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MAGAZINE

N.S.E.



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Arctic**

Laurence
Hernsdon

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**Pirates
of Today**

*Also Roy Norton,
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SEPTEMBER 1928 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 47 No. 5



“The Romantic Soldier”

With full feeling for a leader of men and a fighter, gained at the front in the great war, Frazier Hunt spreads before you the dramatic career of the most picturesque and triumphant—and most tragic—soldier who ever wore the uniform of the United States—General Custer. Be sure to read this remarkable story in—

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\$10,000 a Year
R. B. Hansen, Akron, O., writes that he jumped his earnings from \$150 a month to \$10,000 a year as a result of reading the amazing book, "Modern Salesmanship."



\$700 a Month
L. O. Halloman, Roswell, N. Mex., was a farmer. He wanted to be a salesman and N. S. T. A. helped him. Now he says his earnings are \$700 in one month.



\$2,500 Increase
As a pattern-maker, the income of Kingsley Rowland, Audubon, N. J., was limited to \$1,500 a year. Now he writes that it is about \$4,000, thanks to N. S. T. A.



\$7,200 a Year
F. J. Walsh, Springfield, Mass., thanks N. S. T. A. training for his sensational rise from \$1,000 a year as a clerk to over \$7,200 a year.



\$4,800 More
F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn., writes that he raised his pay \$4,800 after reading "Modern Salesmanship." He credits N. S. T. A. with a great deal of his success.

Here Are Six Men Who Were Formerly Caught in the Hopeless Treadmill of Low-Pay Jobs. Today Every One of Them Report Earnings from \$4,000 up to \$10,000 a Year! Right Now—the Same Opportunity That Changed Their Lives So Completely Is Open to YOU! Don't Fail to Read Every Word of This Vital Message!

WHEN a man who has been struggling along in a low-pay job suddenly steps out and starts earning real money—\$5,000, \$7,500, or \$10,000 a year, he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It is hard for them to believe that he is the same man they used to know. Take one of the men whose pictures appear on this page—Kingsley Rowland of New Jersey, for example. His pals in the shop where he was working as a pattern-maker laughed at his ambitions to make more money. But he knew what he wanted, and he set about getting it in the shortest possible way. A remarkable free book, "Modern Salesmanship," opened his eyes to the opportunities in the selling profession. This book proved that Master Salesmen are *made*, not "born." It told facts and secrets about money-making that were a positive revelation. And best of all, it outlined a simple plan that enables men from all walks of life to quickly reach the top without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from their present positions!

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THE BLUE BOOK

EDWIN BALMER, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "Barren-Land Battle."
Frontispiece: "Men Who Won the West—Pierre Radisson." Drawn by Frank Hoban.

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Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 120
The new international problems caused by the airplane are ably presented in this specially engaging story. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

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MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1928

Special Notice to Writers and Artists:
Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization.

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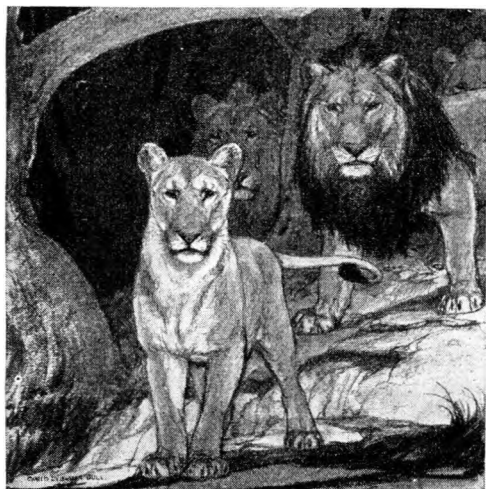
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“TARZAN”

The touch of the great romances of tradition,—and of our own childhood,—the tang of the imperishable fairy tales, is in “Tarzan.” For in “Tarzan,” as in “King Solomon’s Mines” and “Ali Baba,” the reader feels himself also partly the writer. He himself joins in the story-telling and calls upon his own imagination to share in the delightful business of creating romance. That’s just about the best fun there is, and it’s yours to enjoy in the next and succeeding issues of this magazine.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event, of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (September issue out August 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

A wonderful two years' trip at full pay —but only men with imagination can take it.

ABOUT one man in ten will be appealed to by this page. To the other nine a book is a book, a course is a course. The one man in ten has imagination. And imagination rules the world.

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Each one will take you personally thru his institution. He will explain clearly the operations of his bank; he will answer any question that comes to your mind. He will give you at first hand the things you need to know about the financial side of business.

When you have finished with him the car will be waiting. It will take you to the offices of men who direct great selling organizations. They will be waiting for you; their time will be at your disposal—all the time you want until you know all you can learn about marketing, selling and advertising.

Again you will travel. You will visit the principal industries of the country. The men who have devoted their lives to production will be your guides thru these plants in Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago and in every great industrial center.

Thru other days the heads of accounting departments will guide you. On others, men who have made their mark in office management; on others, traffic experts and authorities in commercial law and credits. Great economists and teachers and business leaders will be your companions.

The whole journey will occupy two years. It will cost you nothing in income, for your salary will go right along.

Do you think that any man with imagination could spend two years like that without being bigger at the end? Is it humanly possible for a mind to come in contact with the biggest minds in business without growing more self-reliant, more active, more able?

Is it worth a few pennies a day to have such an experience? Do you wonder that the men, like Mr. Hires, who have had it—who have made this two years' journey—are holding positions of executive responsibility in business everywhere?

This wonderful two years' trip is what the Alexander Hamilton Institute offers you. The details are all printed in the famous booklet, "Forging Ahead in Business." Send for it.



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LIKE so many men in high positions, Mr. Hires is a staunch advocate of the necessity and value of systematic business training. At the age of fifty-five, when his product was already well known all over the world, and his fortune assured, Mr. Hires enrolled for the Modern Business Course and Service of the Alexander Hamilton Institute.

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TARZAN

At His Best

NEXT month Tarzan comes back to you—Tarzan at his inimitable best, lord of the jungle and supreme adventurer waging desperate battle against a strangely surviving alien civilization. With Nkima his messenger-monkey chattering fearfully on his shoulder, he swings swift through the trees to splendid conflicts with ape and lion and savage man. And you through the wizardry of Mr. Burroughs' genius are enabled to share in a valiant career that takes you back to the terrors and triumphs of life as it was lived in this earth's dawn.

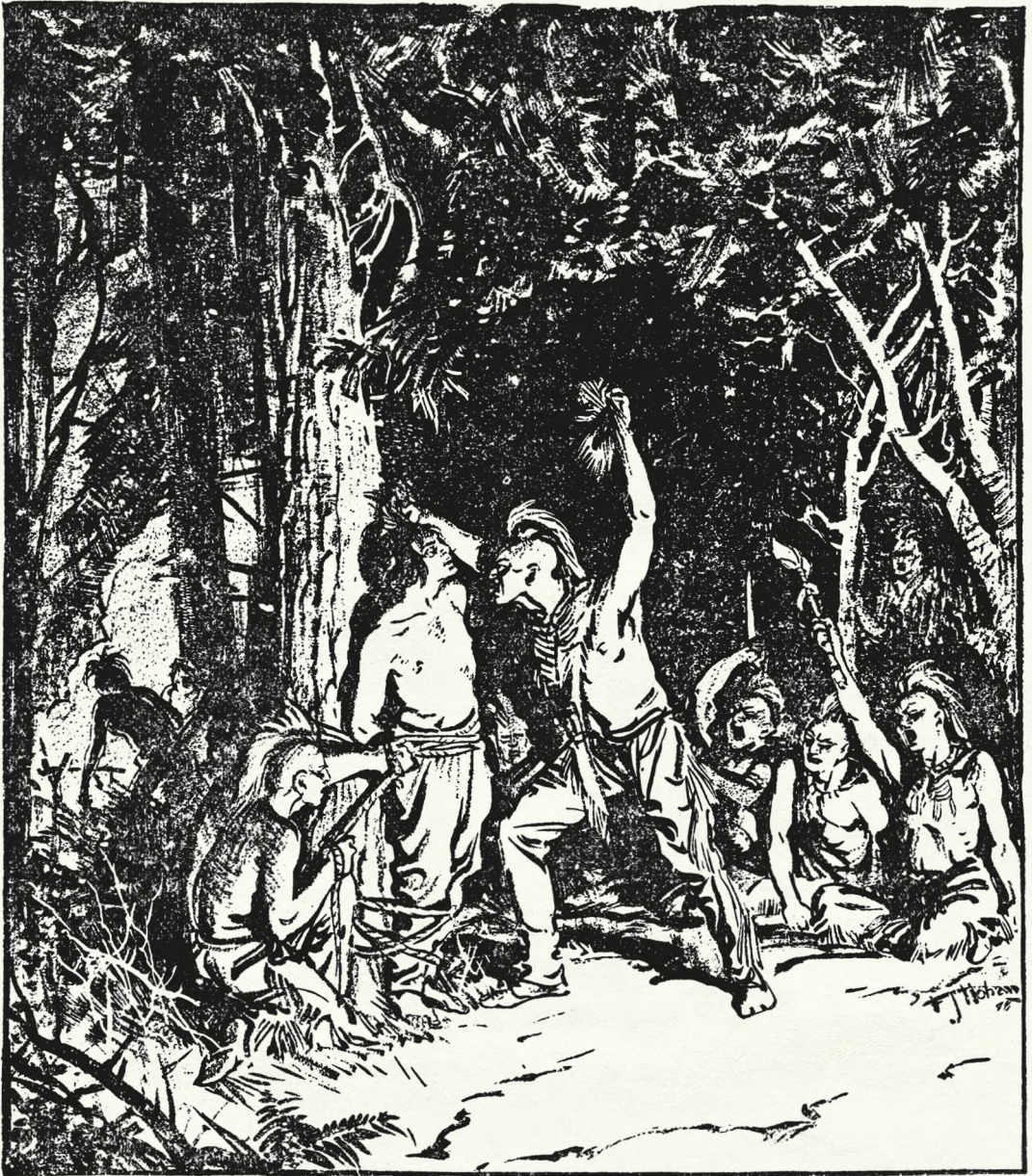
"With a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner." Surely Tarzan, best of all modern fiction, fulfills this ancient description. For never was there another fiction character which wrought more sure enchantment than he. And all you who have loved Rider Haggard's "Allan Quartermain," "Robinson Crusoe," "The Swiss Family Robinson," and Jules Verne's adventurers on "The Mysterious Island" may count upon joyously renewing your delight in a tale of the pure imagination through this newest and best tale of Tarzan.

