'm going to look after you tonight, Crystal. Another man's wife."

"I don't feel like any man's wife," said Crystal. "Not even his. And it's not important now."

Midnight. Two o'clock. Four o'clock.

"No more tonight."

The whisper seemed to run among the thronged shadows. How many people were on the heights above London that night, nobody knew. But the panic was gone. The immortal soul had begun to stir again. Fires were burning in the little hollows. London, far below, sparkled under its marbled ceiling of white, shot with restless squadrons, sprayed by searchlight and floodlight.

"Are you quite warm, Crystal?"

"Yes, Larry."

IN the dimness of the car, Crystal saw the outlines of Larry's lean brown cheek. He had two gas-masks slung about him, and she shivered a little at the sight of them. Against that stuff John Kingdom had shown her on Martos, stuff which all the civilized nations had, gas-masks, she and he knew, were little use.

Kingdom. With war thundering up, they were talking about John Kingdom.

"Why did you marry him?" said Larry. "Oh, it's all crazy. You'll never see him again, Crystal."

"He said we both should." Crystal paused. "Don't try to boggle with your conscience, Larry—at this time. There's no need. You and I always loved each other. He knew it; he realized it so completely. And that was why I married him. You know he's a condemned man? What *does* it matter now?"

"Maybe we're condemned too. This wipes out everything. Even you and me. If they came again—look at those poor devils beating the air up there! And they're no use, no use. They can only go to an enemy city and do likewise."

He drew Crystal close, and she did not resist. Crystal's eyes were still steady and blue, and Larry loved every drop of blood in her—as, he supposed, men must continue to love women right up to the last crack of the Apocalypse. . . . John Kingdom had left her to him. And yet he still stood like a barrier between them in a world where all barriers were going down: That great madman who had failed!

"Wonder where Sally and Dick are?"

"Hush!" The radio of the car, which had been incoherent with mush from the tortured ether, began to speak with a human voice. They sat cold and upright, staring at the unseen voice.

"John Kingdom, John Kingdom. . . . John Kingdom's bulletin. John Kingdom made war-raids upon the cities of all the great Powers during the night, to give a foretaste of what will happen within a few days if their statesmen do not bring to an end the war in the Little Entente, and seek a lasting peace among themselves.

"In a week John Kingdom can destroy the vital parts of the capital cities. He prays the people of Europe to realize it before it is too late, and to finish the race of armaments and wipe suspicion from their Governments forever. Only the people can do it. The Governments will yield to the people."

A great crackling smashed out the voice. The summer dawn was very quiet save for that. A hundred thousand people preserved a thrilling silence up on the heights above London. A dazed and noiseless multitude waited for more. It did not come. It ceased, like the voice of some terrible god. There was the whine of newspaper-vans, the cries of newspaper boys, bringing the news of the death and destruction which came from the sky, yet was not war, but only a prophecy of it.

"Kingdom!"

THE dark multitude began to stir. As far as the eyes could see, the open heath seemed to move and awake out of a huddled, dream-haunted sleep. They were going down into London. Not marching, yet not a mob. Crystal found herself pressing her closed hand against her mouth, watching them. Some of them were laughing now, laughing strangely.

"Kingdom! Not war!"

"Let's go with them!" Crystal breathed. "Oh, let us, Larry!"

Neither of them had felt the power of humanity such as that was, before. It was hypnotic. They abandoned the car halfway into London. The streets were packed solid, but they were all moving one way—toward Whitehall where the Government offices were.

LET KINGDOM KNOW WE WANT WAR WITH NOBODY!

The banners had sprung from nowhere. They swayed above the surging

crowd that carried away the mounted police helplessly. The loud-speakers had begun. They were at every street corner since the first nitrous-oxide attacks which war had almost swept from the memory. It was a calm, suave, reassuring voice. Silence fell, to hear it.

"The miscreant John Kingdom commenced to terrorize the cities of Europe last night, with great loss of life and property. The British nation is assured that the Government has the matter well in hand. Every possible defence is ready against his insane attacks. The tradition of calmness in the face of a great menace will be maintained by people and Government alike. The early capture and punishment of Kingdom is certain."

A stone crashed into one of the loud-speakers near where Crystal and Larry stood, and smashed it. *"Waw, waw, waw,"* it said, and the silence ended in cockney laughter. Then again the crowd was moving.

"Stick close, Crystal darling," Larry said in a low voice.

"They're not dangerous," murmured Crystal. . . .

"They're not dangerous," said the man at the big window in Whitehall ten hours later, biting his underlip till it was white. "This is only a reaction. Panic. I'll grant, though, it's a very quiet panic."

"Tell them we're on Kingdom's track."

"I wouldn't tell them that," said Sir John Shieling, of Room D3 Scotland Yard.

The Prime Minister sat down. There was no formality about this Cabinet Meeting. Nine haggard men looked at each other. Only nine.

"Three of us gone," said heavy-jawed Sir Bertram Lancaster. "Well, I always thought there was something wrong with a war that left the old men and the politicians out of it. But this isn't war. It's Kingdom. Where's that police force? Don't answer. I know. It went out of commission as soon as the Little Entente started to fight."

"Started to destroy themselves," said the Prime Minister. "Why couldn't we foresee this? I don't mean Kingdom."

There was a silence, save for the mighty hum outside the windows.

"They know. There's no hoodwinking them. It's not a case of patriotism now. We don't want to start; nobody wants to start. Yet an incident, less than that Archduke—"

"The subject is Kingdom, sir," said Sir Bertram Lancaster. "There he is. And Europe is too cluttered up with war for any of us to find him."

"Tell them we surrender to Kingdom," somebody said.

The Prime Minister flushed. There was no diplomatic veneer in that room just then. But the old prides, the old inhibitions, still remained. If this had been war in earnest, that crowd would not have been outside. That was the bitter thing. One madman who showed them what war might be, had brought it about.

"I spoke in irony, Mr. Prime Minister. We can't yield to this mass panic."

Another silence that was painful, terrible. Save for the growing murmur and the drone of airplanes, which was now the sound of Europe breathing over the imminent.

"Is there no chance of getting him, Shieling?"

Sir John Shieling paused before his answer. His thoughts were on a young man, a dilettante in his department, whom he had seen the previous night, before Kingdom had loomed into the picture again and blotted out everything else. Larry Raeburn, Kingdom's protégé, once. He had never got to the bottom of Raeburn—had hardly thought it worth while, once war started. . . . Grimly, he smiled.

"Not before tonight. And Kingdom will be here every night. If we could trap him—get him to come here on a flag of truce! He's sincere, the lunatic, heaven knows."

The Prime Minister stepped to the window, flung it open, and stepped out on to the balcony, where a microphone stood. He was a master of simple and eloquent words, of a sentimental idealism of nationality which always rang sincere, never varied. He began to speak over the mighty silence, persuasively, eloquently. . . .

He did not go far. A low, impatient roar drowned it, swelled, menaced. It was Shieling who leaped out on to the balcony and pulled him inside.

ANDERTHAL, in Berlin, saw Unter den Linden laid in ruins and the Reichstag badly damaged. Beneath a gas-mask he sat in the cellar of his hotel while dying people outside cursed a treacherous France which had struck first. But Jacob Anderthal knew it was not France.

Something had happened to Jacob Anderthal. He hardly knew what it was

Troops were getting a machine-gun into position to enfilade the panic-stricken crowd.

himself, but he was no longer the playful gorilla. His nerves were in shreds. When it was all over, and he brought a pale and sweating face from out of the mask, he listened to John Kingdom's bulletin like a man tranced. He went out and saw what had happened—a little of it. His shaken secretaries brought him reports from the Little Entente, where the combatants were like two men, each paralyzed to a standstill at the beginning of their fight. It was not what he had pictured. He had pictured orderly war, and himself growing to a stature of power Kingdom had never dreamed of. An orderly Europe, destroying itself in an orderly manner, as it had done before!

He went to a building on the Alexanderplatz. His car was followed by two guardian machine-gun trucks. The house he entered was a citadel. The two men in plain shirts and breeches who received him looked as if made of tensile metal, but there was hysteria beneath it.

"This Kingdom: Some of the Government were killed last night. He is more important than France or Austria or any other business, at the moment. Where is he?"

"If I knew," said Anderthal, a little bloodshot, "would I be here now?"

They stared at him. Suspicion and hatred had been their bedmates for years, had first kept them under, then carried them to power. They had been sown in the wind of war, and it was in the whirlwind they had dreamed to reap their country anew. They were a living proof that there is no defeat, but only hatred.

"We forgot him. Everybody forgot him."

"A madman who can do nothing," said Anderthal quickly. "In a few days at the most he'll be run to earth. Every nation will be after him—"

"A few days! They won't stand it. And *Himmel,* how can the nations join together to run him to earth, when they're at daggers drawn? You talk like a Jew who can afford to wait."

"I am a Jew," said Anderthal, staring as icily as the other, "and I can afford to wait. I bid you good morning."

He seldom felt any pride of race. He had looked upon himself as an Ishmaelite, even from them, for many years. But he wished, now, that he had not left his father and his mother to die in the ghetto of Kiev, as few other Jews would have done. He wished he had been the kind of Jew who dowered hospitals, and once in five generations, perhaps, founded a great Jewish family. That might have helped the nations to be busy and prosperous.

It was good to dine early that evening with the young Baroness Anny Niemander. Perhaps, after all, it was the little Countess he missed. But he could not be a dancing-bear to this one. She treated everything lightly.

"We're all dead from the last war," said Anny. "So what does it matter? I have starved, and it was not too bad. The food and the champagne one got sometimes—like tonight—tasted all the nicer. The young men are all well-disciplined ghosts. So well-disciplined and well-armed that they could make the Government do anything."

"You have eyes like the blue of a glacier," said Anderthal, trying hard. But she was not like the little Countess.

"Have I? They're yours, if you like, and I will try to make them a little warmer in color." She laughed. "You shall take me somewhere away from the war. . . . Will he come again, tonight?"

"Kingdom? No!"

"You're frightened," said the Baroness Anny coolly, peeling a peach. "But of course you're not dead, as we others are. Kingdom may wake us up. We young ones, I mean."

"To surrender to him?" asked Anderthal slowly, and Anny shook her head, her mouth full of the luscious fruit.

"To come alive. To walk with the rest of the world and—do things. Things without gunpowder and the silly, silly rattle of the saber."

She was suddenly tired, listless. Her beauty faded. Outside, it was growing dark. The planes were wheeling, and the searchlights stabbing upward. Anny laughed again—older, mocking, though she seemed grateful for the dinner.

"I could love John Kingdom," she said, "though perhaps, tonight, he will kill me. Or on the other hand, it may be you."

That particular suggestion fascinated Anderthal all at once, with the same feeling that a man with an unsteady head looks down from heights. He was no coward, but the appalling irony of it, if it happened, went beyond rage.

"As you are old," said the Baroness Anny, whom he now hated, "he very likely will. He comes after the old ones, to dig them out of their holes. That's why I like him."

"You are charming."

"Dead," said Anny with a yawn, "dead people needn't be charming. It is nearly John Kingdom's hour."

HE escorted her to the street, and she passed out of his life with a kiss and a little grimace. Disappeared into the terror! For there was undoubtedly terror in Berlin. It was crushed with an iron hand that had somehow lost its strength. They were still trying to clear away the gas that spread out like a pestilence from Unter den Linden, and would do so for days. The white phosphorus still burned, and people still died in agony.

But there was a great mass demonstration in one of the squares—the Commander-in-chief to his troops. The Minister of War to the German people, on the eve of war.

It seemed to Anderthal that the sky was black and vibrant with patrolling machines. They neither reassured nor frightened him. He felt fatalistic. He could not keep away.

THE young were not all in their military uniforms—yet. They lined the square, dark-shirted, bare-headed, almost silent, disciplined. They marched under swastika banners from their barracks, gas-masks ready slung. But they were white and tense, not looking at the sky. . . . Had he wished, Anderthal could have had a place of honor near the steps of the great equestrian statue where the speakers sat. But he stayed among the other civilians. There was a man with a round white bullet-head, next to him. He leaned on a heavy stick, and laughed thickly.

"Ach, was! It is good meat for Kingdom or for war, whichever gets it first! They're not so lucky as I. I was in Belgium, and had a good time before I stopped one. These will get it in the neck before they know."

The loud-speakers were at it—barely audible above the thrum of the propellers overhead. Anderthal found himself staring at the sky, and vibrating in every nerve. The guttural voice on the loud-speaker seemed to falter too. The mailed fist could not beat out terror.

"They should find the spies," said the bullet-headed man querulously. "Kingdom has spies. Why not?"

Anderthal threaded his way deeper into the crowd. He noticed that the bullet-headed man, limping on his stick, followed him, stuck around. He looked the incarnation of malice.

"It must be war! Down near Potsdam they were rioting for peace this afternoon. No, let them taste it, the arrogant young jackanapes! This Kingdom must not stop it. . . . *And here he comes!"*

The man's voice rose to a scream. There was a wedge of swaying people all about Anderthal, and he suddenly cursed his temerity in coming among them. They were running all about him. Panic, piled up by discipline, had suddenly broken its banks, and some of the young dark-shirts were swept by it. . . . There was a shattering crash of rifle-fire; the bellowing voice on the loud-speaker fell away.

Anderthal was running with the rest. A bullet zipped past his ear and sent a

man ahead choking to the ground so that he stumbled over him. His fatalism had gone, for he knew that it was none of Kingdom's stratosphere planes, but only stark terror, and a nervous officer who had given orders to fire. Always his nightmare had been of such a crowd. It was some complex from his hunted youth. They jostled him, thrust him, swept him. In the wide *Strasse* under the brilliant arc-lamps, he could see that troops were getting a machine-gun into position to enfilade the panic. It began to spit, and he swung for shelter into the open gates of a park, where were blackness and some bushes. And then again he was afraid of Kingdom, Kingdom who had always made him feel a clumsy fool, a blunderer, without saying a word. A very agony of humiliation made him wave his arms to the sky, knowing all the time that Kingdom was not there.