We have often stressed the authenticity of our stories—called attention to the fact that the author had first-hand knowledge of the places and people he described.

And this is no less true of Mr. Burroughs and Tarzan. For though no such superman as Tarzan or such a bright enchanted wilderness as his habitat ever existed in fact, they *have* existed and *do* exist unquestionably in the fancy of us all—are happily true to the imaginative faculty which is one of man's most blessed distinctions and prerogatives, and without which he were dull indeed.

TARZAN will have good company, of course: "Buccaneers, Ltd.," will take you through new exploits of daring modern piracy. George Worts will offer you an engrossing detective story in his novellette "The Silencer." Clarence Herbert New will give you one of the best of his fine "Free Lances in Diplomacy." Arthur H. Carhart, who wrote "The Forest Legion," which concludes in this issue, and Stanley Young, of the U. S. Biological survey, will give you "Old Lefty of Burns Hole," the first story of a remarkable and authentic series—the real life story of one of the last great buffalo wolves killed in Colorado. And there will be many other short stories you will enjoy to the utmost, including five stories of real experience contributed by your fellow-readers. These fact-stories, by the way, are coming in in increasing numbers and are of even better quality than hitherto.

—The Editors.



Drawn by Frank Hoban

MEN WHO WON THE WEST

Pierre Radisson

PERHAPS the first pioneer of the northern West was Pierre Radisson, who saw the Mississippi twelve years before Joliet, and visited Labrador, Hudson Bay, Minnesota, Dakota and the Canadian Northwest. His history is an epic of tremendous adventure that began when at seventeen he was captured by the Iroquois near Three Rivers, Quebec. After a time, with another captive, he killed his guards and escaped—only to be retaken and put to the torture; but he bore himself so well that the savages relented and

adopted him. Two years later he again escaped—this time successfully. The knowledge thus gained of the Indians enabled him to devote his life to wilderness exploration; incidental to this he became an important figure in the fur trade and the axis about which much extraordinary international intrigue revolved. . . . He died in poverty, but—"Memorial tablets commemorate other discoverers. Radisson needs none. The great Northwest is his monument for all time."

Buccaneers, Ltd.

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Illustrated by William Molt

Piracy on the high seas in this year of our Lord 1928—and the methods used are modern indeed! You will thoroughly enjoy this extraordinary story.

THE *Luzon* was sailing at two in the morning. Three hours before, when most of the passengers had already come on board and retired to their state-rooms, three armored trucks from one of the express companies were driven rapidly down the pier. These stopped and backed up to the lower end of the saloon-gangway—three men from each, with automatics swinging from belt-holsters, jumped down—one of the three standing at the front of his car where he commanded everything approaching from any direction—the other two methodically taking small oak boxes from the rear ends of the trucks, carrying them up the gangway, down the saloon-companionway, through a trapdoor in the middle of the saloon-deck to a steel vault underneath it. On the pier a dozen of the San Francisco police were standing in a semicircle a little beyond the armored trucks.

"Are all those piles of boxes and things on the pier going to be put on board before we sail, Mr. Garner?"

Two girls who had boarded the ship hours before but were too excited by the prospect of the voyage before them to turn in had been corralled by the second mate when they got too close to the cargo-slings and taken up to the B-deck with him.

"All but the last two on the other side—that's stuff for the *Mindanao*, sailing two weeks from this. We'll be having everything aboard by one o'clock."

"Is the captain around anywhere? What sort of a man is he?"

"A very good sort, I assure you, Miss Maitland. There's not a more capable

master in the Comp'ny's employ. That'll be Cap'n Selby, now—talkin' to the Customs chap at the foot of the gangway. You're quite sure to like him—I fancy the steward's puttin' you both at his table."

"Do you eat there too, Mr. Garner?"

"No—I've my own table at the other side of the saloon, d'ye see. Possibly you may like to change over to my side after we leave Manila for the run to Hongkong an' Singapore."

"*Ssst!* Listen here! (Don't look too quickly.) Do you know who that man is, leaning over the rail? Rather striking-looking, don't you think? He came aboard when we did. Seems quite accustomed to boats."

"Oh—aye. That'll be Mr. James Morton, of New York and London. Not above five-an'-forty, I fancy—but he's supposed to have retired. Mostly speculation in shipping, one hears. He goes out to the Orient with us occasionally—spends a good bit of time there. Knows Selby quite well—in fact, it's thought by some that Morton used his influence to get the Captain this boat. May be nothing in it, because Selby's competent to handle a craft an' crew much larger than this—but they're good friends of several years' standing."

"Isn't it an awful responsibility, being in supreme command of all this value in property—being accountable for the safety of so many human lives?"

"Aye—more than anybody would undertake, for the pay, in any other line of business. But of course a master—or any of the officers under him, for that matter—takes it as all in the day's work."

THE two girls continued to watch the proceedings with absorbing interest, noticing that except for Mr. Morton, a little farther along the rail, they seemed to be the only passengers who had curiosity enough to come on deck again at that time of night. But what girls wouldn't have been excited under the circumstances? It was the beginning of an adventure often dreamed of in the vague way one dreams of things which it would be so pleasant to do without the slightest hope of ever seeing them realized. Forced into business immediately after high-school, both had shown such exceptional capacity that inside of six years they were receiving rather unusual salaries in the Wall Street District and putting by a separate account for the realization of those early dreams. They were now starting out upon a vacation trip around the world.

"What kind of a shipment is it, Mr. Garner?" they asked now. "Money? We've seen those armored-car boys handling bullion for the Federal Reserve Bank in New York—but surely nobody would be shipping bullion to the Orient, would they?"

"Well—I've not seen the inside of those boxes, d'ye see—so I really cawn't say what'll be in them. Valuable shipm'nt of some sort, of course. We don't talk about 'em on board—least said the better, you know, with a passenger-list of considerably over a hundred. Very possibly there'll be none of the rest up to see the stuff come aboard. The trapdoor in the saloon is covered by the jute gangway-runner, so nobody ever thinks of its bein' there."

Presently, Captain Selby—after seeing the last of the boxes stowed and the trapdoor closed—came on deck and paused to light his pipe and shake hands with Morton when he noticed him at the rail.

"By Jove, old chap! I'd not glanced over the passenger-list, yet—didn't know you were sailing with us this trip. Dev'lish glad to have you aboard!"

"It's a little earlier than I usually go out East, but I've been quite interested in one or two little things which have happened lately on the Pacific—entirely outside of my own activities. Thought I'd run over to Hongkong and see what some of my friends out there may have heard—what they think of it."

"What nature of thing might it be, Morton?"