"A spy! Kingdom's spy!"

It was the bullet-headed man, limping grotesquely. The creature had kept close to his heels. He came on with his eyes slit and glistening, lifted his stick. Some turned to look, and ran on again as the machine-gun stuttered.

"Fool! I am Anderthal!" the other cried in desperation.

"Anderthal! Kingdom's partner. A Jew, a Jew spy! I knew it!"

The man was on him with the blackthorn stick. Half-blind and bleeding, he grappled with his attacker. An insane, humiliated fury was in him.

In some unknown Berlin park, Jacob Anderthal, beaten to death—just as he might have been by Cossacks as a ragged boy—and John Kingdom's hand still stretching over the world!

While the machine-gun rattled, and terror ran past in swift shadows, Jacob Anderthal and the unknown cripple of an old war fought on the soft grass. The stick thudded to his temple, and the cripple went on beating.

And when John Kingdom came, just before midnight, which was three hours later, Jacob Anderthal had not moved in the bushes where he lay.

WHILE John Kingdom rained his warning fire and gases again on the already gaping wound which had been Berlin's fairest street, a number of men who were brave at most times were locked behind stone and steel, with cold sweat on their brows. It was not John Kingdom they feared just then. It was the iron discipline that had turned to rend them, the brute force and brute dreams which they had nursed that swept in a tremendous backwash against their shelter, while the machine-guns and the howitzers which were not John Kingdom's were at work in the reddest night Berlin had ever seen.

The strato-planes vanished. But the machine-guns and the howitzers kept on.

NO sleep. Every one of the twenty-four hours John Kingdom was coldly, dynamically alive. No glowing enthusiasm or godlike dreams for the world now. The sword-blade, when it was striking, did not dream. He had never been religious. It might be that his soul was damned in the hereafter. But that was a matter for the hereafter to judge.

He sat at his desk in the villa of Martos. The sun, streaming through the window, put no color on his carved gray head, his immobile gray face. Leontov, the Russian, stood before him with hollow sockets for eyes, and a tight mouth that twitched out of his control now and then.

"It is murder," he said draggingly; "and I, for one, cannot go on. It is not fear of death. If you shoot me, I want no bandage across my eyes."

"I sha'n't shoot you," John Kingdom said. "It is murder, as you say. So is war."

He inclined his head, looked at the young man with a momentary gleam of pity. Then was stone again.

"There's some one to take your place?"

Leontov nodded dumbly. He was a man in purgatory. Kingdom spoke again. He did not reach out any hand to comfort, though he understood.

"No dealing judgment on yourself, Leontov!" Like the crack of a whip, then: "I need everybody. You may go."

Neither praise nor blame. An instrument lost its edge, and he put it aside. He forgot Leontov an instant later. He knew the ordeal was terrible, had known it would be. That link in the chain he had also tested, long before, and realized it to be the weakest. In war, there was wine and, not seldom, women, both good and bad, to help. And excitement, the fear of the enemy. Here there was no fear of the enemy—yet. And if the enemy found them, the fear would not last long.

Laboratory and workshop, when he went through them, satisfied him. The

strain was not so much there. His scientists and engineers could lose themselves in their work, as their counterparts out in the world, mild and humane men, who were like delighted children when they succeeded, also could. When history wrote of John Kingdom, it would marvel at the simplicity of his organization. But when it was written, the stratosphere would be conquered and they would understand. The rest was chemistry, and that was known already. The countries of the Little Entente knew it.

None other of his airmen had given way yet. He saw that. Their youth was gone, but it would come back when it was all over. Once he had waved his hand to them in boyish greeting and loved to see their eyes light at his presence. He had forgotten that.

They relaxed when he went away. He knew that, without turning. An iron discipline, built on the old hero-worship. Stronger, better now.

The radio cabin, with its chirping voices. His unnatural calm always rocked a little when he entered it. There might be some message to John Kingdom from the nations—his own bulletin always went down from the stratosphere. It was safer that way.

"In little more than a week the countries of the Little Entente are devastated by the air-war. . . . The armies on both sides are powerless against attack from the air. . . . It is suggested in Washington that America call a conference of both sides, since no move appears to be possible among the European powers. . . . There were Kingdom riots in Paris and Berlin yesterday."

"Kingdom riots!"

Something had frozen within him, and he had forgotten how to smile. In the room of the villa where Chundra Dah had set a meal, the photograph of Crystal Templeton, which had stood on the cabinet, was not there now. He had put it away.

HE had finished, and was sitting musingly for some time before he became aware of Chundra standing there. The dark, soft glance of the Babu was fixed upon him. He could feel that doglike devotion, that fakirlike reading of his soul.

"The head never troubles you now, sir?"

"Not now, Chundra."

"And presently the end will come. Who can say what it will be? Save that it will be the end."

"For me? We both know that."

Chundra's eyes were limpid. He dropped on one knee, and it was neither clumsy nor theatrical; but just a dignified Oriental gesture.

"I wish not to see the end, sir, if you please. I would take departure, as promised, if you have finished with me. And I perceive that is so."

KINGDOM looked at him. Long ago he had known Chundra had some sort of prescience. And what the Babu said was true. He needed Chundra no longer. Presently, please God—if God was still on his side, as he had believed before he grew stone-cold—he would need nobody but himself. Or else he would be dead.

"No prophecy, Chundra?"

"None, sir."

"Money?"

"I have saved money, sir. In the East, where I spend the sunset, money is practically superfluous. But if I may, I will beg one of the periscope mirrors from the work-shops. For a Holy Man in the East—which pursuit I propose to resume—it will be valuable. First, though, I may take a little holiday."

Chundra rose to his feet again. They looked at each other as man to man. And Chundra did just one more Oriental thing. He took John Kingdom's hand and placed it to his forehead.

"The end, Chundra. It's better without prophecy. Both you and I walk alone," Kingdom said. . . . And he forgot Chundra, as Chundra had known he would.

It was not the Chundra Dah who had once all but beaten his breast over the suicide of his dear master in the Villa Marigolda, who passed noiselessly out of the room. He went to the workshop and begged one of the deep crystal mirrors in its bright aluminum cup, wrapped it up very carefully and placed it in a small portmanteau.

Nor did he take farewell of any other person on Martos. By night he stole out of the harbor-cleft in one of the electric launches and went through the quiet darkness of the Ægean until the batteries were exhausted. Noon next day revealed an Indian gentleman with a large handkerchief under his hat to shield his head from the sun, placidly floating on the swell which ran like shimmering silk into the Gulf of Athens. To

the Greek seaplane which dropped down to investigate, he explained. A wealthy Indian gentleman leisurely traveling to Europe, he had foolishly gone ashore at Crete and missed his liner, tried to go in chase, and this was the result. Was Athens very far?

NO one saw Chundra Dah leave Athens. He did not go East, where the sunset of his life awaited. In the seventh Kingdom raid on a hysterical Paris, a gently abdominal figure, whose face was hidden in a gas-mask like the rest of the nightmare figures about him, watched the destruction from the heights of Montparnasse.

"It does not seem necessary to wear this," observed Chundra to the man by his side, taking off his mask. "This *méchant* Kingdom confines his activities."

The shaking and muffled voice answered out of the inhuman face.

"To one-half square mile. And on that he has rained all the fires of hell, every night. You are only just come to Paris? It is a good sight-seeing, for one of your color, m'sieur, to be sure. It will make you proud that you are not white. This is what we proposed to do to each other."

"You are crying," said Chundra gently. "It is not easy, in a gas-mask. Rest assured, he will be caught and hanged."

"We do not cry about Kingdom," said the mask fiercely. . . .

The raid ended. The quick and almost noiseless blows that mushed and battered and poisoned for half a mile round where the Quai D'Orsay had stood, ceased after five minutes. There were no airplanes to challenge the raider. Above that sulphurous pit no machine dared go. Chundra, going buoyantly down, saw the squadrons streaming in feeble pursuit.

But Paris was busy with other things. There was a multitude gathered in the Bois de Boulogne. Women, as well as men. Women by the thousands, and some of them looked like *pétroleuses* of the Revolution. There were soldiers and phalanxes of machine-guns, and horsemen of the Republican Guard. But the guns were silent, the sabers in their scabbards.

Outside a great white building not far away, stood a larger multitude still. They were very quiet—waiting, watching the balcony upon which a floodlight poured. Now and then a long sigh, a low murmur. Panic had passed, and something deeper, more poignant, had come.

An Indian gentleman, taking his last look at Western civilization, with a gas-mask slung over his portly shoulders, was in the crowd. Wherever he was, at fair or funeral, Chundra Dah's mild and pleasant personality mingled well. And his French, as well as half a dozen other languages, was excellent. When an old woman by his side took a handkerchief to her eyes, he raised his hat.

"Pardon! I am but a dark stranger. It is confusing. This is to demand the capture and punishment of this Kingdom, no doubt?"

"Fool! He is too great for them ever to put their little hands on. He is dead; and God is using him, that is obvious," said the woman, crossing herself.

"*Merci bien!*" said Chundra Dah, raising his hat again.

THERE was somebody on the balcony, a small fiery figure which came forward in an almost deathly silence. The loud-speakers brought his voice:

"I tell the nations, and I tell all others"—the clipped beard seemed to tilt a little, as though the face looked fiercely skyward for an instant—"that France does not want war. France is content. Tomorrow, France would agree to put down her arms with other nations. But it cannot be at the dictation of one man, however powerfully the evil one has armed him. Let Kingdom cease to destroy our Paris, and we will parley with whoever will listen. Till then, we defy Kingdom!"

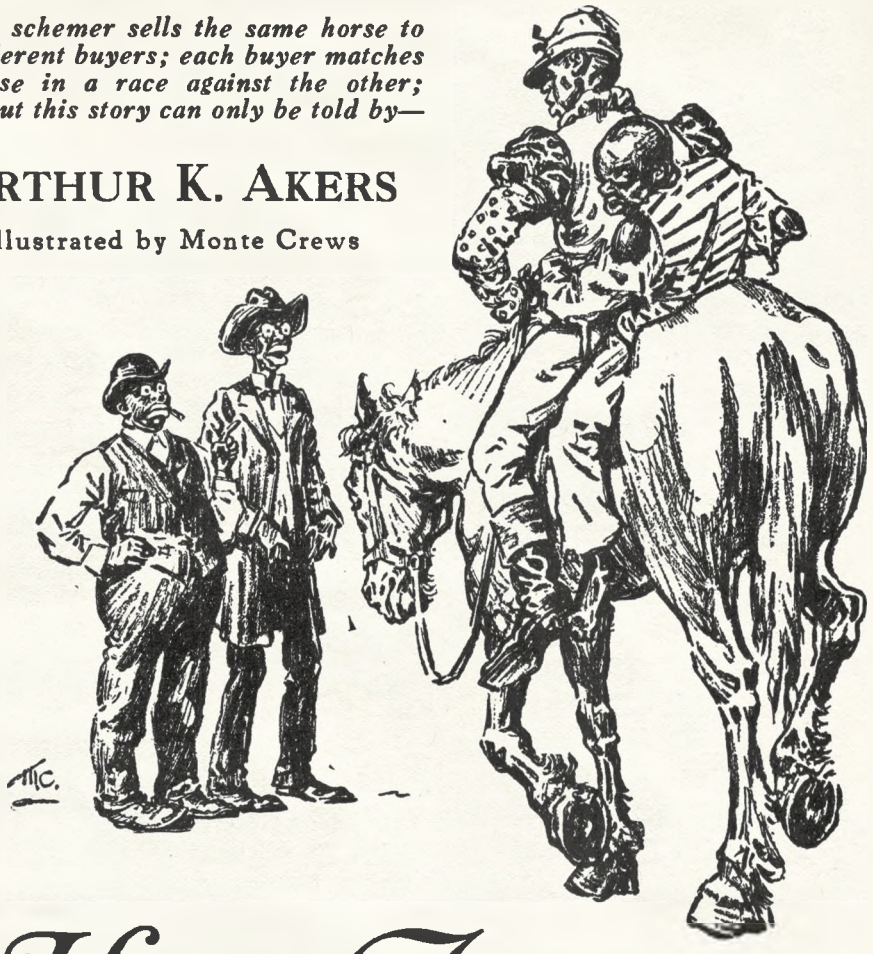
He stopped. The floodlight etched him as, with both hands on the rail of the balcony, he looked over the crowd. A little, foolish man he looked to Chundra Dah, at once very brave and very frightened, with the white light making him look paler than he probably was. There was one shout from the crowd; and Chundra Dah, whose experience had ranged round the globe from Suez to Saskatchewan, had never heard anything like it. The shot that followed seemed a mere anticlimax. The little man clenched his hands at the sky as he reeled back, and somebody dragged him through the open window.

The tremendous climax of this remarkable story will appear in the next, the November, issue.

A dark schemer sells the same horse to two different buyers; each buyer matches his horse in a race against the other; then—but this story can only be told by—

ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Monte Crews



Horse-Feathers

EVERY time dusky "Double-egg" Howe listened to his wife Anthrax, his business got in a jam. But every time he didn't listen, skillets got to buzzing about his skull. As now:

"Tells you I wins de horse in a raffle!" squalled Mr. Howe defensively from his huddle against the kitchen wall. "Pays a boy from Selma fifty cents for de ticket what win him!"

"Anybody what wins *dat* horse, loses!" the shrill and scrawny Anthrax covered that point too. "Here you aint had him but two days, and he done et you poor a'ready! Keeps tellin' you I craves a car: and what is you do? Fotch home a horse! Besides, how you know dat boy was from Selma? How you know it his horse? How you—"

"Poor *before* I gits him, account Willie Freeman aint pay off," Mr. Howe blundered toward an exit.

It was the wrong answer. A wâffle-iron clanged against the wall near his head. "And you lendin' Willie Freeman dem forty dollars was de *other* place you was dumb in de knob!" Anthrax lumped Willie with the horse as an asset. "Why aint he pay off?"

"Married woman's husband fixin' to mess Willie up; Samson G. Bates tell Willie a boy in his fix need one dem accident-insurance policies he's sellin' what pays off at de bedside. Willie borrows de forty off me and buy hisself de policy. . . . But de cops git dat gal's husband for bigamy; and dat leave Willie widout no way to git crippled and collect—"

"Boy what's gwine need dat kind of policy in a minute more is *you*—is you still round here!" interrupted Anthrax significantly.

Mr. Howe took the hint with both feet —bringing him face to face with his

horse, whereupon a bargain began to look like a calamity on four legs. "Old *car* aint burn gas standin' still!" he drew a comparison that stung him. "Got to git shet of you, horse, 'fore your dinner-bell starts ringin' some more."

THIS brought up again the difficulty of disposing of a horse in an automobile age. Anthrax's craving for a car was but symptomatic. Mr. Howe was still stuck for a solution—when Amos Bowser, the junk-buying boy, unwittingly provided it.

"Keep lookin' like dat, and white folks liable to shoot you, to save chloroform," Mr. Bowser strove to be helpful.

"Feels like I looks—every time starts studyin' dis here horse."

"Heaps of things aint bad as dey looks," Amos' mind strayed to shop. "Like dat border-line case I gits down to de junk-yard dis mornin'."

"How-come 'border-line'?"

"Buys a wreck 'as is'—by de pound—and finds out it'll still run. So I's aimin' now to sell it for a car."

"Gwine be a wreck myself—instead of Willie—is I aint git a car before long," Mr. Howe unhappily recalled his wife.

"Why aint you buy dis here car I been tellin' you about?" salesmanship stirred.

"Buy it wid what?"

"Twenty-four dollars, cash money."

For Double-egg a dream came walking: If Willie would but repay that forty— But just here the dream walked out on Mr. Howe—boys like Willie were what kept boys like Double-egg in the red. "Talk to you, is I could sell dis here horse," he indicated the remoteness of any deal.

"Why aint you git out and circulate wid him, den? Expose de horse to a sale. All time some fool buyin' hisself a horse," persisted Amos.

Double-egg winced sharply at the reference but could not blink at its wisdom.

"Hoss, git vigorous! Play down dem spavins. Us fixin' to circulate!" he reached for the halter of his equine albatross.

Horse in tow, Mr. Howe forthwith attracted attention, but no buyers, until he had shuffled disconsolately into somnolent Hogan's Alley. Then everything grew different, with the advent of one "Loose-change" Jackson.

The lanky but sinewy Mr. Jackson was at the moment using the alley as the main exit from an African-golf game. In that "risk-ruckus" money invariably burned his pants, and now he had money; gobs of it—fifteen dollars, to be exact—burning to be spent.

"Boy, whar at you gwine wid de camel?" Loose-change eyed Double-egg and his tow indistinctly through the combined auras of gin and triumph.

"Aint no camel—hit's a horse," corrected Mr. Howe sadly.

"Looked like a camel from here," Mr. Jackson insisted alcoholically.

"You must been lookin' at his appetite," bitterness obscured salesmanship in an owner.

"Been aimin' for de last couple of minutes to git me a good horse," Loose-change startled a seller who had stepped out of character.

"Boy, *you's fixin' to!*" Mr. Howe recovered rapidly.

"Looks like 'bout a fifteen-dollar horse to me. How long you had him?"

"*You* done had him ever since you started talkin'!" Double-egg brushed trivial details aside. Subtraction of four-bits for the raffle-ticket from fifteen dollars for the horse was proving in the very teeth of Anthrax the hitherto unprovable—that Double-egg was a business-man when he got started! "I throws in de halter, and here's your horse."

"Aint buy cash-and-carry," Loose-change demurred, opening invisible doors to unseen complication. "I pays cash, but you carries—delivers de horse for me."

"Delivers free widin hundred miles," Double-egg quoted verbatim a department-store advertising slogan.

"Aint crave no hundred miles: wants him took and parked in 'Poleon Nash's stable. Tell 'Poleon keep him till I come for him—or sends."

WITH Mr. Jackson's purchase-money in his own pocket now, Mr. Howe stepped on air. As a business-man, all that he lacked was an audience, and already he saw one coming, even if it were just one man.

"Horse, strut yourself!" directed an ex-owner. "Wants you to pass Germicide Hill, comin' yonder, wid your neck out!"

But the muscular Mr. Hill was not to be passed. Rather, "Hold on dar!" he hailed Double-egg peremptorily. "Whar you gwine wid dat horse?"

"Takin' him to de stable."

"Lemme look at him." Something seemed on Germicide's mind. "Whar you git him?"

"Old hoss aint nothin' *but* looks—and speed. Do a mile in nothin', flat, when he feelin' good!" Fifteen dollars went to a boy's tongue when fourteen-fifty of it was profit! "Gits him in a raffle, off a nigger say he from Selma."

Mr. Hill was casting a critical eye over the horse. "Aint much horse," he concluded disparagingly.

"He aint? Why, a boy jest gimme—Uh, got to git on wid him," Mr. Howe checked himself barely in time.

"Wait a minute: how much you want for him?"

Double-egg's startled gulp gave business time to beat conscience to his mouth by a fraction. "Dat's a fifteen-dollar horse," he stuck to the truth by a straddle.

"Nine and a half," countered Mr. Hill coldly. But he didn't leave.

Addition finished the job—and Mr. Howe! Fifteen and nine-fifty were twenty-four fifty . . . enough to cover the cost of that raffle-ticket and Amos' proffered car! Already Double-egg could hear Anthrax shutting up about his business ability. St. Anthony never had *seen* any temptation—

"Make faces and gag round here all day, and I still aint give you but nine-fifty for dat plug," Germicide impatiently misunderstood the seller's symptoms. "What you got, de whoopin'-cough?"

"Tryin' make up my mind part wid de horse," wheezed Mr. Howe truthfully. "But you gits him. Throws in de halter free, for cash."

"You gwine need de halter." Mr. Hill had never looked more fit physically, it came over Double-egg as he eyed alternately his buyer and his future.

"Need it for what?" he queried feebly. Loose-change was no bantam-weight—

"To carry my horse to de stable wid. I pays off for him, but you delivers him." Mr. Hill paid, and again Double-egg pocketed a profit.

"Delivers him whar?" Around a boy's knees it felt like winter was early this year. Keep on like this, and who owned old horse would be getting complicated!

"To 'Poleon Nash's stable. Tell him I calls for him. —What ailin' you, boy—you got de pip?"

"Kind of chokes on my business,"

"Why aint you git out and expose de horse to a sale? All time some fool buyin' hisself a horse," Amos advised. Double-egg winced sharply.

gurgled the seller in self-defense. Old recovery was rushing a boy—two sales of the same horse, and already too late now to say anything about it!

But, reflected Mr. Howe, as self and horse got under way again, the thing to do was let each day sit on its own bottom. Worrying about tomorrow was what kept the white folks in a fidget all the time. Now all a boy had to do was to park old horse in Napoleon's stable

and forget the muscular Germicide and the sinewy Loose-change, while he showed Anthrax what a good day's work at the altar really looked like! Anybody could sell a horse *once,* but it took a genius to sell him twice. With a car all set in Amos' junk-yard with which to drive up and prove it!

At the stable of Mr. Nash inspiration stepped into the sole remaining breach. The preachers were right: all a boy had to do was tell the truth and stick to it. "Leavin' dis here horse wid you for a couple of boys what owns him," Double-egg said truthfully.

Amos Bowser had had little more than time to reach his junk-yard when recovery set in there, too. As the horseless Mr. Howe hove in sight, Amos marshaled a new sales-point for his reception: "Nine gallons of gas in dat car's tank when she hit de tree; and it still in dar," he spread it temptingly.

Double-egg gulped: he had been worrying about gas, but nowadays difficulties no sooner presented themselves than they got solved. The thing to do with luck like this was to push it!

"Git my car started," he issued commands and currency simultaneously. "Rearin' to ride!"

"Sellin' it to you *as is,*" Mr. Bowser covered his commercial rear as he slid from beneath the steering-wheel.

"Aint buy nothin' no other way!" Double-egg couldn't wait to get to Anthrax with this proof of his commercial prowess. "Chickens, stand back and gimme de road!"

And on his noisy arrival in Kaufman's Alley at dusk, there was no question of Anthrax being impressed. For the first time in nearly forty years, she was all but speechless. Double-egg saw he had so managed his business that when she gained a car she lost a war! Nothing shut a woman up like having what she had been hollering for! Old dove was fixing to alight on what had long been strange territory.

As a car-owner and consequent head of his own house, Mr. Howe put his feet on the table and indicated preferences for supper. Anthrax drew down the corners of her mouth in a way that had once meant squalls from Hatteras to breakfast, but didn't mean anything now—not with old car parked out front!

Double-egg surrounded food and went to bed with his shoes on. Morning would be soon enough to finish telling Anthrax where she got off in future. And if morning was also the time that Loose-change, Germicide and Napoleon started trying to sort out the tangled ownership of that horse in the latter's stable, that too was tomorrow's business. . . .

Sounds and smells indicated morning. Mr. Howe stretched sleepily. Anthrax was already up and preparing breakfast. Double-egg loosed a lusty summons. An inquiring head was thrust around the half-open kitchen door.

"Craves my breakfast in bed!" a husband took up where he had left off the night before.

"Let out another crack like dat, and you gets it in your *face!*" Anthrax wasn't as tame as he figured on, it seemed.

"And I makes up my mind whar I rides to, while I eats," Mr. Howe held out for masculine dominance.

"Yeah? Well, I done made up your mind whar *I* rides a'ready," disaffection without details further marred the morning.

"Rides whar?" Double-egg was patient with insubordination until he got his feet under him.

"To de races."

Mr. Howe blinked. "Says *huh?*"

"Says me and you gwine ridin' to de racin' dis evenin'."

"Woman, you says words widout sense. *What* racin'?"

"*Hoss*-racin'. To settle big argument couple of boys gits into at Bees'-knees' barbecue-stand last night while you is sawin' off all dem snores."

Squeals of the back-seat drivers gave Double-egg his first intimation of his mishap. "Aint see him till he's flyin' through de air!" came the defensive falsetto of Mr. Howe.

"Aint know nothin' about no argument—"

"Nor nothin' else! Argument's between Loose-change and Germicide Hill —about which one of dey new horses is fastest. —*What eatin' on you, nigger?*"

Mr. Howe's ashen jaw seemed to have frozen and become in grave danger of dropping off, while his eyes widened until they practically met. "F-f-fast what?" he croaked as icy fears fumbled at his heart.

"Horse. Both bought a horse; and both gits to braggin' about how fast *his* horse is. So dey gits up a race to prove it. Up by de cement-works at four 'clock dis evenin'. Everybody gwine to it: specially me and you."

Double-egg's symptoms grew complicated. The first boy those two brawny buyers would start looking for when the facts about that horse-deal emerged would be him!

"Rally dat jaw! Looks like *you'd* had de accident, wid *Willie* got de policy!" snapped Anthrax, in whom that breakfast-in-bed business rankled.

"Somethin' I et aint suit me!" dissembled Mr. Howe from his bedside.

"Somethin' I married aint suit *me!*" Anthrax resumed reoccupation of lost territory. "Climb into dem pants now, and start washin' my car good for de races."

"Wash it soon as I sees a man," Mr. Howe clutched at the only straw in sight. Policy or no policy, Willie must repay him now, so he could refund—

"Sees him on a empty stomach den!" Anthrax took a still firmer grip on the situation and on a frying-pan.

"I couldn't feel no wuss, was I pizened!" shuddered a business-man facing a future that hadn't even uncertainty now to recommend it. For nothing was more certain than the demand he was fixing to be in when a couple of big boys grasped the fact that he had sold them both the same horse.

The first sign of any change in Mr. Howe's luck came a few blocks from his house as he glimpsed what seemed at first blush a pile of clothing moving painfully up the alley under its own power. A parting of the pile, however, revealed a squat and depressed-looking darky underneath—Willie Freeman, the pants-pressing boy and Double-egg's leading *Account Receivable*.

"Hold on! Whar you gwine, Willie?" The first hopeful note since dawn tinged Mr. Howe's hail.

"Gwine out of business. Takin' all dese here suits to Samson's new shop."

"Gwine out of *what?*" Double-egg's future re-darkened. "Looks like you got more business dan you can travel under, now!"

"Dat's how-come," mourned Mr. Freeman. "Samson G. Bates done git my eagle jerked out from under me—for chiselin' on the pants-pressin' code, Samson tell de 'ministrator white-folks. After he done sell me dat accident-policy for all my money—"

"*My money,* you means!"

"—Shets *me* up, den *opens pressin'-shop hisself!*" Mr. Bates' baleful motive finished emerging in all its ugliness.

"Sho is!" croaked Double-egg above the grave of his forty dollars.

"Mess wid me again," Mr. Freeman's peeve rose to a still higher pitch under his wrongs and his ex-clients' clothes, "and I gits myself in a accident, jest to git even wid him. . . . 'Pays off at de bedside,' old policy say!"

MR. HOWE perceived himself busy barking up an empty tree. With Willie definitely wiped off as an asset, his earlier hope of escaping his doom by refunding his buyers the price of his horse was dashed to earth.

Lower than the barnacle on a battleship's bottom, Mr. Howe dragged himself homeward. His route lay through Decatur Street, already a-cackle with delighted gossip. The coming contest had stirred Decatur Street to its shallow depths. "Fishface Carter gwine ride Loose-change's hoss," rang one inescapable fragment of its excited chatter. "Fishface aint no jockey; wait till you see Monk Stanford on Germicide's hoss!" came painful answer. "Cain't git nothin' but even money, Bees'-knees say both dem horses so good. . . . 'Poleon Nash got hisself CWA job workin' de road—done gone off and left both dem horses locked up in his stable; so cain't nobody git in to 'em till he come back," further details harrowed. For this last item meant that when exposure came it would be public—in the open, at the race-track! Selling the same horse twice had never looked worse, from the standpoint of the seller's health!