"That's just what I don't know. All that has come to me is this: Two Secret Service

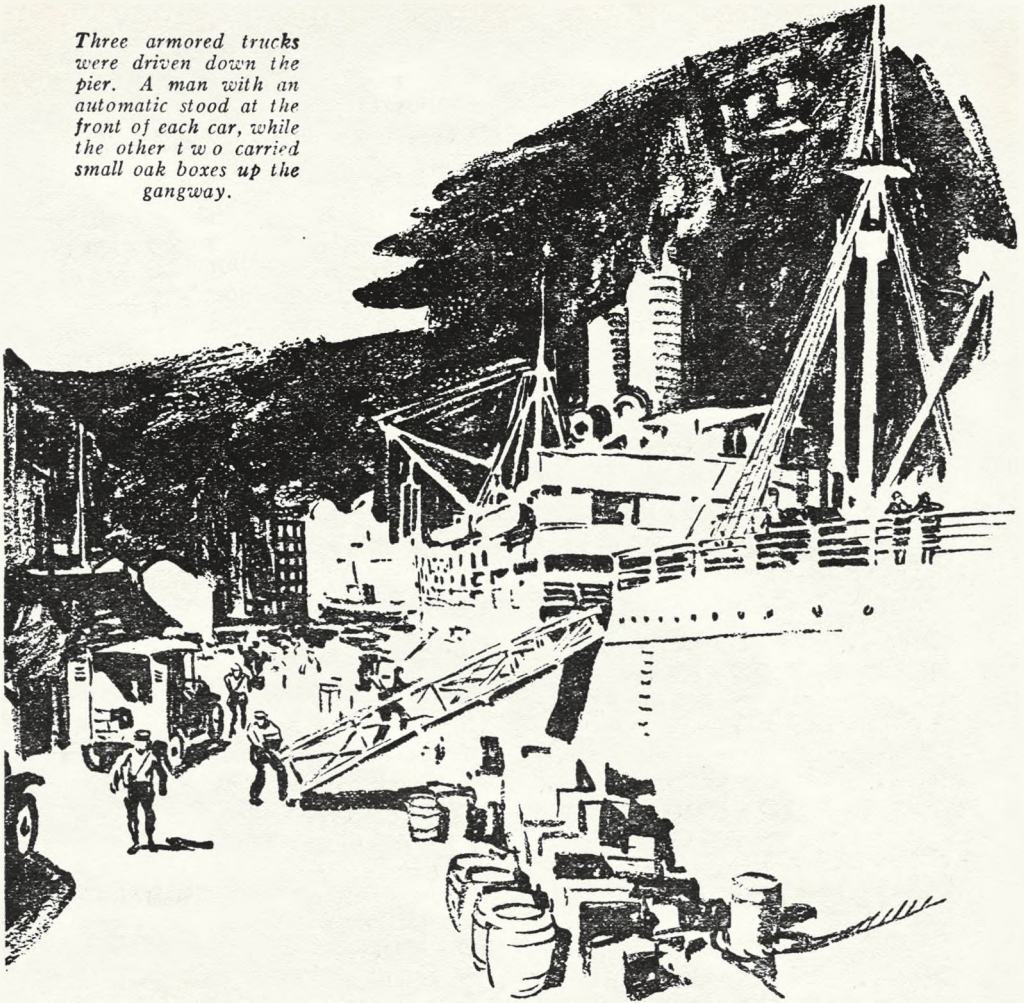
operatives from the Treasury have gone out to Honolulu—another two are on their way to Manila—a couple more are already in Shanghai. As nearly as I could make out by matching up one bit of Washington gossip with another, they were sent in response to a suggestion from the British Foreign Office, with some understanding of coöperation from the F. O. Secret Service men."



"Sounds like something political. Can't be anything in the criminal line, or it would be Scotland Yard instead of the F. O. messing in it."

"I didn't know that Scotland Yard went in for anything of an international nature. Eh? Crime in British territory, yes—though I'm not so sure that they cover Australia or the Cape, and India has her own very efficient Intelligence Department. But in the matter of something which concerns other nations as well as Britain, I think it's usually the F. O. The point is, that—with nothing startling reported on the Pacific or in Eastern waters, there are

Three armored trucks were driven down the pier. A man with an automatic stood at the front of each car, while the other two carried small oak boxes up the gangway.



these indications that something *has* happened, and that everything about it is being most thoroughly suppressed by those in authority. Well—I've no definite occupation, you know—got more than I'll need to spend during the rest of my life, though I take on something occasionally when it looks like good speculation, with the elements of risk and excitement. So I'm interested in what may be going on out there—my friends will put me in touch with the F. O. men in China. By the way, I suppose that's the Philippine currency shipment coming aboard, directly from the San Francisco mint?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, old chap—I've not seen the manifest, except for a casual glance over it when I cleared at the Custom-house, two hours ago. I'll not say I'd rather have inflammable cargo in my holds, of course—but I much prefer sailin' with very little of value in the strong-room. Passengers' valuables—oh, aye! All they

wish to put in my charge. Because, in case of shipwreck or other disaster, they know all of the circumstances as well as I do, an' can't blame me for whatever I'm forced to do in emergencies. But stuff runnin' to quite serious amounts, shipped by somebody ashore who knows nothin' of what happens at sea, or gets a badly garbled account of it, often makes a deal of trouble for a shipmaster, d'ye see. However, it'll be all in the day's work."

WHEN some of the passengers turned out for breakfast, the *Luzon* was seventy or eighty miles west of the Farallones, making good time over a long Pacific swell which gave the boat just comfortable motion for those accustomed to the sea but proved disastrous to others, who persisted in sticking to their staterooms. Miss Maitland and her friend were so interested in everything connected with the voyage that it made for easy acquaintance with their

fellow-travelers. Morton was a man who usually kept more or less to himself, but he was quite apt to cultivate anyone who interested him for reasons of his own. In the course of a few minutes' talk with Jean Maitland, he quickly grasped the resource, the close observation and general efficiency, which made her worth what she was getting from one of the big operators in Wall Street. As she and her friend had been seated opposite him near the head of the Captain's table, the four became good friends at that first meal.

"I'm wondering whether your likes and dislikes are rather strongly developed, Miss Maitland—that is, whether they seem to be instinctive—sometimes without any particular reason? Eh?" Morton remarked one day as he and the girl sat on deck chatting leisurely on casual topics.

JEAN Maitland laughed amusedly.

"You've discovered one of my ungovernable weaknesses, Mr. Morton—I noticed that you were studying me like a strange bug, or something. Yes—I take very decided liking or dislike to various people I meet, and it seems to be purely instinctive. I've called myself a fool for such prejudices more than once—particularly when there appears to be no reason for them. But the curious point is that, in the long run, the instinctive feeling isn't so far out—in fact, I'm getting so I trust it more than I do surface impressions."

"That's about what I thought. Well, a ship at sea is a little world by itself, with all sorts and conditions of human beings. It occurred to me that I'd like to start a little game with you—just us two—with a gentlemen's agreement that we don't mention it to anyone else. Miss Burns is charming, of course—but her abilities have a different trend from yours. What I had in mind was this: we tell each other, every day, whether we've observed or talked with any man or woman who seems to us in any way untrustworthy—and explain if possible what it is that gives that impression. Passengers, officers, crew—makes no difference who, or what they do on board. How does this strike you?"

"Rather like a cat-party—picking other folks to pieces! Village tea-party—gossiping about their neighbors. Any particular object in your 'information exchange,' Mr. Morton?"

"Mostly corroboration of my own instinctive impressions; I'd like to test 'em

out—see how reliable they are, or whether they are absolutely untrustworthy."

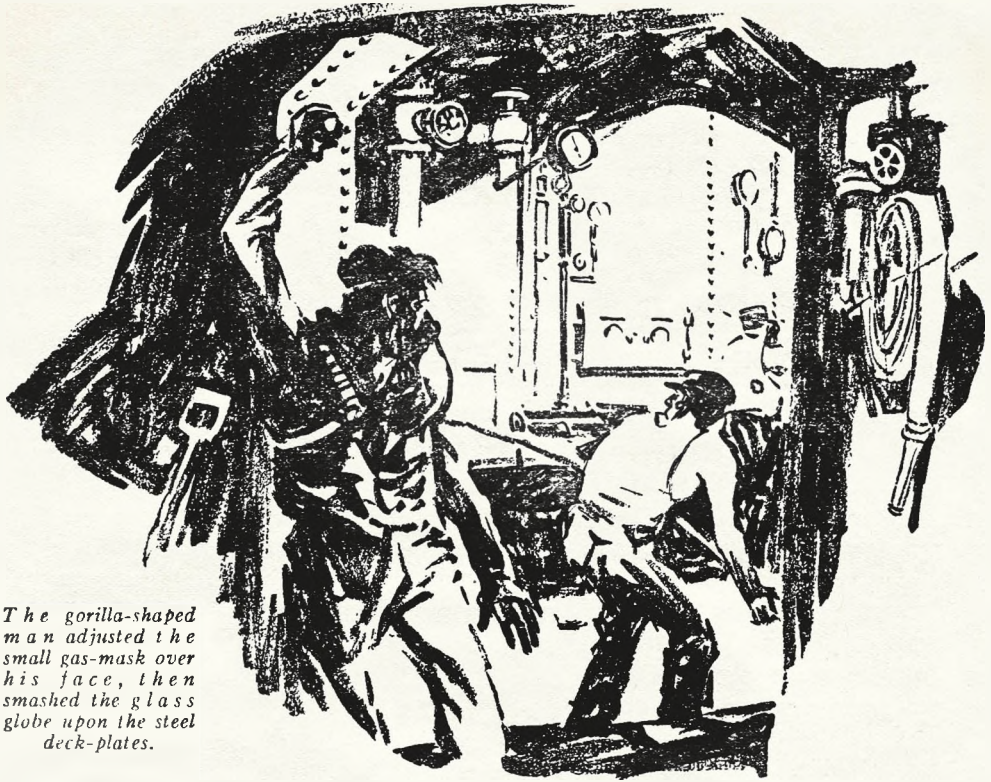
"H-m-m—sounds a little as if you thought we might have pirates aboard and wanted to spot them in advance. Is that it? I'm afraid pirates are rather out of date, aren't they? 'There aint no such animal,' any more. Wouldn't have much chance against a fast, high-powered modern steamer, would they?"

"Well—here's Cap'n Selby. Ask him!—Miss Maitland wants to know, Captain, whether there are any pirates left in these days—whether they'd have any chance against modern shipping?"

"Hmph! Possibly that's not altogether the silly question you might fancy. Any heavily armed boat of twice our speed could stop us at sea, for example, with the threat to sink us if we didn't stop. With no passengers, the case would be somewhat different, d'ye see—a master would have but his crew's lives an' his own to consider. On the other hand, mails would be an added complication—a master is bound not to endanger safe transportation of the mails. The whole question of nerve would be whether he felt inwardly certain that the pirate would carry out his threat of sinkin' in case the master proceeded without regard to him—an' thereby took to the bottom whatever the pirate was after. With the type of gunmen an' criminals we have today, chances are ten to one the pirate would sink an' destroy us—possibly even fire on the boats, just as a warning in future cases of the same sort. What would *you* consider a master's duty to be in a case like that? Go to the bottom—takin' his passengers, mails an' valuables with him?"

"Oh, mercy, no! You *wouldn't*, would you, Captain Selby?"

"One doesn't know. Time enough to decide upon that when the pirate chap turns up. But let's consider the other side of it. We'll suppose, of course, that the pirate is after a large sum of money or bullion which he fancies the steamer is carryin'. All bullion-ingots are stamped with the assay-marks—sometimes with bank-marks as well. Specie is apt to be freshly minted. Before your pirate can spend what he gets, he must melt up those ingots into some other form which is commercially exchangeable, or mint it into coins of some country which is just issuing new coinage. He might reduce the metal chemically an' impregnate matrix-ore with it, so that he



The gorilla-shaped man adjusted the small gas-mask over his face, then smashed the glass globe upon the steel deck-plates.

could ship it as ore an' have any reducin'-plant handle it for him. But in each one of these methods the chances are three to one in favor of detection—against the pirate. An' his jolly fellow-pirates would be wantin' a split-up at once, d'ye see. As a matter of fact, the difficulties in the whole proposition—after gettin' the money—are so great that a chap would think twice before tryin' to pull it off, in these days."

"Wouldn't modern science offer some methods for piracy which might be successfully used, Captain?"

"Aye—an' there'd be no tellin' what methods. Piracy is quite as possible as ever it was, Miss Maitland; but the world is a good bit smaller. The same scientific discoveries which offer the pirate new opportunities prob'ly would insure his eventual detection equally well. Even at that, though, I'd not say the pirate mightn't have the best of it for quite a while. His greatest danger, naturally, would be from his fellow-pirates—his own confederates."

A COUPLE of days later Miss Maitland admitted to Morton that there were four individuals on board who gave the impression of having in mind things quite the opposite of what they said.

"How would you class their intelligence,

Miss Maitland? I infer that at least two or three of them may be among the crew. Would you consider them average men with about education enough for their jobs, not likely to rise so very much higher?"

"On the contrary! What seems to me most suspicious about them is my impression that their education is far above the average. Yet—one is an oiler in the engine-room ('greaser,' I think you'd call him); one is a saloon steward—just one of the lowest-paid lot; and another is a deck-hand who goes up with another man and takes the wheel at certain hours during the day. The fourth is a woman in the second class with whom I talk occasionally—active, outdoor sort of woman, twenty-eight or thirty. Walks as if she'd spent a good deal of time in riding-breeches."

"I know her. Miss Brady of Seattle. Traveling alone, but sticks around a good deal with a quite illiterate old woman who is, none the less, about as fine and straight as they make 'em. I've also spotted the three men you mention—and their records, as far as I can find out by very cautious inquiries, are excellent. All three supposed to be college fellows down on their luck, taking any old job to keep their tummies from caving in. It's a type one frequently meets at sea—in the stokehold, in the

pantry, galley, fo'c'stle. Not a solitary thing against any one of them; Selby and Garner would laugh at us if we suggested it—and yet both your intuitive sense and mine keep insisting that way in the background there is something out with each of them. All right—keep watching 'em. And when there is opportunity, get a look at the tall light-haired cook in the galley, and the black-haired, gorilla-shaped fellow in the stokehold, and Gundarson, the fourth officer. See if you notice him in the radio-room with Sparks at any time. I think they are rather chummy in their watches below, and unless I'm considerably mistaken, Gundarson knows a heap more about radio than our Sparks does."

"I'm rather surprised at the suggestion about Gundarson. He's seemed so colorless to me that I doubt if I've spoken more than half a dozen words to him since I came aboard—but I'm willing to cultivate the man a little if you say so. I haven't had more than a peep into the stokehold or the galley—but I'll get Mr. Campbell and Williams, the chief steward, to show me around a bit. Do you know, Mr. Morton, I'm getting interested in this game you suggested—because I think you have some ultimate object in view. Tell me what you suspect—what you think might happen?"

"Frankly—I don't know. Something *has* happened on the Pacific or in Eastern waters which the British Government and ours appear to be investigating in a very quiet way. We're carrying two or three millions in Philippine currency and specie, coined at the San Francisco mint. Don't mention that to anybody. One of my friends in the Treasury told me that shipment had been scheduled, three weeks before we sailed—and I booked on this boat a month or so before I usually cross just to see if my hunch was pure imagination."

A WEEK after the *Luzon* had sailed, she was bowling along at a comfortable sixteen knots in mid-Pacific. The day had been sultry, with a stationary or slightly rising glass—oppressive, but from heat only. The deck-chairs had been strung along the wide starboard gangways, in the shade, with the probability that many of the passengers would sleep in them half the night. Dinner was served at one bell in the second dog-watch—half-past six—and by the time dessert was being placed upon the tables, it was dark. The second mate had the bridge, so Captain Selby, the chief

engineer, mate, purser, assistant engineer, and doctor were at dinner, with the chief steward, pantrymen, cooks and practically all of the stewards, on duty below. Also Murfree, the third mate, who substituted for Sparks in the radio-room when he was below. The engine-room was in charge of the second assistant. Greasers, stokers and deck-hands, not on duty, were in their respective mess-rooms on the main-deck and in the fo'c'stle. All of these, bear in mind, were below decks—in rooms supplied with fresh air by the ventilating-ducts from the blowers in the engine-room. The only men on deck in the open air, at the time, were the second mate on the bridge, the lookout on the fo'c'stle-head, the fourth mate in the forward "well," and two quartermasters in the wheelhouse, all the windows of which were open.

As three bells struck, the gorilla-shaped man in the stokehold stepped over to where his jumper hung on the engine-room bulk-head, took a four-inch glass globe from one of the pockets and a curious-looking wad of webbing and tubing from inside one of his voluminous trouser-legs. Standing in the narrow passage between stokehold and engine-room, he adjusted the small and compact gas-mask over his face. Then—the backs of the stokers being toward him—he smashed the glass globe upon the steel deck-plates just behind them. There were so many other noises made by the steamer and her machinery that the little *plop* attracted no attention whatever—but inside of two minutes every man in the stokehold had staggered away from the furnace doors, sunk down upon the deck-plates, and gone to sleep.