RELUCTANT arrival at the house of Howe revealed Anthrax in soul-sickening preparation for social conquest at the impending Roman holiday. To make things worse, four of the alley's leading back-seat drivers had already arrived, by invitation of Anthrax.

"Make haste and step on yourself, business-man!" she opened fire before she could see the whites of his anguished eyes.

"Aint no rush," countered Double-egg gloomily. "Race aint for hour yit."

"Aims to ride round a spell!" Anthrax revealed her objective. "Past some dem women been high-hattin' me about not havin' no car. Takes Fish Alley first."

Outnumbered, outvoted, and unsung, Double-egg got his machine into clamorous motion. Old nine gallons of gas was liable to weaken before he needed it in a get-away, if this kept up!

Driving deeper into Baptist Hill, Mr. Howe got his first real inkling of what a horse-trade could develop into. The Hill was literally a-boil with interest in the coming contest of speed between the respective stables of those two racing kings, Loose-change and Germicide.

Into the thick of this milling, vociferous throng, Anthrax directed her car. "—And run over dem niggers, is dey aint git out de way and let a lady by!" she betrayed how rapidly pedestrian blood can become diluted with gasoline, given the chance.

"Sho, run over 'em!" dilution extended to the back-seat drivers.

"Runs over nobody," grumbled Mr. Howe obstinately. If Anthrax wanted it, from now on he was against it.

"Mumbles which?"

"Mumbles nothin', copious."

"Honk de horn. Make 'em move over!" Anthrax was prominent on wheels.

"Honks till old horn sheds a tonsil, is it shet *you* up!" The surrounding confusion made repartee safe for husbands.

Left and right the crowd parted before him, until, like some victorious and vindicated Cæsar, even the imperiled Mr. Howe felt a faint glow of pride, and gave his chariot a real shot of gas.

Then it happened!

Spread-eagling off at an angle from his front bumper, shot something that looked like a suit of blue clothes in full flight, to land in a flattened huddle midway between car and curb. Squeals of the back-seat drivers gave Double-egg his first intimation of the nature of his mishap—the blue suit was inhabited!

"Double-egg done run over somebody!" His back-seaters started it, and the whole Hill seemed to take it up.

Instantly the street was in new turmoil, with two focal points—Double-egg's car and Double-egg's victim. *"Aint see him till he's flyin' through de air! Runned right in front of me!"* came the defensive falsetto of Mr. Howe, to be swallowed by the clamor of the rear-rankers in the crowd: "Who he hit? Who he run over?"

"Double-egg Howe done run over Willie Freeman—"

WILLIE FREEMAN? Horror curled up Mr. Howe like a bait-worm on a hot rock. His knoblike eyes revolved wildly as the embittered Anthrax' tongue swept into words that were already his thoughts.

"Dar you is!" she raised preliminary blisters on her lord with it, with half of Baptist Hill as her audience. "Businessman, aint you! Bringin' home a car and bellerin' for breakfast in bed! Den what you do wid car when you gits it? Runs over de only boy on Gawd's earth what owes you money! Forty dollars . . . and you got to run over and ruin *him*, so he cain't *never* pay you now!"

"Samson done ruint him first, nohow!" The incidents of the accident-policy premium, the eagle, and the competing shop of Samson G. Bates arose before Mr. Howe in rebuttal. But too late—interrupting movement around the prostrate victim distracted any attention Anthrax had gained.

"Willie comin' to!" ran excited incredulity.

"What I wants to know is, how dey *tell* it when Willie's to?" Anthrax's relief took a new tack.

Clangor of Sim Silver's ambulance coming after its first case in months provided new thrills—and a new opening through the crowd. "Git on to de racetrack, runt, while you got a chance!" Anthrax's hit-and-run blood surged, albeit delayed, to the surface.

For once a husband was in full accord. Mr. Howe got on—to find the throng at the impromptu track gave no hint that Baptist Hill was still heavily inhabited. For again the grapevine telegraph of darkydom had been giving the radio lessons in how to spread the news. Seemingly all Marengo County was there! Professor Alex Dinghouse's one-man band was there, booming, braying and blaring madly beside the improvised judges' stand. Sim Silver was there, doing a land-office business hauling passengers to the races in his hearse. Double-egg saw and shivered. Fishface Carter and Monk Stanford, it was reliably and volubly reported, were gone now to the stable for the horses. Double-egg shivered some more—at that plural.

The racing kings Loose-change Jackson and Germicide Hill were there—each surrounded by open-mouthed admirers as they bragged endlessly about the excellencies of their respective steeds.

Bees'-knees Thompson was there, seeking odds and finding them. Also giving out detailed descriptions of the horses, unhampered by the facts. One was bay, the other black, and both were fast, was the gist of his broadcast.

From low in his overalls, Mr. Howe, cause of it all, surveyed the broad back of Mr. Hill, the long legs of Mr. Jackson, and an ague swept him; he moved so he couldn't see the hearse.

Strangers were increasingly evident—the news must have traveled far. One was peculiarly in the forefront—a worried-looking six-footer with the appearance of having lost his lunch-money somewhere on the grounds. Double-egg couldn't account any other way for such continual searching.

THEN speculation about the stranger was interrupted by a rising murmur on the outskirts of the crowd. Shouts, whistles, giggles, indicated something important in the wind, in the direction of the stable of Napoleon Nash.

The uproar mounted, ran like a wave through the throng as it parted. Words became distinguishable: "Here dey come! Here dey come!" The plural was unmistakable, but also inexplicable. Double-egg winced and squirmed and sweated. That plural was going to get singular in a minute, and when it did he was going to be in the jam of his life!

"Here dey come!" The spectators parted ecstatically. Mr. Howe glanced, gasped, and gazed petrified at what he beheld—the rival jockeys, Fishface and Monk, both riding the same horse!

Two riders with but a single horse!

Double-egg staggered dizzily. But staggered was no word for what the revelation did to the racing kings. Consternation flamed into rage. "What dat Monk doin' ridin' *my* hoss, Fishface?" Mr. Jackson's opening bellow collided with Mr. Hill's: "What Fishface doin' on *my* hoss, Monk?"

"Huh? *Huh?* You hold him, Germicide, while I takes off my coat!" raved Mr. Jackson.

Double-egg glanced wildly about him for escape—only to encounter the sight

"Sho is obleeged to you, Double-egg, for gittin' me even wid Samson," astoundingly spoke this wreck of Willie.

of Anthrax clouding up like a thundersquall in the west as the source of her car was for the first time revealed to her in all its hideousness.

" 'Poleon Nash pourin' water over his head still, tryin' to understand it," two baffled jockeys laid their own perplexity in larger mental laps than theirs.

But employers were naturally faster in the head than employees. As Mr. Jackson whirled on Mr. Hill, Mr. Hill turned savagely upon the unhappy Mr. Howe. And Mr. Howe whirled upon heels that yearned for distance—and were stayed only by two heavy hands that fell strongly and simultaneously upon his shoulders.

"Whar you git dis hoss, Loosechange?" Germicide fired a sickening question across Double-egg's stricken form.

"*Buys* him. From Double-egg, here—for fifteen bucks, cash money. Whar *you* git him?"

"*Buys* him. From Double-egg—for nine dollars and a half."

Mr. Howe squeaked, shuddered. The crowd pressed delightedly about. If a horse could not race *himself*, a massacre would answer admirably as a thrilling substitute for the race! All of which produced a situation so tense, a ringside congestion so enthralling, that it was with the greatest difficulty that a worried-looking six-foot darky, a stranger, pushed his way to where Germicide was now shaking Mr. Howe like a terrier shakes a rat. He was waving a paper as he came.

"Here, what all de rumpus about?" demanded this newcomer arrestingly.

"Tryin' to sort out which one of us own dis here horse!" Mr. Hill barked over his shoulder above the rattle of Double-egg's back teeth.

"Well, saves you de trouble of dat,"—

the six-footer was grimly unfolding his paper,—"becaze *I* owns dis horse!"

"Says *huh?*" Even Double-egg joined the startled chorus of turfmen.

"Says *I* owns dis horse! Here de police-paper wid his picture on it and everything, tellin' how he was stole from me, over by Selma. I jest gits word a boy had come through here rafflin' off my horse. And now I got him back—"

The strangled squawk of Mr. Howe moaned beneath a brassy sky. A new angle to his operations ravaged the recesses of his soul. Wait till Anthrax heard this!

But Anthrax had heard—even as the stranger reached for his horse's halter, and Germicide Hill reached for Double-egg's throat, while Loose-change loomed bloodthirstily between him and any hope of flight *via* his car.

"Boy," the voice in Mr. Howe's ear was that of Germicide, "jest one thing now gwine keep lilies from coverin' up dem footprints of gravy on yo' vest!"

"W-what dat?" gibbered Mr. Howe.

"Givin' me back my money—quick!"

"Me too! Snappy," concurred Mr. Jackson, in the face of the police circular. Thus shutting a door upon Mr. Howe before it had even opened, and leaving his very soul caught agonizingly, audibly, in its spiritual crack. He couldn't refund what he had already spent, for Anthrax's car!

Then Double-egg had an idea. "Aint got no *money*," he seized the other if equally hot horn of his dilemma, "but gives you boys my car instead—"

THE instant battle-snort of Anthrax was obscured by the attitude of a couple of horse-buyers making the best of a bad bargain, as their now ex-horse was being led off.

"Takes de car conditional," they decided ominously. "—Conditional on us gittin' our money back, sellin' it at a profit, or else—"

"Here de key!" Avidity distinguished Mr. Howe's acceptance: what he needed most now was a thirty-yards' start on a wife who had again lost confidence in his business ability.

But just here, as Anthrax's lip lowered in the universal storm-warning for husbands, fresh disturbance arose in the rear of the goggle-eyed crowd—indicating, as Mr. Howe's sinking heart told him, fresh trouble for him, in whatever forms might be left in stock. Then the throng parted to reveal that he was right: again calamity had caught up with him, in new shape and as a hangover from an earlier mishap. Calamity on crutches—literally—in the bandaged and limping form of the final straw—Willie Freeman!

STRIPPED now of horse, cash, car and standing, Mr. Howe awaited like a wall-eyed rat at bay this climax to catastrophe.

"Gits here quick as I could." Gray-faced, dry-mouthed, Willie's ferocity was well-concealed, as was also his precise type of revenge. Double-egg waited.

Willie was fumbling in his bandages and garments—only to produce dramatically what Mr. Howe could not believe with either eyes or ears: "Sho is obleeged to you, Double-egg, for gittin' me even wid Samson," astoundingly spoke this wreck of Willie.

Mr. Howe did some fumbling of his own. "*Me* git you even wid Samson?" he stuttered.

"Yeah—when you runs over me—"

"When I runs over you?" Willie's brains must have been run over too, he thought dazedly.

"Uh-huh. Becaze den old accident-policy 'pays off at de bedside'—jest like it say. Collects eighty bucks from Samson Bates on it—forty for you and forty for me! Wid Samson hollerin' like a stuck hawg!"

But Double-egg wasn't bothering. Not with Anthrax bearing down on him like a battleship, even as a hand about his windpipe shut off his first outcry. Above him again now loomed Loose-change Jackson; in his back was the knee of Germicide Hill; while between them Double-egg's right hand no longer knew what his left hand was doing: only that with one he was receiving a key, and with the other he was losing the money Willie had given him.

Then—"Dat's right—forty bucks!" Germicide was counting in his ear as his release came. "Boy, you sold a horse, but you is also done bought yourself a car—from me and Loose-change—at a profit! Now scram!"

And not until Anthrax was climbing aboard her car with a triumphant, "Tells everybody a *business-man* got to build hisself up in de brains, eatin' his breakfasts in bed!" did a still-dazed Double-egg grasp that in thus magnificently—if accidentally—winning a battle, he had also won a war!

Saved by the

A national park ranger's strange ani-

MY first assignment on my new job as summer ranger at one of our Western national parks was a remote station, high in the mountains, commanding an incomparable view, where I checked arriving and departing automobiles at the head of a one-way-at-a-time control road.

Though on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I was much alone.

A flowing spring beside my cabin attracted all sorts of animals. Rabbits, weasels, an occasional fox, and innumerable birds were early-morning imbibers. Fat squirrels, busy chipmunks and lizards of various sizes, shapes and hues, drank at their pleasure throughout the day. The bears usually ambled along at noon, when midday heat and their fur coats made them thirstiest. With twilight came the deer—large, small, old, young, usually eighteen in the herd—to drink with sportive quail, and other birds and animals addicted to nightcaps.

I fixed a salt-lick for the deer. Often, at objections from insistent motor-horns, I wound a friendly arm about the neck of the leader and led him and his herd from the roadway, so that vehicles might pass.

Wild life is not afraid, unless it has cause to be. Frequently I had to leave office-callers abruptly to oust a meddlesome mother-bear and her two cubs from my kitchen larder. A tiny fawn came, each afternoon, to nap upon my cot.

"All life is protected in this reserve, excepting that of man's natural enemy—the rattlesnake. Kill all of them you find," I had been instructed.

In August I was transferred to an entrance toll-station. Here I issued park permits at five dollars for each automobile admitted, sealed firearms, rejected dogs, issued instructions concerning camp-fires, and the like. My only connections with park headquarters and my source of provision supply were the line-telephone and motor-stages which raced past once or twice a week.

Though a veritable prisoner at my station, I enjoyed the wild, spectacular, illimitable expanse; the isolation. And I made new friends among the wild life.