When sure they were unconscious, the man in the mask closed three furnace doors which had been left open, then went back through the passage into the engine-room, where a couple more of the glass globes had been dropped from the second grating by one of the greasers. The second assistant and three other men were unconscious, on the gratings; and the other greaser, with a gas-mask over his face, immediately came down, bringing two good-sized copper cylinders which had been stowed away where nobody had seen them. Pointing their nozzles against the intake of the ventilating-blowers, the draught immediately began carrying a stupefying gas through the system of ducts to every confined space on the steamer except the holds, which were served by another blower. When a third and

fourth cylinder had been emptied in this way, they stopped the engines and went on deck.

The fourth mate, Gundarson—with a mask on—had stealthily climbed the bridge-ladder behind the second mate and directed the nozzle of a smaller cylinder over his shoulder in such a way that he gulped down three or four lungfuls of the gas before having the least idea what was happening to him, and sank down unconscious on the deck-gratings. Then Gundarson, standing out of sight, pushed the nozzle of the cylinder over the sash in one of the wheelhouse windows and let the gas spurt inside. After getting the look-out on the fore-castle-head, he dragged him down the ladder inside, and closed the door. Going back to the bridge, he dragged the second mate into the wheelhouse and closed all the windows, so that the confined air would keep them unconscious considerably longer than if they were left in the open air. Passengers who were in their staterooms naturally got the gas through the ventilating-ducts and went to sleep in their bunks. Then Gundarson went up to the radio-room and began calling a fast yacht which appeared to have been approaching them during the day and was now but three or four miles astern with her lights doused.

CHAPTER II

THE ventilating-fans and the engines¹ having been started up again about six bells, streams of clean fresh air were being blown into every room and confined space below-decks, gradually replacing the fumes which had kept so many human lungs breathing heavily for upward of three hours—those with the strongest constitutions naturally beginning to recover first. Campbell, at the foot of the Captain's table,—being a Scot, and very difficult to keep in a helpless condition,—was the first to open his eyes, looking wonderingly about him. Apparently everything was as he last remembered it—the dishes of fruit and dessert on the table—passengers seated along it. But although a number were still in semi-upright positions, braced against the backs of their swivel-chairs, they seemed to be motionless, with closed eyes, while others were leaning forward upon the table, having pushed the dishes to one side in a last conscious effort. Selby was bolt upright in his chair, just starting to move.

Glancing across the saloon, Campbell saw the same condition of things—and on the deck, lying in the gangways, were the figures of four stewards. What to make of it all the Chief didn't know.

In a moment, however, he began to notice something he *did* know—because knowing it was part of his job. His engines were running as sweetly as they should—the vibration and throb of them told him that unconsciously. But the boat was pitching—taking water over her bows in a way that showed she was out of control and off her course. Getting upon his feet with some difficulty, he staggered up the companion and out upon the B-deck, where great breaths of fresh air revived him still more. Slowly up the ladder to the bridge—into the wheelhouse, where he found the three men on the floor. Throwing the wheel over until the big steamer once more was on her course, he lashed the spokes with marline, opened the windows and got the quartermasters on their feet, propping them against the wheel-stanchion. Then he asked the second mate how he got where he was. Frisbie didn't know. He was on the port end of the bridge at last accounts, and had suddenly felt his senses leaving him.

“Wair there a body near ye at all, laddie?”

“Not a soul, Chief! The quartermasters were in here—look-out up yonder, on the fo'c'stle-head. Gundarson down there in the for'ard well. Not another person on deck as far as I could see. I was looking off to south'ard—where I fancied I'd seen a light on the horizon. Then—suddenly—I couldn't keep my eyes open. I'd have said, don't you know, that I just sank down an' went to sleep right there, on the grating—but I fancy I must unconsciously have staggered along to the wheelhouse an' in through the door.”

“An' hoo about tha twa bodies in tha wheelhouse? Will ye be tellin' me they wair steerin' in their sleep? Aye?”

GOING below to the engine-room, Campbell found the second assistant on his feet examining the steam-gauge, which was down seventy pounds. The greasers were sitting up—conscious but completely bewildered. In the stokehold, three of the huskiest men were staggering from coal-ducts to furnace-doors, getting the fires up again with forced draught. The engine-room clock showed half an hour after midnight (one bell)—and their last recol-

lection was that eight bells in the previous watch hadn't gone.

By this time, most of those in the saloon, pantry and galley were conscious. Passengers in their staterooms were longer coming out of it. Except for the officers, Morton and Miss Maitland, everybody was rather taking it for granted that a sudden closeness in the air had sent them off in a faint which had lasted but a few minutes, and that they were still finishing dinner. Jean, however, had glanced at her wrist-watch in amazement—placing it against her ear to see if it were still ticking, and then showing it to Morton, across the table. He nodded, with a grim smile—looking solicitously at his friend Captain Selby, who was now sufficiently awake to speculate upon what had happened. He also nodded in answer to Morton's unspoken question.

"We'll have a look-see presently, old chap—after everybody has turned in. But I fancy it'll be scarcely necess'ry. Clever, don't you know—damned clever! Nobody could have foreseen such an utterly preposterous thing! Don't know how long it took with you, but I was out in less than a minute, I'd say. Couldn't have been anything in the food, because it hit everybody at the same instant. We'll see what Graeme has to say about it—he's something of a chemist, besides bein' a dashed good medico. Possibly he'll be able to give us an explanation. I'll be wantin' as many sworn affidavits as I can get from passengers an' crew as to just how it hit 'em—what their sensations were."

Jean Maitland had been listening to the Captain's rather jerky remarks in round-eyed amazement.

"Do you really mean, Captain, that—"

"I mean nothin' at all, Miss Maitland, until I know a good bit more about this than I do now! When I've gone to the bottom of it, I'll explain to you—but until then it'll be as well not to speculate upon wild possibilities or even discuss 'em. Might have been something atmospheric, you know—seismic—something like that."

"Mr. Morton may have told you, Captain, that he and I have been doing a little quiet studying of two or three interesting matters which, possibly, could have some connection with this. Would you be willing to have us both up in your cabin—say, an hour from now—and let us make a joint conference of it?"

The master looked at Morton questioningly.

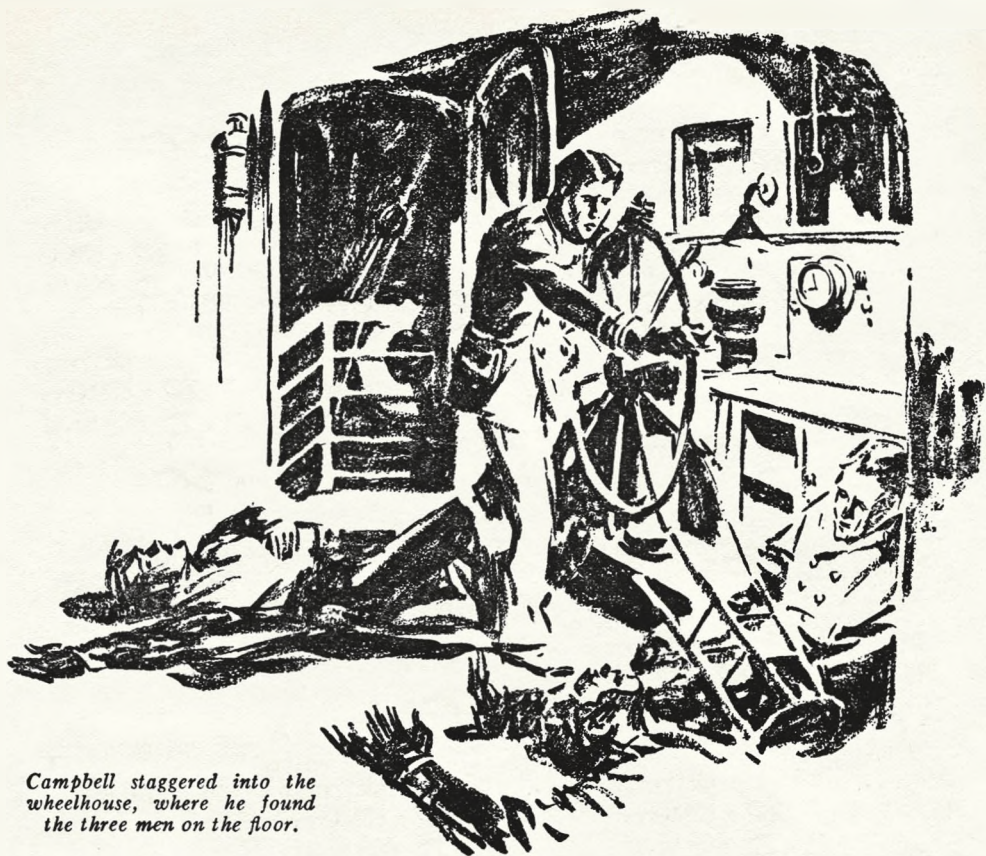
"She has quite an exceptional head, Selby, or she wouldn't be holding down a six-thousand-dollar job—you may find her suggestions well worth considering. Er—during the next hour, if possible—see if you can account for every soul on board who sailed with us a week ago—see if any are missing, or if one of them was noticed doing anything suspicious just as the others were losing consciousness. See exactly what's missing—if anything." (He was speaking too guardedly to be overheard.)