A pair of chipmunks and three young elected me provider-in-chief of their commissary department. My bacon came in "slabs." I sliced it without cutting the rind. This I nailed to a tree-trunk, near the ground, beyond my kitchen door. While I ate at my rustic table five fat squirrels sat on their haunches to munch the tidbit with greedy relish. But the most novel, interesting and—as events disclosed—the most reciprocal of my natural neighbors was a family of rattlesnakes which nested beneath the floor of my cabin.

I counted seven rattlers, most of them approximating full growth, at once. Sometimes I thought more visited the feeding ground. Often fewer. It was my first opportunity to observe the much-maligned and highly poisonous reptiles. I found much to admire in them.

The rattlesnake always is a gentleman, or a lady. He molests no one. He will extend every reasonable courtesy. I walked among my sub-floor tenants, in riding-boots, with complete safety.

If I followed them so closely as to suggest pursuit, made feints of attack, they stopped and confronted me. When I stood still, they withdrew, warily. They repaired to their retreat beneath my cabin calmly and unafraid. I could have cut each one in two with my axe, or shovel, as it disappeared, and I planned to do so when I could learn no more from them, and before I should leave. Circumstances prevented this act of treachery.

A veteran ranger from headquarters arrived, one day, with no apparent mission. Though there was plenty of room in my cabin, and he complained of the nocturnal cold, he spread his bed-roll

REAL EX-

Most of us have had at least one record in print. For details of our

Enemy By BURCH BAKER

mal friends help him out of big trouble.

behind concealing rocks, some distance from the station, and slept in the open.

The next day he spent ambling restlessly about the place; on his horse, across the highway from the cabin, principally. I thought he might have been detailed to inspect my work, but he was avowedly indifferent to all station procedure. Instead, he kept watching the roadway for approaching travelers, whom he disregarded after they arrived.

"Who is that?" he would ask, when some lone hiker, or strangers afoot, on horseback, appeared. Even automobile passengers aroused his concern, until they had registered.

"What difference does it make, who they are?" I returned.

"You can't be too careful," he admonished. Then he told of having been attacked by robbers, when a young grocer's-clerk, and receiving a blow on the head which made him ill for weeks.

Five dollars collected from each automobile admitted at that park-entrance, and no established means for remitting to headquarters, left me an average cash total of several hundred dollars. I sent the money, with my reports, to park offices by dependable stage-drivers, passing rangers, or other park attachés, whenever I could. Between irregular opportunities I kept most of the money in a cache I contrived in a wall of the cabin. The rest, if accosted, I would have given up, since I was alone and unarmed, with no help available. I had no gun, no revolver, no weapon whatsoever—unless a small butcher-knife, in the kitchen, could be so termed.

The following morning the chief ranger appeared, ostensibly on a "fishing-trip," but he carried no angler's equipment. None was available. While I ran the station, the two rangers loitered about, on their horses, keeping to the highway, disappearing for hours. That evening the chief took my accumulated funds and both men departed. This procedure was repeated, several times.

Each time the chief ranger came, he took away with him what money I had. Finally he decided to make the long trek no more and told me that an unsigned message, stating that Mexican outlaws planned to hold up and rob my remote station on a certain date, had been received at park headquarters. Several subsequent notes had reported postponements.

"I don't believe they'll come," the chief concluded. "But keep your money hidden, so they can't find it. Might put it into a tin can, and bury it."

I was not disturbed. So much pother over a vague warning appeared absurd.

SEVERAL days later, at the twilight hour, when I had fed my "boarders" and sat at my kitchen-table eating my supper and watching them feed, a short stout Mexican in a filthy sombrero suddenly appeared at my door, pointed a revolver at me, and demanded:

"Up! Up! Damn you!"—raising his free hand in illustration.

I stared at him in speechless horror, disregarding his command. For—

A turmoil of angry and protesting rattlers writhed under and about his feet!

In his haste and excitement he had pounced upon my venomous friends!

His glance followed mine. With a terrified shriek, he leaped into the air, then ran, shouting, toward the highway.

A second bandit, who had invaded my "office," ran after him.

One shot was fired, whether by accident, or at the snakes dangling about the outlaw's flying bootlegs, I never learned.

Road-workers, supping in a rock cavern within hearing distance, came running to investigate. The foiled robbers mounted a motorcycle and fled.

Sometime later I left the post on notification too brief to permit the intended rattlesnake massacre. It was an excuse for which I was thankful.

PERIENCES

experience so exciting as to deserve prize Real Experience offer, see page 3.

The Flaming Derrick

Caught atop the derrick when an oil-well burst into flames.

By

T. W. McNIEL

IT was a stormy spring morning in 1920 in the Ranger Texas oilfields. Derricks were scattered all over the landscape; the rig I was working on was being put in readiness for "bringing in" the well.

Two other "roughnecks" besides myself were working up in the derrick. The other two boys were working on a small platform about sixty feet above the floor of the derrick, while I was up on the crown-block, the very top of the 112-foot derrick. The ground crew was busily engaged in connecting the necessary piping to divert the oil into a hastily constructed earthen storage reservoir.

All was going smoothly, when all of a sudden a cry of warning rang out from below. I glanced down and imagine my despair when I saw a blast of flame roaring skyward. The well had become ignited—how, no one will ever know. In the twinkling of an eye the well was a roaring furnace, with the flames shooting sixty feet in the air. My two fellow-workmen gave a cry of terror and pain; and a second later both of them jumped out into space—to a dreadful death at the foot of the burning derrick. I'll never forget the feeling of dismay that gripped me as I clambered down off the crown-block and started climbing down the ladder toward the flames. The heat was almost unbearable, but I realized that my only chance was to reach one of the guy cables that anchored the derrick.

These cables were fastened about twenty feet below where I was working. Somehow I endured the torture of the glowing furnace long enough to reach one of the cables. I remember distinctly that as I swung out on the cable, I felt the derrick sag to one side as one corner burned away. The cables sloping at a pitch of approximately forty-five per cent shot me earthward at a dizzy clip. Halfway down I felt a horrible sensation as the friction of the cable burned through my gloves. Somehow or other I managed to swing one leg over the cable, and with this help I reached the ground with a thud, though suffering torture from the intense heat and the fact that the cable had burnt my hands almost to the bone, while a jagged strand of the cable had torn my hands and leg terribly.

I glanced at the torn hands as I reeled to my feet and staggered to the protection of an old sheet-iron tool-house standing only a few feet from where the cable was anchored. As I reached the lee side of the tool-house, I heard the cable snap as the derrick fell with a crash. For one brief moment I glanced toward the well and could see the bodies of my two fellow-workmen lying at the base of the roaring furnace. Twenty feet away were three other bodies, burning.

That one glance almost cost me my eyesight as the terrific heat seared my face. At the same instant the greasy "jumper" that I was wearing became ignited, but somehow or other I flung it off as I stumbled into the rickety old tool-house. At once I realized I would be cooked alive in that sheet-iron shack, as the heat had become so intense by now that the sheets of iron were beginning to warp and curl up. To run outside was suicide, as the heat was so great that I'd have been burned to a crisp before I could have got ten feet, and I knew it; but I decided to risk it rather than be roasted alive in the sheet-iron oven. Faintly I recall wrapping an old gunny-sack about my head and starting for the door. Then all turned black.

TWO weeks later I came to my senses in a Ranger hospital, my entire body swathed in greased bandages. A nurse came over to where I lay, and greeted me

with a cheery, "Well, kid, you're going to make out all right."

"Tell me all about it," I begged.

"Some other time," she promised. "I'm too busy now."

Late that afternoon one of the hospital doctors came into the room to inspect my burns. "Son," he said in a grave voice, "you're the luckiest roughneck who ever climbed an oil derrick!"

Next morning old Joe Patterson, my boss, tiptoed into the room, and in spite of the pain, I actually smiled at the sight of his big good-natured face.

"No use to try to send you to hell, Mac; you're too tough to burn," he said.

"How did I get out, Joe?" I asked.

"Well, you remember a thunderstorm that was hanging back in the southeast just before the derrick caught afire?"

Vaguely I did.

"Well, when the well caught, you climbed down the ladder, an' for some reason you picked the southeast cable to slide down. You'd have burnt to a crisp if you'd have went down any other of the cables, because there wasn't a sheet-iron shack at the end of the other cables. Then, there was a fairly stiff breeze blowing out of the southeast, an' it was blowing the heat away from you. Then, the luckiest break of all, the thunderstorm broke just as you tumbled into the shack. Rain, hail an' a gale right out of the southeast too, swept the heat back enough to keep you from frying in there.

"When the storm was at its worst, one of the boys working on the well just south of ours saw you stagger into the shack. He had sense enough to know you'd roast in that oven if somebody didn't drag you out of there. This kid grabbed an old piece of sheet-iron, an' using it for a shield, made a dash for the shack an' somehow he made it an' pulled you from the doorway where you'd fainted. One minute more of that heat an' you'd never have lived to listen to this. As it was, the only thing that saved your eyes was the fact that you had sense enough to wrap an old gunny-sack around your head before you passed out. When this kid had dragged you to safety, the clothes were burned off of both of you."

The poor devil who pulled me out of that inferno was killed about a year later at Burkburnett, Texas. His name was Charley Stillman. There is no one I owe more to than that reckless roughneck.

It was four months after the fire that I was able to leave my hospital bed, and more than a year before I was able to do a lick of manual labor. I am physically all right again, but the sight of those hideous scars brings back vividly that morning when I slid down that guy cable to safety—the only one of the working crew who escaped.

Bandits in Basra

A fight with three murderous Arabs, described by—

A. L. CALDWELL

AFTER traveling over much of this old terrain of ours and experiencing some rather weird, strange and exciting times, I can always reflect back with a vivid memory to a hard and exciting day spent in the city of Basra. Of course, Basra was always a sort of adventurous city. Marco Polo said so some four hundred years ago. "Sinbad the Sailor" was a reputed citizen of the city. And between cutthroats, thieves, and adventurers from all the worst corners of the earth Basra was living up to the worst of her reputation in these stirring days just after the British installed Emir Feisal as the new king over the new country of Iraq.

It was the month of October. The sun still shone brightly and strongly enough to indicate one hundred and ten degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. And as the last rain that fell was over seven months previous, the ground was baked hard and dry.

I had been up since five in the morning, and working until noon-time. And in the early afternoon of this sultry humid day I found myself in a soccer uniform, in the army football field at the northwest side of the city, with a

civilian soccer team, playing the British Army as stationed in Basra, for the honor and glory of the Mesopotamian Cup. Underneath my uniform I wore a spine pad, and a cholera belt, in order to keep out the heat.

AT length the game came to an end. And we started off to be entertained to a light "tiffin" that might help to replenish the poundage lost in the football field. Then a quartet of us decided to attend the usual Saturday night dance in one of the hotels.

The first dance was very quiet. Girls were at a premium in the place. Only a few modernized Arab, and Arab-Jewish girls, daughters of some of the leading merchants, and a few Eurasian women were present. The evening looked like a real flop, and I went out on the veranda to get a breath of what fresh air was possible, and by some strange impulse I found myself strolling around the block of buildings in front of the hotel, forgetful of the fact that a white man was not supposed to walk in that city unless it be in the bazaar when he is shopping. It lowers the prestige; or so the unwritten law of society dictated.

I had wandered down one long street and turned to the left into another equally dark street when something rather strange and mysterious arrested my attention. I felt almost certain that certain figures had flitted across the road some thirty feet ahead. And by the phantom-like dresses I guessed that they would be native Arabs. I stopped and hesitated a moment. I knew that many of these city Arabs would rob and kill for a nickel. And I also knew that I made a very fine target for attack with my white drill-cloth suit, and my white pith helmet. The only weapon I had in my possession was an especially large pocket knife, and this I opened, then buttoned my jacket and got ready for trouble.

All was still and quiet as I stepped forward, and I can assure you that my heart was beating some pretty strange key-notes. As the road was barely twelve feet wide, there was not much lessened danger by taking to the center. I walked on cautiously, and ever on the alert. Then of a sudden a white-robed figure sprang at me from a doorway. Immediately a second one appeared from the other side; while a third followed suit.

By good fortune they all attacked me from the front, although they were on both sides of me, left and right. The battle was fierce. And in such fights, when three attack one with large knives, it is generally the rule that anything goes in retaliation. I swung my foot at about the height of the groin, as I stepped quickly to one side, and had the satisfaction of feeling it meet soft flesh. Then I jumped back and repeated the process with my other foot, with not quite so great success. The first assailant had dropped out of the combat, but the second one only became more furious and bloodthirsty. Instead of being wary as he had been before, he was now almost berserk, and charged me wildly.

One may dodge a bit, and use the feet and hands to some extent in a combat with three armed Arabs. But there comes a time when something magical needs to happen in order to come off on top. I had fought as hard and as well as I knew how, and had just held my own when I caught sight of bright lights from the front—an automobile coming along at a fair speed. The Arabs left off the attack, when the driver honked a horn, and jumped to the one side out of the way of the car. Then when the car was just about on me, I did the same thing, and with almost a last herculean effort, made a flying jump and tackle at the side of the car. It was a large touring car. And luckier still for me, I landed on something soft, as the auto sped on.

I felt my position, and hearing groans and some violent protests in Hindustani, decided that the two gentlemen that I had landed on were Indians. I guess I was almost berserk myself then, for in the darkness I imagined them to be another couple of cutthroats at first. But they proved most docile, and the taxi-driver, a city Arab, seeing that I was a sahib, decided it was better that he drive me to the hotel as dictated.

WHEN the taxi stopped in front of the hotel, I tipped the driver and apologized to the two ruffled sons of India.

Then I grimly walked up the steps into the hotel that I had left probably about twenty minutes before. A grim look and determination probably showed on my face as I looked into the dance-hall. My friend Dodds came over. He certainly misinterpreted my looks.

"Guess you'd better have a drink," he said.

I nodded my head. "I was just thinking so myself," I replied.

In the Nick of Time

A telephone trouble-shooter achieves a hazardous rescue.

By

JIM NORFLEET

ON my job as a trouble-shooter for the telephone company in Washington, D. C., I reported for work at eight o'clock in the morning at the company's garage. Because of the difficulty of finding parking space in official Washington, I was the only maintenance man in the downtown district who drove a car—a small truck of the type used by telephone companies the country over, carrying ladders, wire, and a complete assortment of telephone station equipment. It was my duty to cover all troubles which necessitated much pole or ladder work, or involved equipment which could not be carried by the other men, who traveled on foot.

On this particular morning I had arrived at the garage half an hour or so early. I decided to call the wire chief, located at the main test desk downtown, and make a note of my first job.

A wire chief must never get excited, but I could detect something unusual in his salutation.

"Say, Jim," he said, "take a listen to this L. P. L. I'll connect you in." In telephone parlance *L. P. L.* designates a line which is short-circuited or grounded, whether due to the receiver being left off the hook or to trouble on the line.

I listened carefully. Very faintly, as if through a closed window, I could hear the rattle of a street-car passing somewhere in the neighborhood of the unidentified telephone. Then, closer at hand, I heard a faint moaning sound. I waited a moment. The sound came again. This time it was unmistakably a groan.

"Somebody groaning," I said.

"Yeah," said the wire chief. "That's what I thought. The line went L. P. L. about twenty minutes ago. It may be just a drunk, or it may be some one in trouble. You better take a run over there and see what's up."

He gave me an address in southwest Washington. I chucked my tool-bag into the car and stepped on the starter. The streets were fairly clear, for the rush of Government workers to their offices had not yet started.

As I dived into the southwest section, I saw a motorcycle policeman leaping on his motorcycle in front of the Botanical Gardens to pursue me. A second glance showed me that it was the same cop who had tried to give me a ticket for double parking a few days before. He was a big red-headed Irishman who always seemed to be on my trail. A friendly police captain had intervened on that occasion, and the cop had stepped gracefully aside, but he had a baleful gleam in his eyes that told me he hadn't forgotten.

I turned and waved back at him, indicating the need of haste. I then bore down on the accelerator. Having got this far, I didn't intend to be stopped. For a moment it looked like it was a toss-up with him whether to give chase or not. Finally he made up his mind, turned off, and started back to his post.

A few moments later I screeched around a corner with locked brakes and pulled up in front of a small but neat frame house, having covered three and a half miles through the heart of Washington in six minutes.

FAILING to find a bell, I began to belabor the knocker, setting up a terrific din. Silence. I waited a moment and knocked again. I had made enough noise to awaken the sleeping beauty herself. Still there was no response. I looked through the window into a small

neat parlor. There were no signs in the room of anything out of the way. Yet there must be some one in the house!

Deciding to investigate further, I went around to the back. A few feet from the south corner was a stepped telephone pole. Fine! I would climb the pole and look into the second-story window, the shades of which were only partially drawn.

THE room into which I looked was evidently a study. I could see the corner of a couch, a desk on which a telephone was sprawling on its side, and a stretch of carpeted floor. On the floor were visible a man's feet and part of his pajama-clad legs. To all appearances it might be merely a drunk who had passed out, but I doubted it. There was something about the way the man's feet were twitching that made me think otherwise. It looked to me as if he had tried to get to the telephone but had been unable to make the grade.

It is a capital crime in telephone circles to enter a building by any other way than being admitted by the persons in charge. In this case, however, I decided to take the chance. The man might be ill, perhaps suffering from a heart attack. Of course, I might call the police and leave it up to them. But it would take the police at least five or ten minutes to get there, and five or ten minutes is a long time when a man is in grave danger. I leaned over to the window, pulled the sash up, and dropped into the room.

I had taken two steps toward the man on the floor before I realized what was the matter with him. Then it struck me like a blow on the head. Gas! The room was so thick with it that you could cut it with a knife. Before I had time to think, it had knocked me to my knees. Instinctively, without thinking, I took a deep breath and tried to rise.

My head was now roaring dizzily. Pinpoints of light were flecking before my eyes. Wavering, I put one hand on the floor to steady myself and tried to think what to do. Hold my breath, of course, and try to get to the window. I got up carefully, my body feeling light as a balloon. Yet my legs were so heavy that it was almost impossible to move them. I took two short uncertain steps toward the window and then pitched forward over the sill, my head and upper body hanging down out of the window. . . .

I don't know what would eventually have happened if I had been left there alone. Probably the air would have revived me. Possibly I would have fallen to my death on the bricked alley below.

What actually happened was that the cop back there on Pennsylvania Avenue changed his mind and decided to follow me after all. He came "putting" up the alley just as I appeared in the window.

And this cop was a smart fellow. The gas was blowing out of that window clean down into the alley, so he knew what it was. He got my ladder off the car, climbed the wall, and lugged me down to the ground. Then he went back for more.

I came to, while he was bringing the other man down. By the time he had laid him down, I was up there and helping him open the front door.

Holding our breath between dashes to the windows for air, we explored the rest of the house. In a small bedroom we found two children unconscious in their beds. In the next room the man's wife lay half out on the floor. Tousled bedclothes and an overturned chair told the story. The couple had awakened before being completely suffocated, and the man had made a desperate attempt to reach the telephone and call for aid. I picked the woman up and carted her out the front door. Behind me followed the cop, a child tucked under each arm.

WE didn't stop to call for help or anything; we just laid the four on the front lawn and went to work trying to pump some air into their lungs. And if you think trying to give artificial respiration to two people at the same time is easy, just try it sometime. I laid the man and his wife close together on their stomachs, put my right hand on the man's floating ribs and my left on the woman's, and went to work. The cop was doing the same thing to the children. The oft-mentioned "one-armed paperhanger" had nothing on us!

The man was just beginning to come out of it when an ambulance came howling around the corner, filled with firemen and pulmotors and other paraphernalia. The wire chief, waiting on the line down at the test desk, had heard the cop and me shouting to each other, and called the fire-rescue squad. A moment later we were sprawling on the grass, exhausted, while the firemen carried on the good work. Out of that family of four, three were saved. Only the youngest child had been too far gone. . . .

That red-headed cop will be my friend for life.

The Voyage of the Monarch

VI—SHIPMATES WITH DEATH

By CAPTAIN GEORGE GRANT

CHRISTMAS DAY came over the horizon like any other day—in a tropical dawn that was fierce and red. Christmas Day and Good Friday are the only holidays a sailor-man can claim on a British ship. At eight bells the sailor-men gathered at the galley to receive their breakfast. Some wore sea-boots, some were bare-footed with their trouser legs rolled up above the knees, all were lightly clad and all were perspiring from the exertion of washing down the steel decks. Each was a lonely secretive figure, nursing its grievances, as sailormen will.

As I came with Jamie from the bridge, where we had been shining the brass binnacles and telegraphs with bathbrick and colza oil, I couldn't help likening them to a flock of glum-looking crows caught in a shower of rain; and I couldn't resist the temptation of kidding them.

"Ho! You old shell-backs!" I shouted, preparing to run should a boot seek the seat of my trousers. "Why so glum this Merry Christmas morning?"

Hoskins swore and shook his fist under my nose.

"Merry Christmas, me blinkin' eye!" he scoffed. "Merry 'ell, says I. We 'as rights, we 'as. We're Henglishmen an' not blarsted 'eathens—"

"Tut! Tut!" exclaimed a voice.

Mr. Johnson had come from Mr. Boxley's cabin, and he was standing holding on to the storm-rail of the deck-house, a little bit tipsy.

"The Christmas spirit, Hoskins! The Christmas spirit ably expressed!" he said, beaming all over his face.

He stepped unsteadily from the rail, and gave to Pat Greenaway a bottle.

"It's a present from the mate, m' lads. A present from Mr. Boxley, the mate," he said. The sailor-men looked at each other, all rancor gone from their faces.

" 'E's a bloomin' toff, 'e 'is," breathed Hoskins, "and 'e 'as a 'eart of gold!"

Greenaway went forward, the bottle clasped to his bosom like a child. The sailor-men trooped behind, carrying their mess-kits and singing with great glee:

"I drink it out of an old tin can,
Whisky, Johnny!
I drink it out of an old tin can,
Whisky for my Johnny."

The voices died away, and the deck was very empty.

"There's nothing for us, Tommy," whispered Jamie. I had been thinking that too.

THE mess-room was like an oven. The hot air, weighted with the smell of grease, came from the engine-room and escaped through it to the deck. The butter was a liquid mess of unappetizing oil; the linen was soiled and limp. Around the table in our Sunday best, white trousers and shirts, sat Ernie, Spifkins, Jamie and I, the sweat running in gleaming streams from our brows into our eyes while each of us pretended to enjoy our breakfast of porridge and curried meat-and-rice. Footsteps sounded in the alleyway, and Captain McFarlane appeared in a white uniform.

"Up! Attention, chaps!" I shouted.

We came to our feet, heels together and arms by our sides.

"Guid mornin', laddies, an' a Merry Christmas," said Captain McFarlane.

"The same to you, sir," we cried.

He motioned for us to be seated, but we remained on our feet.

"I just thought I would peek in an' see how ye were a' enjoyin' yersel's," he said, "for ye're far awa' frae hame. I couldna come wi' empty hands, so I broucht ye this. Ye can spend it at the first port we touch."

We gazed at the four half-sovereigns he had laid on the table, and when we looked up to thank him, he was gone, leaving behind the blue smoke of his cigar to fill his place.

Ernie and Spifkins whooped with joy. A half-sovereign! It was a symbol of wealth. There were so many things I needed—clothes, books, a great big cake!

My reverie was broken by a disturbing sound. Jamie was lying across the table weeping.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I—I—I don't know," he stammered.

My gaze went to the others, but they shook their heads. They were in a fog as much as I. I felt sorry for him, but I didn't know what to say.

Luckily at that moment Wilkins, one of the ordinary seamen, came running into the mess-room with his eyes popping out with excitement.

"Come on out, you fellows!" he shouted, braking his speed against the door-jamb. "There's a warship heading for us. Looks like a German! We're going to be blown to smithereens. The mate's trying to fight her off with a broadside of curses. The air's blue! You ought to hear him—hasn't repeated himself in five minutes!"

He raced away, shouting the news. Until that moment the war had touched us very lightly. We had seen nothing of the enemy. In Barbados we had heard of the retreat and of the entrenchment of the Allied armies; of Admiral Sturdee's victory off the Falkland Islands; of the German naval raid on the east coast of England—all exciting items of news, but far away.

ALL hands were out. On the starboard wing of the bridge stood Captain McFarlane, gazing toward the northern horizon where the superstructure of a warship, hull-down, could be clearly seen against the pale blue sky; behind him Mr. Boxley paced up and down like a lion in a cage, and he growled every time his head came up.

It was quite apparent that the warship was scrutinizing us from a distance. She steamed directly toward us; then, when about five miles distant, she sheered onto another course, ruffling the horizon with her high speed.

"She's maneuvering for a position to let us have it," vouchsafed Jamieson. "She'll get our side open, then slip a big one into the engine-room, and it'll be all over. Some one had better tell the Fourth to say his prayers."

Suddenly the warship altered her course again, swinging her stern to us and steaming off into the sun with incredible speed.

"Scared the bleedin' lights hout of 'er, that's wot we've done," boasted Hoskins.

But Lord Percy cried from the bridge:

"She's one of ours! I can make out the White Ensign against the sun!"

The tension seemed to evaporate.

"Hurrah! Hip-hip-hurrah!" all hands shouted, and they tossed their caps in the air and danced around like children.

Throughout that afternoon the ship slept, but when the night had put the day to sleep with a cool, friendly hand and the stars were hanging low like lanterns suspended from a courteous sky to light our way, we came from our cabins to gather on Number Three hatch and sing old songs of the home-land to the accompaniment of an accordion, played by the third engineer.

It was a night on which to dream, and I lay on my stomach on the tarpaulin and dreamed of the years that rose ahead like the rungs on a ladder, each rung a step toward the command that I desired. How long I dreamed and sang I do not know. I awakened suddenly to the reality that Jamie was not amongst us; nor could I remember seeing him since we had left the supper-table.

Perturbed, I searched around the decks. Shrouded in the pitch blackness under the overhang of the forward house I found him, gazing down at the water like a man in a trance.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked.

He started up as though in fright.

"Oh, leave me alone!" he cried.

"I don't want to leave you, Jamie," I said. "Why don't you come and join us on the hatch?"

"I don't want to come!" he cried. "I hate it. I'm going to leave. I'm going to run away."

"Don't let it bother you too much, Jamie, old man," I advised. "Today hasn't been too bad. We'll soon be in

port, and you'll forget all your troubles when you're spending the ten bob the Old Man gave you."

"I—I—haven't got it," he sobbed miserably. "I left it on the mess-room table this morning and it—it's gone."

Then I heard myself saying: "Gosh! That's nothing to be down-hearted about. I'll give you mine. I don't need it."

"Oh! Thanks, Tommy!"

The misery fell from him, and he laughed happily.

But I didn't. Of a sudden I felt unutterably low. The flying-fish, darting like steel knives from the wash along the run, ripped the sea into a dark cavern into which tumbled some clothes, some books, and a great big cake.

THREE days later when the *Monarch* was approaching the Florida coast, all hands were on pins and needles and betting with each other as to what the orders would be. The married men wanted a homeward cargo; the single men, including the cadets, hoped for a run to China or Japan.

About two miles from the starboard beam, in the center of a low white sandy key over which the heat hovered in visible wavering rays, stood the Sand Key lighthouse, a square pyramidal skeleton enclosing a stair cylinder and a brown dwelling for the keepers. Beyond, eight miles or more to the northeast, the wireless towers of the Key West naval station could be seen.

Captain McFarlane left the wheelhouse where he had been conning the vessel parallel to the line of the reefs, walked onto the wing of the bridge and raised his hand. Spifkins, waiting on the poop, dipped the red ensign to the keepers of the lighthouse, and without waiting for an acknowledgment, hoisted it again to the peak of the flagstaff. Captain McFarlane turned to where Ernie and I were standing with Lord Percy in a confusion of flags.