"Aye—naturally, those'll be the first points we'll be wishin' to know. Both of you come up in an hour—sayin' nothin' to anybody."

THE first reaction of passengers and crew alike was a failure to realize the length of time they had been unconscious. Rather to their surprise, all seemed to find their hunger not quite satisfied, as it usually was at the end of a dinner—the passengers calling for a little more food, with coffee, and the stewards taking an occasional bite as they passed through the pantry. It was another half-hour before the saloon was deserted, but while he was waiting, Selby had gone through the up-to-date safe in the purser's office, equipped with everything except a time-clock. When the saloon was empty, they rolled up the gangway runner, unlocked and opened the steel trapdoor, descended into the strong-room, where a few minutes spent flashing their electric torches about proved all the investigation necessary. Then they locked the trapdoor again, replaced the runner, and Selby went on deck—going up to his cabin abaft the wheelhouse a few minutes later.

When Morton and Jean Maitland had seated themselves, Selby said slowly:

"The strong-room is swept clean—not a box, not even a canvas bag, lyin' about. Ackerley's safe, in his office, hasn't been touched—luckily, everything belonging to passengers or members of the crew had been put in it, because there's no chance for anyone to open it, in the ord'n'ry run of things, without disturbin' him or the night-watch. Prob'ly whoever took the bank-shipm't knew there was no time to waste drillin' it open, an' comparatively small pickin's if they did. There was no attempt at lootin' passengers' luggage in the staterooms, or we'd have had a howl from some of 'em before this. So far as the passengers are concerned, they haven't the slightest evidence that any robbery has



Campbell staggered into the wheelhouse, where he found the three men on the floor.

been committed—or that anyone else has been aboard of us. I'll not enlighten 'em, either! Keep the whole matter absolutely under the rose betwixt Ackerley, myself, you two and the owners.

"The door of the strong-room was opened by some one who had the combination. Ackerley an' I made up the letters ourselves an' kept no written memorandum—but I fancy a really expert safe-burglar might listen for the fall of the tumblers an' work it out, if he had time an' opportunity. As for the roll-call you suggested—Williams assures me that every man in his steward's departm't has been seen within the hour, an' that none of the passengers is missin'. Campbell is equally positive about every man in the engine-room an' stokehold. Garner has personally seen each one of his men on deck or in the fo'c'stle. In the morning I'll check up those statem'ts by seein' each person for myself—but I've no reason to doubt them."

"Have you seen Gundarson?"

"Aye—just spoke to him before comin' up here."

"There's a man who looks like a gorilla, in the stokehold—"

"Aye—Campbell was tellin' me that chap is still a bit stupid from the effects of whatever hit him."

"Hmph! I'll be damned! The brains which planned this proposition are altogether too exceptional to be run down as I've been rather hoping we might do! Consider! We know absolutely that there must have been assistance right aboard this boat—assistance from at least half a dozen of the men you've checked over as being here. Yet we've not, so far, one shred of evidence against any one of them—if we get it, it'll be something of a miracle. Can you beat it? You're dead right about it's being lucky that none of the passengers' stuff was taken, Selby! Your owners lose nothing through *them*. And I'm not so sure they can be held responsible for the bank-shipment."

"Not a chance of it! The clause on the bills-of-lading covers the whole question. You've seen it—on every comp'ny's bills: '*Not responsible for loss incurred through action of the elements, piracy on the high-seas or an act of God.*' That lets out Butterworth an' Stires for every penny of the loss. It'll be the underwriters

who'll have to pay. All the same—it's a bit tough in my case."

"Don't see how it can affect *you*, Selby!"

"Oh, my word, old chap! Consider! I'm master of the boat—in sole charge. At dinner-time in the evening, perfectly fair weather, normal conditions everywhere, craft bowling along at sixteen knots, much too fast for boardin' while in motion—no other craft in sight. An' I let nearly three million dollars be taken right from under my nose without even knowin' how or where it went! What owners or underwriters in all the world will ever believe a tale like that!"

"NOW, wait a bit!" urged Morton.

"W-a-i-t a bit! Neither owners nor passengers have lost anything by you. There'll be affidavits from everyone on board as to just what happened—all of which count very heavily in your favor. Aside from all that, Miss Maitland and I are practically convinced that we know at least four or five on board who were in this up to their necks. Very likely it'll be a long job before we get proof or definite information. There's no question but that we're up against men of brains, wealth and power—probably occupying thoroughly respectable positions ashore. But I'm a persistent sort of cuss, and secret-service men of two powerful governments already are digging into this proposition, unless I'm very much mistaken. At the moment, I think Miss Maitland and I have a little the advantage of them. You just sit tight, Selby—and leave your case to the owners. Of course you're sending a radio in code of exactly what happened, with the statement of how many affidavits you have. I'll send another to Arthur Butterworth, myself. Has Doctor Graeme made any report to you yet?"

"Merely upon the condition in which he found some of the passengers when he treated them. He was sitting at Garner's table, like all the rest of us. When he felt himself goin', he had a vague impression of some very faint odor which reminded him of an opium-pipe—an' some of the more susceptible passengers had symptoms which he fancied might indicate very mild opium or morphine poisoning. Says he can't be positive—but is temporarily under the impression that the saloon was suddenly filled with some unknown, immensely powerful gas. Which, of course, would mean that it was blown through the ventilating-system from the engine-room. But

if there's anything in that theory, everyone down there, includin' the stokers, must have been put out of business ten or fifteen minutes before we were. That hardly seems possible to me, because some one would have looked down from the door on the main-deck an' seen 'em at work!"

"Don't forget that the crew off watch were eating in the mess-rooms an' fo'c'stle at the same time that we were in the saloon—might be half an hour before anyone stepped into the engine-room on the upper grating, and they couldn't get in any other way. —Now, Captain, Miss Maitland got Sparks to send a message for her, a few minutes ago. Didn't you, Jean?"

"Yes—to one of the officers at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland—the Chemical Warfare Department of the Army. An old friend of my father's. Of course he can't give me any of the results obtained in their laboratories, but there's no ban on anything they print in their little type-written magazine, because it's merely general information—but we fixed up a code for even that, when I had occasion to ask questions. I'll probably hear from him before noon—wished to find out whether there is any gas known today that would produce the result we got in the way it did. Meanwhile—I'd like to just run over what we know of the situation and possibly suggest something. May I, Captain?"

"Oh—er—quite so! Glad to hear anything which occurs to you."

"Well, let's assume that it was some new gas, as a basis to start upon—administered through the ducts of the ventilating-system. Until there's evidence to the contrary, I'm convinced that's the way it happened, because I myself noticed a faint druggy sort of taste in the air just as I was going off. That means collusion—carrying out a lot of details by several persons on board. I think we can dismiss any theory of stow-aways, because neither the hatch-covers nor the manhole plates had been removed, as far as we know. Which leaves from three to half a dozen of those now on board who actively carried out the whole scheme and then pretended unconsciousness like the rest of us. Of course they'd throw overboard everything they had in the way of gas-masks and containers for the gas—no trace of evidence against them. The mere fact that none of them has been suspected since leaving port, and that they're still on board as though perfectly innocent, shows that they're exceptional actors with

abnormal nerve. They are perfectly aware at this moment that everybody aboard is more or less under suspicion from the few of us who know that the money is gone—consequently they'll not be fools enough to confer with each other at any time—wont say a word more than they've been doing right along. Very well—if they stick to that, we can't do a blessed thing until some of them go ashore and we can have them followed. But—if we can make them dangerously suspicious of each other—convince some that others are double-crossing or selling them out? Do you see?"

MORTON exploded in amazed approval: "You clever little devil! Machiavelli in short skirts! How in blazes would you go about it?"

In Selby's case, it took a moment longer for the point to penetrate.

"Oh, but—I say!" he demurred. "How the deuce? Take some doing—what?"

"Of course this idea only occurred to me as I went along—I've nothing really blocked out. But—well, something along this line: Mr. Morton and I have something more than prejudice to warrant being suspicious of Gundarson, Miss Brady, the gorilla stoker, the tall light-haired cook and one of the quartermasters—because we've watched them closely at various opportunities. There are also two others we suspect. Well—suppose you suddenly lock up the gorilla stoker and a certain room-steward in the steamer's brig without any official explanation, as being partly responsible for the wholesale sleeping-sickness we had. Then mention to Mr. Garner in the wheelhouse, when that particular quartermaster is on duty and just catches what he thinks he's not supposed to hear, that you've received a hint from one of the crew—name and description withheld—that those two men were responsible for what happened to us and anything else which may have occurred during it.