"Noo, laddies," he ordered. "Hoist them up!"

To the jumper-stay, a wire stretched between the two masts, we let fly on one set of halliards the flags H P W O; on the other set we hoisted S W.

The four-flag hoist was the *Monarch's* name; the other was a signal taken from the International Code Book, and meant:

"I wish to obtain orders from my owners."

It was the common practice before the days of wireless for tramp owners to dispatch their vessels to a certain point for orders. It gave them more leeway in the selection of a charter. When one was closed they cabled instructions to certain lighthouses, and the keepers there, for a small fee, transmitted them to the vessel when she appeared and displayed her signal letters.

Now, as we watched the Sand Key lighthouse, the red and white answering pennant of the International Code fluttered to the breeze from a flagpole projecting from the western side. Our message had been understood.

"Doon!" snapped Captain McFarlane.

We jumped to obey, and in a vainglorious display of our efficiency, down came the hoists from the jumper-stay with a run.

A two-flag hoist flew bravely from the flagpole on the lighthouse. Lord Percy glued the long glass to his right eye.

"'T A,' sir," he said slowly.

"What does it mean?" asked Captain McFarlane.

The International Code Book was lying on the bridge-rail table. I opened it at the two-flag hoists, and ran my finger down the letters.

"'T A,' sir? It means: 'Proceed to—' and a blank, sir," I answered; and I held up the book for him to see it.

He adjusted his glasses and verified the signal; then he glanced toward Lord Percy.

"D'ye ha'e the letters right, laddie?" he inquired.

"'T A,' it is, sir!"

"Guid! Answer them!" he ordered, curtly. "An' staun by for the port!"

Ernie had the answering pennant bent on. We ran it up to the jumper-stay before you could blink an eye. The two-flag hoist disappeared within the lighthouse, and we lowered the pennant to a ready position just clear of the bridge awning spars.

"They're a wee bit slow," said Captain McFarlane. "They're no as eager as—But there it goes!" And he added, almost in the same breath: "What is it?"

Lord Percy raised the long glass with a flourish, held it against an awning stanchion to steady it, and after what seemed an unconscionable length of time, he read slowly, as if picking each letter out of the warm air, which indeed he was:

"'A W Y H,' sir."

I had the code-book open at the geographical names. In a jiffy I had found our destination.

"New Orleans, sir!" I shouted, as loudly as I could, so that all hands could hear.

"Ye havena made a mistake?" asked Captain McFarlane in a strained voice.

"No sir!" Lord Percy and I cried together.

"Thanks, laddies. . . . Answer them!"

Our answering pennant went to the jumper-stay on billowing halliards, and the four-flag hoist vanished within the lighthouse.

"Gi'e them 'X O R.' Ring doon for full speed!"

The "thank you" signal flattened against the blue sky as the *Monarch* pulled the wind ahead when her engines were speeded up; the ensign was dipped again in farewell; and the Sand Key lighthouse dropped astern over the starboard quarter.

"It's no sae guid, laddies," said Captain McFarlane to us, as we rolled up the flags to stow them away in their pockets. "It's no sae guid as they think. The East would ha'e been better. They dinna ken how cruel war can be."

ON our arrival at New Orleans, the *Monarch* was placed in drydock to have the barnacles and grass scraped off, and her bottom painted with an anti-fouling paint.

"You've got to have a slick keel under you," the agent told Captain McFarlane on arrival. "You've got to make all the time you can on the run home. If you don't the submarines'll git you. We hear they're out sinkin' right and left."

Which may have been true enough but it didn't worry us, for berthed astern of where we lay on the river-front loading steel billets and cotton was the tall-sparred four-masted barque *Silverbank*, and every evening we went on board to fraternize with her eight cadets, who were a foolhardy lot. The third mate, perceiving a means of earning some ready cash, had bought a tattooing outfit, and had encouraged the cadets to have their bodies decorated at so much a picture. Being mostly from wealthy parents, they had gone the limit.

One night this third mate came into the half-deck of the *Silverbank*. We were all there—Ernie, Spifkins, Jamie and I—sitting on sea-chests while we waited for her cadets to get washed up to accompany us on shore to a movie.

"Look here, you chaps," said he, leaning nonchalantly on the door-jamb and knocking the stem of his pipe against his white teeth as he spoke, "why don't you each have a bit of tattooing done? You know, you steamboat men are a bit soft. You need something like that so that the world may know you're real men." He drew a packet of designs from his pocket and threw them onto Ernie's lap. "Pick out what you want. You're going on shore now but I'll do them tomorrow night, just before you sail for home. It will be something to show the old folks. It's safe as can be, and it won't hurt a bit."

He nodded urbanely to each of us in turn and disappeared along the deck. The cadets of the *Silverbank* were vociferous in their encouragement. Ernie was all for it. He was going to have, he declared, a picture of the *Monarch* on his back, the funnel between his shoulder blades so that his black hair would be the smoke coming from it. Spifkins agreed with him that it was a great idea. Jamie said nothing, but I saw him take what money he had from his pocket and, covertly, count it. The idea of being a real man, I could see, appealed to him.

The *Silverbank's* cadets reported to the chief mate that they were going on shore, before I spoke.

"With all due respect to those lads who have been tattooed, I think it is a barbaric practice," I asserted, "a relic left to us from the savages, and if any of *you* have it done, I'll punch the stuffing out of you."

Before an argument or a fight could arise, the *Silverbank's* cadets came from under the poop and we all went on shore, singing at the top of our voices as we trudged along the wharf, and skylarking. . . . Sleep had laid a gentle hand over the town when we left the movie-theater. I don't know why, except that the devil was in me—but as we passed a dimly lighted saloon on the corner of a block, I grasped the reins of a mule that stood against the curb, harnessed to a light cart. To my surprise the mule walked along without any urging, as if glad to be in our hilarious company.

When safely away from the vicinity of the saloon, I shouted: "Come on, my lads! Up and into it! We'll ride down to our yachts in style!"

No urging was required! Into the cart the twelve of us scrambled, to sit on top of each other like sardines in a can, and to bounce like dolls as the wheels bumped over the cobbled street.

A sailor-man always sticks by his ship to the last. It seemed a pity, when we reached the freight-sheds, to desert the lowly conveyance that had served us so well. The wharf was open to the street, and some one suggested that we ride in state right up to the gangway of the *Silverbank*. Which we did, making as little noise as we could, in order not to have the police or the dock watchmen in pursuit. Opposite the gangway, on which a hurricane-lamp burned dimly, came another suggestion—from Ernie, I think. Why not present the mule to the mate of the *Silverbank?* He had been told that the mate was a mule-driver!

Two of the cadets ran on board to entice the old night-watchman into the galley out of the way. Everyone else assisting, we unharnessed the mule, put a coat over its head, held some hay from the pig-pen under its nose as a bait, and led it up the narrow gangway to the deck. We tethered it to the mizzen-pin-rail, and above it on the mast we nailed a placard of cardboard, on which was printed in rambling letters:

BEHOLD BELOW THE IMAGE OF A BELLICOSE MATE! PRESENTED BY THE BOYS OF THE MONARCH WHO DO NOT HAVE TO SAIL WITH HIM.

I AWOKE with a start from a dream in which I was tumbling head over heels down a cliff into a sea of leaping fire, to find Mr. Boxley standing at the half-deck door, his eyes blazing with anger.

"Get up! Get them all up!" he thundered, shaking his fist at the cold blue sky of dawn. "Get them up an' bring them forrard! I'll give you something to make you sit up. . . . Get them up!"

Crazed with anger, he banged the door and went away, cursing like a madman.

When we were all dressed and gathered outside the half-decks, I held a council of war.

"Don't let him cow us," I said. "Let me answer all his questions. If he attempts to strike any one of us, let us all pile on him!"

They nodded, timorously. I put on a bold front and led them along the deck. But my heart was thumping wildly for I knew, only too well, how powerful Mr. Boxley was, and how brutal he could be.

He sighted us when we cleared the break of the forward house and reached the ladder leading down on to the well.

"Come here, boys!" he barked.

Standing jacketless on No. 2 hatch, with his shoulders rounded and the yellow light of dawn casting deep shadows on his face he resembled a prehistoric man. And I saw then that his right foot rested on one of the shafts of the cart we had stolen the night before!

Amazement, and not a little consternation, held my feet as if glued to the bridge-deck. Then my eyes spotted a cargo-skid, inclined against the bulwarks from the wharf, and I knew. They had dragged it up, hand over hand, after explaining to the watchman, no doubt, that their captain had sent it along to be taken to England.

Mr. Boxley stepped from the square of No. 2 hatch to meet us.

"Who's responsible for that?" he demanded, and he pointed to a placard pinned to the cart on which was written:

BEHOLD A GARBAGE WAGON PRESENTED TO THE MATE TO PUT HIS FOUL LANGUAGE IN.

I wanted to laugh but my gaze was riveted on Mr. Boxley's scowling face, and the laughter stopped in my throat.

"I—I—I don't know, sir," I answered.

"You don't know, eh?" he sniffed. He swung toward the others. "Do you?" he demanded.

Ernie, Spifkins and Jamie all shook their heads.

"None of you know!" he said sarcastically. "I suppose it was the Liverpool man—or the cook. Well! I've got something here that will knock the stubbornness out of you, and some respect in." He twirled a rope's-end through the air, but before he could bring it down across our shoulders, Jamie cried:

"It—it—wasn't any of us. It was the boys of the *Silverbank!*"

He dropped the rope's-end to his side. "So!" he sneered; then he said: "We'll see. Wait here until I come back!"

Swinging on his heel, he went up the ladder toward the gangway.

Mr. Boxley was on the wharf halfway toward the *Silverbank*, swinging along with a truculent deep-sea gait and his head down. Coming toward him was that vessel's mate, a raw-boned Highland man from Skye with a face like basalt rock, and fists hard as handspikes. They approached each other like two railway engines, heading along the same track to a collision.

On the point of impact they halted, greeted each other with a short salute, and commenced to talk, emphasizing their conversation with gesticulation.

We were too far off to overhear their remarks, but from their actions I knew

full well that it brooked ill for us when Mr. Boxley returned. And when he did finally leave the *Silverbank's* mate and head back toward the *Monarch*, his wrath seemed in no way appeased. When he was out of sight behind the deckhouse I turned to Jamie.

"Look here!" I cried. "Get up into the fo'c'stle and hide there! Quick! I'll stand up for you!" He fled along the deck. I faced Ernie and Spifkins. "If he starts anything, we'll slide down that cargo-skid to the wharf. He won't dare follow us."

We had just time to drift apart when Mr. Boxley appeared at the head of the bridge-deck. Swinging the rope's-end over his shoulder with a maniacal vehemence, he stamped down the ladder.

"Ready!" I whispered, edging toward the bulwark-rail.

"Guid mornin', Mister! Guid mornin', laddies!" said a welcome voice.

As one we looked up. Captain McFarlane had come from his cabin onto the lower bridge and he stood against the rail in pajamas, an inquiring smile on his sea-wrinkled face.

"Has somebody been playin' a joke?" he asked, with a humorous twist to his tongue. "I mind once puttin' a donkey in ma captain's cabin. It was rare fun. He wasna a wee bit put oot, though a card said it was like himsel'." His gaze moved to Mr. Boxley. "I see ye ha'e a wee strop in y'r haun'. Ye'd better sling the cart ashore before the loadin' starts. But mebbe that was what ye were gaun tae dae."

He smiled a knowing smile and disappeared, and we heard the door of his cabin shut.

Ernie, Spifkins and I looked at each other with relief, and each of us smiled a wry smile. But we knew that we hadn't heard the last of it. We hoisted the cart on shore with heavy hearts.

NEXT morning the *Monarch* was ready for sea, and Spifkins and I were sitting in the starboard half-deck waiting for the call to breakfast when Ernie flew in through the open door.

"The mate—the mate," he cried hysterically, "is kicking Jamie!"

I leaped to my feet.

"Come!" I said to Spifkins.

Together we raced around the deckhouse. Jamie lay cowering in the waterway near the side bunker hatch, his arms protecting his head. Mr. Boxley, the personification of a fiend, maddened by whisky, was towering over him, and kicking him with a vicious bestiality.

"You little snipe!" he sneered. "I'll put guts into you!"

Murder leaped into my heart. I ran forward blindly, feeling for my sheath-knife. But I didn't have it on. My gaze sought a hatch-bar. But they were firmly wedged in their cleats.

At the sound of our running feet Mr. Boxley staggered around on his heels. His lips curled in a sneer. His long gorilla-like arms crooked up.

I flung myself through the air. His stomach was nearest me, and open. I planted my fist there with all the weight of my body behind the blow. He gasped, bellowed like a bull, and his fist crashed into my face with the force of a sledge. My head went up. I toppled backwards, staggered against the side bunker hatch, and cut my forehead on a cleat as I hit the deck. I was on my feet instantly—to see a tall broad-shouldered man in a trim blue suit push Spifkins to one side, and squaring away, fell Mr. Boxley with a terrific right to the chin.

"Guess that will sober him up," the tall man said. "It was a beauty!" He smiled, and wiped his hands on a white handkerchief as if wiping the incident away, and said: "I'd better go along and see the captain. Mebbe he'll want to settle this before he goes to sea."

All hands had gathered on the bridge-deck. As the tall man turned away toward the lower bridge, Captain McFarlane shouldered his way to the front. His lips were pursed grimly, and his blue eyes were like cold steel. He looked from where Mr. Boxley was struggling to rise, to my bloody face.

The tall stranger said: "I'm the pilot, sir. Your mate was ill-treating the boys. He's drunk. I knocked him down, sir."

Captain McFarlane answered: "Thank ye, pilot. I'll meet ye on the flyin'-bridge." Then as the pilot bowed ever so slightly, and walked away, Captain McFarlane swung on the sailor-men gathered about. "Get forrard where ye belong!" he bellowed, and he shouted: "Steward! Steward!" Mr. Johnson appeared immediately from the shelter of the galley. "Get the laddies fixed up," Captain McFarlane ordered. "They're a' broken up!"

As I walked away behind the steward, I heard him say to Mr. Boxley in a voice that was deadly calm:

"I'll see ye in ma cabin, Mister. Right the noo!"

EVER since the *Monarch* had cleared the delta of the Mississippi at dusk and the work of snugging the ship down against the assault of the North Atlantic gales was finished, I had stood against the bulwarks at the after end of the bridge-deck, gazing seaward with my black thoughts. They were black because I could not forget that I was a murderer. I had not killed, but murder had been in my heart when, that morning, I had leaped in a blind rage toward Mr. Boxley, feeling for the sheath-knife that usually hung from my belt.

Now the mess-boy appeared, and summoned me to the captain's cabin.

Captain McFarlane was sitting at his desk, poring over the "Ship Captain's Medical Guide" when I reached his door. He swung around in answer to my knock.

"Come awa' in, laddie, an' sit doon," he said. "I'll be wi' ye the noo."

He turned back to the pages of the "Medical Guide." I knew, as did all hands, that he was very worried over Jamie, who had been taken ill soon after the *Monarch* had cleared at New Orleans.

After a while Captain McFarlane closed the book with a snap, pushed the bulkhead lamp back on its bracket, and sighing wearily, turned toward me.

"I dinna ken what tae dae for the best, laddie," he remarked, shaking his head gently. "I havena seen an illness quite like his before. He seemed tae be pickin' up, an' then he slumped plumb doon. Mebbe it's just shock—he's a poor, wee thing, an' the mate must ha'e frightened him tae pieces wi' his brute strength. What I want ye tae dae, laddie, is nurse him—watch him till the morn. If he disna show signs o' pickin' up again, I'll tak' the ship intae Key West an' leave him in the hospital. Meanwhile we'll just let him rest. It's the best treatment I can prescribe. Keep him warm an' tend him gently, laddie. If ye want ma help, I'll be here."

THE bulkhead lamp flickered to the currents of air which eddied through the open door, and the half-deck was eerie with darting shadows. Jamie, who lay tossing on the bunk in the agony of his fever, clutched my hand, and although sometimes I thought he slept, every time I stirred, he wakened, and he seemed loath to let my rough hand go.

Once Mr. Boxley came to the door, to stand in silence beyond the sill like the brooding figure of a god, with the lamplight touching his bronzed face with gold. His gaze fastened on Jamie, and I believe he wanted to speak, to ask forgiveness for what he had done, but he went as silently as he had come.

After that I must have slept. I wakened with a start, a cold sweat on my brow, to find Jamie sitting up and groping with his outstretched arms toward something I could not see in the darkness beyond the foot of the bunk. His eyes were glazed and opened wide with fright.

Panic seized me. I wanted to run and seek Captain McFarlane on the bridge, but Jamie clutched me around the neck and wept, and I could not go; I eased him gently back on to the pillow, and bending over him, I sang a queer doggerel song we had often sung together.

How many times I sang it, I cannot now remember. Suddenly I was aware that he was very still; and—I saw that he was dead, his eyes closed in a peaceful sleep. Wave upon wave of emotion ran through me with the wild rush of a freshet, and I would have wept, but as I took my arm from around his shoulders, his pajama jacket opened, and I saw on his upper left arm a large tattoo, all swollen and festered; and I wondered if it could have caused his death!

I flew then to the bridge—to Captain McFarlane's cabin. He was sitting at the table, reading his Bible by the light of the lamp which swung easily in its gimbals under the deck-head.

"Jamie—Jamie's dead, sir!" I cried.

He did not show any astonishment. He remained staring into space for a moment, then he moved his head sideways and looked over his glasses at me. "Dead?" he muttered. In a minute he sighed, and said: "I kind of expected it, laddie. But no sae soon."

As he followed me along the deck, I told him about the tattoo, and about what I had thought. He did not answer right away, but after he had seen Jamie and covered him up with a reverent hand, he said: "It wasna that, laddie. It was somethin' else. His heart, maybe. It wasna strong enough for the life at sea. I thoucht that on the very first day he was on board. He had the heart o' a lassie. Ye ken what I mean?"

He closed the door of the half-deck quietly, and taking my arm, he led me to the bulwark-rail, where we stood together, our shoulders touching, in that silent communion which obliterates rank and age, and men are drawn together by the delicate threads of a common sadness. The sea before us was a sheet of

billowing velvet, and it seemed to absorb the starlight and the soft grayness of the night sky. I felt lonely and terribly sad; and yet, as I look back at it now, that moment was one of the most precious of my life. It held an awakening. From the chaotic whirling of my thoughts, I emerged a man. I perceived, in Jamie's death, the grim reality of life; and from Captain McFarlane I took the strength to look it squarely in the face. . . . But immediately, as though to push me back into the boyhood from whence I had come, a thought struck me. Against my will, I began to weep.

WITHOUT turning, Captain McFarlane asked: "What is it, laddie?"

I couldn't answer right away. But after a while I blurted out:

"I was just thinking, sir. I—I gave him the money he had. You know, sir, the money you gave me on Christmas Day. He—he lost his, and I was thinking—I was thinking that if I hadn't given him mine, he couldn't have been tattooed, and maybe he would have lived. Maybe—maybe, sir, I killed him!"

Captain McFarlane put an arm around my shoulder with a comforting pressure. "Life isna like that, laddie. Ye canna blame a death on a supposition. Ye didna kill him wi' y'r kindness; Mr. Boxley didna kill him wi' his brutality; an' I didna dae it wi' sailin' frae New Orleans in sic a hurry. There was something in him that didna want to live, laddie. He died. It was God's will. Ye canna gang against it wi' y'r thoughts. It wouldna be right."

Silence settled over us again.

He was right, I thought. You couldn't go against God's will. And yet—circumstances seemed to indicate that twice in one day had I been a murderer. . . .

When the first yellow streaks of the dawn were in the sky I crept from Captain McFarlane's cabin on tiptoe and went along to the mess-room. The mess-boy was sweeping up, but he fetched me a cup of coffee from the galley.

I toyed with the mug for a while, and soon I noticed that my gaze was fastened on a small blue bottle which lay on top of the slop-bucket. I picked it up and turned it over in my fingers. The label was lost, and I could not tell from the smell what it had contained, although I knew from the color of the glass that it must have been poison.

"Where did this come from?" I asked.

The mess-boy stopped sweeping the floor, came over to my side, and lowering his voice to a whisper, he said: "He—*he* had it." And he nodded towards a bulkhead behind which Jamie's body lay.

"When?" I asked, startled.

"Last night—in the dog-watch. He got up from his bunk, and came in here and asked for a glass."

"Yes?"

"He poured the stuff out and rubbed some on his arm—on a tattoo there."

"And then what did he do?"

"He drank the rest of the bloomin' stuff at a gulp—like a dose of salts."

"Why didn't you tell some one when he was taken violently ill?"

"He told me not to. And anyway, I didn't know it was wrong. He said it was medicine that'd make him better."

I thought for a while. It seemed a strange thing for Jamie to do; and yet I could see the workings of his mind as clear as day. He had failed at home; he had failed at sea. He couldn't fight alone, for he wasn't built that way. What was there left for him?

As I sat there toying with the empty bottle, it came to me that the others must never know he had been afraid to carry on in the face of danger like a true sailor-man. They must remember him as a boy who had died on duty. I turned to the mess-boy.

"Keep quiet about what you have told me," I said. "If the Old Man should hear, he might have you arrested for murder. This was found in your possession."

"I'll—I'll never tell."

"You'd better not!"

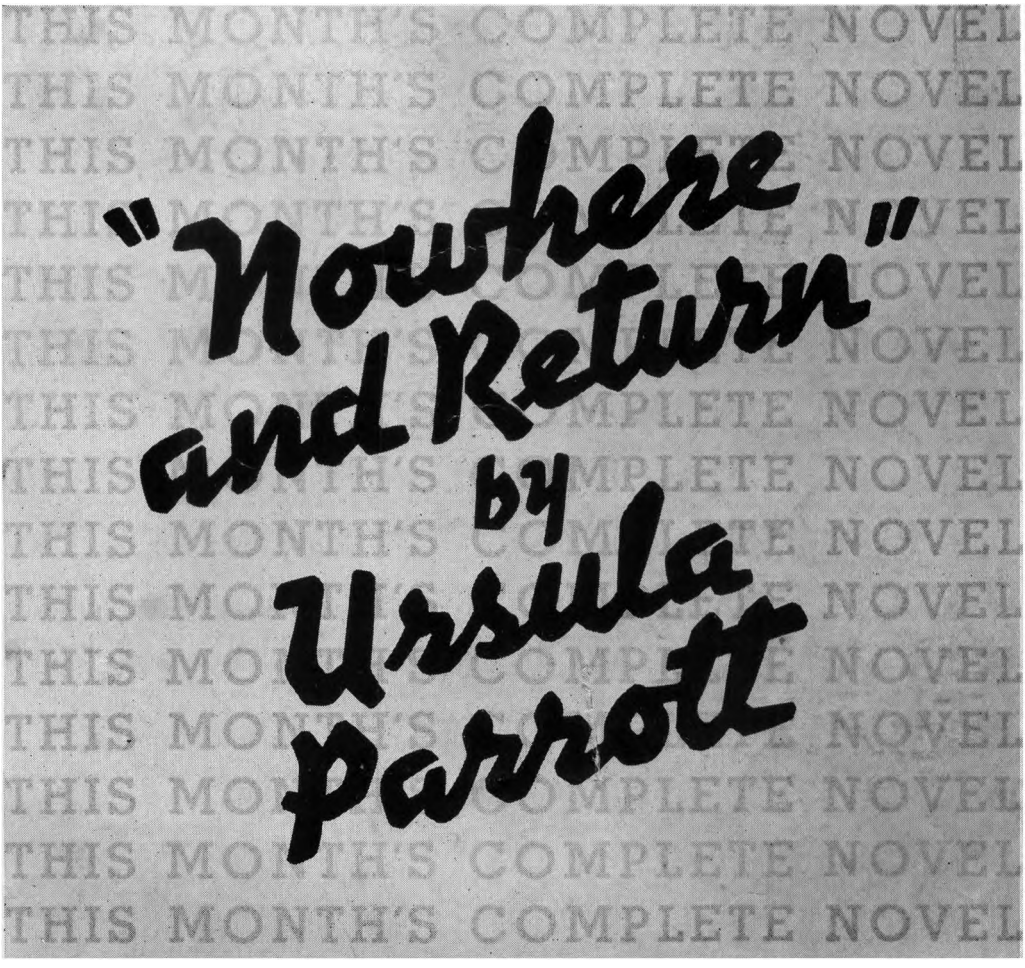
I went out on deck, and unseen by him, I dropped the bottle into the sea.

AT eight bells Jamie's body was lowered into the sea. All hands stood around the bunker-hatch, bare-headed and dry-eyed. Only the day wept. A cloud drifted across the sky, and a few drops of rain fell. The sun came out again in a burst of glory, and the *Monarch* went on her way.

When all was over, Mr. Boxley remained by the bulwark-rail alone, his head bowed down. I was glad that I had not killed him, for behind his brutality, his gruffness, there lay a courageous heart. I had seen it often, and he would reveal it to me again, I knew.

I did not have very long to wait.

A dramatic climax in this moving story of the sea will appear in the next, the November, issue.



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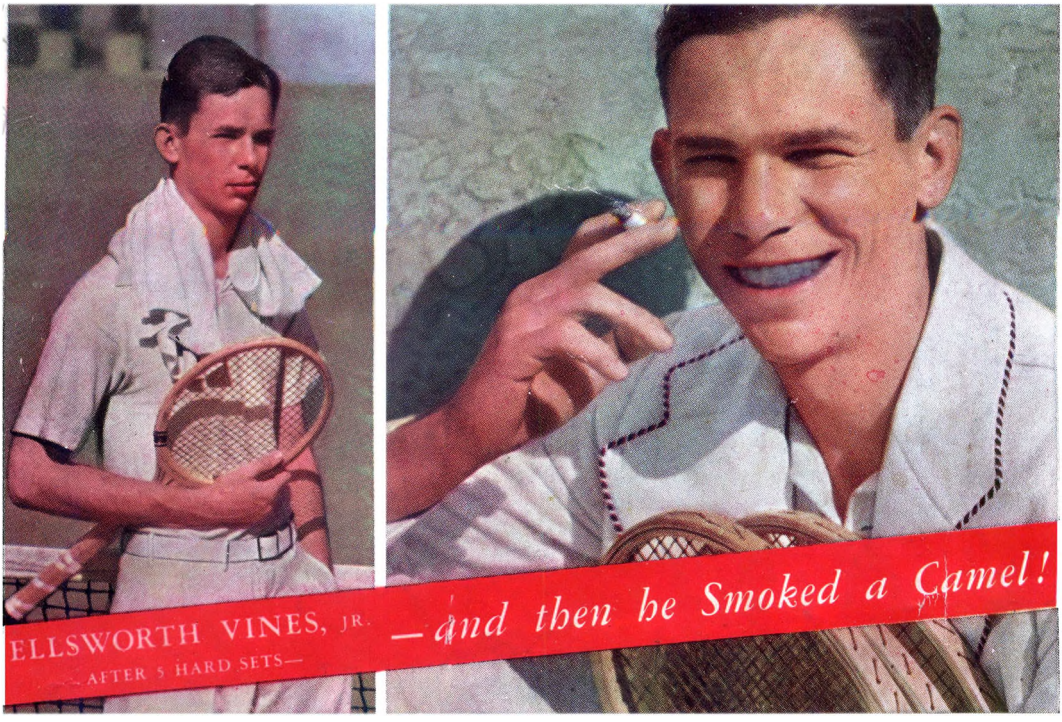

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