"It strikes me that two things will almost certainly happen. The unknown men *not* in the brig will manage, somehow, to get a word or two with those inside—who, naturally, will be rabid. Gundarson, I should think, might be the first man they'll suspect of double-crossing them, because he's fourth mate and may think he'll get more quick money—with immunity from future punishment—if he stands in with the boat and owners instead of waiting for his share of the plunder at some indefinite

time in the future. Give plenty of opportunity for anybody to have a word with the prisoners—don't interfere too quickly if there's any row among themselves—but keep the closest kind of watch upon the individuals we suspect."

Selby's lips puckered in a low whistle, while Morton chuckled.

"Can you beat that, Selby! What price Wall Street girls—eh? And I've a dictaphone we can hide under the berth in the brig!"

"She's a bit quick in her reasoning for me to follow—but I fancy that I'm graspin' it. Of course you're assumin', Miss Jean, that the bounders will act as you've worked it out—an' I'm quite willing to admit the probability. But—suppose they keep their heads an' wont fall into the trap? You're not forgettin', I trust, that the brains behind that outfit are dev'lish clever ones?"

"Not for a moment! But the best and coolest brains are at the top. The brains of subordinates are never quite as abnormal or dependable—else they wouldn't be subordinates. Undoubtedly their ability is far ahead of the jobs they're holding at present, but that doesn't prove necessarily that they've the higher type of cold reasoning brain which is not influenced by suspicion, hate, passion—the mania for killing a treacherous confederate. They'll know tomorrow that you've told nobody but the owners anything of the strong-room looting, and that you've no intention of doing so. That very fact will be proof to them that you either know or suspect more than they intended you to. They'll figure you couldn't possibly do that unless somebody had blabbed. Your hint in the wheelhouse will be enough to spread the rumor among stewards, deck-hands and stokers—giving the impression that you thought the men at the wheel couldn't possibly hear you."

"Upon my soul, Miss Jean, I believe your scheme may work! We'll try it out in the morning!"

WHEN the suspected steward was taken out to go in the brig, he expressed the utmost amazement—wanted to know what he'd done—but offered no resistance. Gorilla, on the other hand, swore he'd done nothing to deserve being locked up, called upon the other stokers to help him—and put up a fight which required six able-bodied men to overcome him. He was in a murderous frame of mind when the bars were finally double-locked upon him—

bullied his companion with questions as to what he had done—what it was all about, and so forth. The steward sat on the edge of his bunk with an expression of supreme indifference, his lips motionless—but the Gorilla caught words spoken guardedly but distinctly, spoken as long-term men learn to speak in states-prison.

“Shut up, you fool! Shut your idiotic trap—and begin to use your brains, if you’ve got any! There isn’t one shred of evidence against any of us—you know that! Well—that leaves just two answers to this: Either it’s a plant to make us give ourselves away—or else one of us has blabbed and is standing in with Selby. I don’t believe that Selby or any of his officers has brains enough to think up any such scheme for making us come out in the open—he’s had no reason to suspect us any more than all the rest of the crew. It would be so clever as to be way over his head!”

“Hmph! He’s gassin’ a lot with that passenger Morton—who’s no fool, let me tell you—an’ that bit of fluff from New York!”

“Yes—but you can bet your life he hasn’t told ’em the bank-shipment is gone! He’s not letting a soul into that except the purser and mate—and Sparks, because he’d be sending the radios to Butterworth and Stires in Liverpool. Well—if those four men have enough thinking capacity to lock up two of us on the mere chance of stampeding the others, then I’m a South Sea missionary! It looks to me as though some one of us has blabbed on a promise of reward and immunity—and if that’s true, I’d say Gundarson’s the most likely one.”

“But—for why, Taylor? Wot’ll he be gettin’ in the way of reward that’s a flea-bite on his cut from the Corporation if he keeps a shut mouth an’ says nothin’ to nobody? Here’s you an’ me—we goes ashore in any port, an’ there’s money to our credit in some bank or with one of its agents. An’ the deposit’s growin’ all the time! The Corporation knows damn’ well that unless it plays straight wi’ us, there’ll be twenty or thirty men in different parts of the world as can give the whole show away by radio without bein’ caught ourselves! Each of us signs on for a certain percentage of the cut—stand to get fifty to a hundred thousand a year for each man under the top five—with any sort of luck! Where in hell can Gundarson match that with any bloody police reward?”

“Gundarson only signed on three months

ago—this is his first chance for a cut after the loot is disposed of, which may take another three or four months at least before he touches a penny—and he may doubt his getting it at all, in spite of the assurances we give him. Five or ten thousand dollars in cash, with immunity, might look like good business to him—”

“With him knowin’ damn’ sure he’ll get his t’roat cut for sellin’ us out? Mebbe he’s got guts enough to risk it—I don’t think! Me—I don’t get rattled, myself—but I aint got any doubts about wot’ll happen if I try any double-crossin’!”

“Well—if he or any of the others have tried it, we’ll deal with ’em when we get ashore. Even Gundarson can’t produce a shred of evidence against us beyond his bare word. Meanwhile—we just sit tight.”

CHAPTER III

IN the morning Jean Maitland received a radiogram in code from the Edgewood Arsenal stating that formulæ for a new and very powerful lethal gas had been obtained at great risk by one of the U. S. Army officers connected with the Chemical Warfare Department. That, in analyzing it, the Arsenal laboratories had discovered that the omission of one chemical element in its composition rendered it harmless, while the substitution of a vegetable compound allied to opium rendered it very powerfully and instantly active as a soporific—one cubic centimeter, under a pressure of two atmospheres, being completely effective in less than one minute when released in a space of sixty-four cubic meters. Presumably the formula upon this basis was unknown outside of the United States—but there was, of course, the possibility that experimentation in some part of Europe along the same lines might have produced similar results. Neither this gas, nor the lethal one from which it had been developed, was commercially obtainable, anywhere, being held in reserve as an offensive weapon by the governments discovering it. There was, however, a remote chance that some private chemist might have worked out a similar gas or even one practically identical—if he had sufficient money and incentive for doing it. All of which covered everything Miss Maitland, the Captain and Morton needed to know. There was now little question as to just what had been used and how it must have been

administered. This was vital information bearing upon the whole matter, enabling a certain amount of preventive measures to be taken.

TWO days later Selby released the men in the brig—explaining that his informant had not produced the other man to back up his statements, so that it was a

hundred dollars, when they reached Hongkong. If they were under espionage, that would be out of the question. With Gundarson dead, there would be nobody to bear witness against them, as far as they could see. . . .

Next night, Morton and Jean Maitland thought, from one or two little indications, that matters might be coming to a head.



They saw the raising of a body at arm's-length and the hurling of it over the rail.

question between his word and theirs alone. But he warned them that if any evidence turned up they would be again confined.

The Gorilla had been sullenly chewing over the problem as to who could have informed against them—whether he would not again succeed in placing them in the brig as suspects before the *Luzon* reached port? The more he thought of it, the more murderously enraged he became and, with two of his fellow-pirates, the more certain that the informer could be no other than Gundarson, inasmuch as they had tested all the rest repeatedly. The steward, who had been with him in the brig, cautioned all three that it would be suicide for everybody if they attempted to do anything with Gundarson before they got him in some dark alley, ashore—an exposure of everyone who had been concerned in the affair. But each of them had been figuring upon drawing from various banks two or three

From a dark corner at the forward end of the B-deck, they looked down into the forward well, where Gundarson was sitting on the hatch with two other men, talking quite heatedly but in very low tones. Presently five of them came up the ladder to the C-deck for the purpose of going along the gangway and down into the after well—deserted at that time of night unless when some of the stokers were emptying ashes from cans on the lifts. Hurrying along on the deck over them, but on the port side. Morton and the girl found another dark corner from which they could look down and watch the men. The after-half of the C-deck gangways were allotted to the second-class passengers, but the rain then beating in upon them had sent everybody below. In a moment the two were joined by Captain Selby, who had come along on his rubber soles as noiselessly as a cat. Presently the quarreling in the well became

a trifle louder—they caught the remarks quite distinctly:

"Nobody else to blab, ye bloody double-crosser!" "Arrgh—wot are we waitin' for! Slit his bloody t'roat an' ha' done wi' it!" "Aye—he knows the penalty jolly well—he swore to stand for it if he blabbed!" "But—ye damned fools—*listen* to me! It's all a plant, I tell ye! *Nobody* blabbed! They started this to make ye do just what ye are doin'! Queerin' yourselves an' the whole Corporation! Fixin' to hang the lot of us!" "You talk too much, Gundarson! Save the few breaths you got left! Here! Who has a sharp knife? Mine's too dull!" "Ah—to hell with yer knives! Wanta scatter blood all over the deck an' rail f'r the officers to find? Here! Pass him this way! We'll do the job nice an' quiet so there'll be no evidence afterward! Now then, Gundarson—kiss yerself good-by—an' not a single squawk out o' ye!"

To the watchers above, it sounded like a pack of wolves snarling over something not quite dead. They dimly saw one great paw of the Gorilla clasp Gundarson's throat, shutting off the wild cry he was trying to get out—the swaying back and forth of the two shadowy figures as the pressure increased. Then gradually the sagging limpness of one. The raising of a body at arm's-length over the Gorilla's head and the hurling of it over the rail, where it was sucked down against one of the screws as it passed. There was no word among the group for two or three minutes afterward. Then, in single file, they started up the ladder to the C-deck—on their way forward. Before the first man disappeared along the starboard gangway, however, a dazzling beam from an electric torch shot down, covering every figure—and Selby's calm voice asked, as if he had just come along by chance and looked down over the after rail:

"What's the trouble, men? What are you doing down there?"

"Just havin' a bit of an argyment, sir. One of us passed the lie to another, up for'ard—an' we came aft, here, to let him explain, not wishin' to have no row near the fo'c'stle. It's all settled, sir—an' no hard feelin'."

It was the Gorilla who spoke, and his face was the only recognizable one—the other men having ducked down behind him so that only the backs of their heads and

shoulders appeared in the gleam from the torch.

"Well—go for'ard an' *stay* there, or I'll be steppin' down among ye! You've no business aft unless on duty!"

When they had disappeared, Selby muttered to the other two:

"Fortunately, I make it a point to know men by something else besides their faces. With Gundarson gone, that makes five we've got to a dead certainty—with evidence enough to hang them in any British port. Morton's notion of riggin' up a dictaphone under one of the bunks in the brig was a winner—we've now direct evidence as to how the money is distributed to subordinates. I *say!* What the devil was *that?*"

A choking screech came faintly aft from the ladder going down into the forward well. Rushing to the starboard rail, they saw in the phosphorescent wash alongside something which looked like a white face and a human arm. It took three minutes to stop the engines—another ten to make any headway astern and sweep the foamy wake with a searchlight. But they found nothing. But—in the morning the Gorilla also was missing.

WHEN they reached Manila, Captain Selby made a detailed report—with a dozen witnesses—to the agents for Butterworth & Stires, three officials of the Philippine Bank and two representatives of the underwriters—the witnesses being excused and leaving the room after testifying to the "sleep-attack," only. Even the bank people could see no reason for censuring the master or suggesting any suspension of his ticket. In fact, the agents admitted having received a cable from Liverpool that Selby couldn't be held responsible for the loss. But the secret-service operatives, when a conference was obtained with them, were skeptical as to Selby's evidence being worth anything—suggesting that they confer with both English and American secret-service men as soon as they reached Hongkong. This, Morton was able to bring about through his friends, there—the service men taking much the same view as had the others in Manila.

"We've been diggin' away in this matter, gentlemen, for the past six months. We'll admit, if you like, that you've prob'ly got five or six members of this mysterious organization upon charges that'll hold 'em if you care to press them an' be detained

in port as witnesses—even hang 'em for murder, if you choose. But if you let 'em go, under espionage—where are you? They'll never attempt to draw a penny from any bank as long as they know they're bein' spotted—an' they'll have expensive counsel who'll presumably take the cases upon speculation. There was but half a million of the *Luzon* shipment in Philippine silver—the rest was gold-ingots to be held as collateral. We're fairly certain this organization must have a small mint and two or three of the best die-sinkers in the world—making dies of Dutch, English, French an' Spanish coins dated one to thirty years back. Your shipm't will be scattered in various forms through hundreds of private an' general bankin' houses all over the world an' your owners'll ne'er see a penny of it again. In fact, you may regard the *Luzon* incident as closed!"

Morton laughed and drew a sheet of paper from his pocket.

"You chaps are pessimistic from force of habit and experience, I guess! I'm a born optimist, myself—and I often accomplish what I go after just because of that. I became interested in this proposition in the States, before booking on the *Luzon*—before I even knew what the game was, beyond the fact that you service men from two governments were in it. Frankly, you know—I consider that Selby, Miss Maitland and I, have made more real progress, so far, than all of you put together. Now—I want to read you a radiogram which was delivered to me at the Hongkong Club just before I came here to meet you. Before doing so, I'll say that I mean to accept the proposition contained in it if I can possibly manage to obtain the information in time—and I'll book a private wager of ten thousand dollars with any of you that I make a dent in this mysterious organization within a year. Here's the radiogram: "Mr. James Morton, Hongkong Club, Hongkong.

"Congratulations upon your efforts during voyage of *Luzon*. We do not admit slightest interest in any of the men you now have under arrest, but your methods and deductions were exceedingly clever—so much so that we should welcome you as one of our shareholders—possibly, in time, one of our Board. We have still few hundred shares treasury stock, not yet placed—drawing, after auditing account like *Luzon's*, thousand dollars per share, special dividend. (Butterworth & Stires now cred-

ited our books \$2,920,000, as transferred our account.) If disposed purchase such interest in our business, make this proposition: Whenever you forward information leading to collections like *Luzon's*, we allot one hundred shares treasury stock, forwarded care your Hongkong bankers registered mail. Communications by radio—Eastern Waters. Call letters: GKSV. International or A. B. C. Codes—commercial. Our own code—private.

"Cordially—

"BUCCANEERS, LIMITED."

CHAPTER IV

THE five men who were chatting around a table after tiffin in the Hongkong Club were each of rather heavy caliber in their own lines—though but two of them were locally known as such in Asiatic ports. Maurice B. Cochrane, of course, was an outstanding figure, not only in the Orient but to a slightly lesser degree in London. Head of the great banking and trading House of Cochrane, Maxwell & Co., he is known to be a man of wealth, influence and unassailable respectability—doing business with almost every corner of the world. Leffingwell, resident manager of the Eastern & Occidental Steam Nav. Co. (sometimes confusingly referred to as the "E. & O."), is equally well-known anywhere between Hongkong and the United Kingdom. Of the other three, Philip Fernshaw was a confidential agent for Lloyd's with a roving commission which took him, unexpectedly, to the four quarters of the globe, Britton, supposed to be an English tourist and big-game hunter, was actually one of the keenest men in the British Foreign Office, and James Morton, had recently arrived in Hongkong as a passenger on the Butterworth & Stires liner, *Luzon*—after going through a most peculiar and exciting experience. They were discussing this, in undertones so that even the China boys about the club could make nothing of an occasional word they might overhear.

"What I can't understand, Morton," said Leffingwell, "is how the deuce it can be that the press, so far, hasn't appeared to have gotten hold of the real facts in the background! The news-sheets have given half a column or so to the 'remarkable case of sleepin'-sickness' which suddenly overcame your passengers an' crew without any apparent explanation—but not one of 'em

has turned up the fact that nearly three millions in gold an' specie disappeared from the boat's strong-room at the same time!"

"Simple enough, Leffingwell—not one of the passengers or crew could have seen anything of what went on during the time they were unconscious—and Captain Selby took mighty good care that no word of it came to them. They simply know nothing about the looting. At the inquiry in Manila, they supposed they were testifying in order that the owners might get at some medical or atmospheric explanation for their being knocked out in that way. When Selby and the purser went down into the strong-room after midnight, there was nobody in the saloon but the usual night-watch of two stewards—both old hands who had been on the boat for several voyages and could be trusted to keep their mouths shut. Even they got no look into the strong-room under the saloon—didn't know whether Selby found everything all right or not, or what took him and the purser down there. Selby told the chief engineer and mate—nobody else. Miss Maitland and I already knew, because we were instrumental in spotting the five men of the crew who were mixed up in the piracy. Aside from those four—us two, and our five prisoners—not a soul on the *Luzon* knows the actual facts. Naturally, the newspaper-men couldn't get a word from either of us if they tried. Apparently none of them has suspected the truth. The agents and the underwriters aren't talking for publication, either. Had any reporter gotten hold of that cable I received, here at the club, every newspaper in the world would have published it with scare heads, and dug out bits of the whole story in one way or another."

"Let's see: It was an intimation that the pirates were a stock corporation calling themselves *Buccaneers Limited*, wasn't it? An' that you might communicate with 'em by radio anywhere in Eastern waters? Rather complimented you upon makin' out a plausible case against those five men of your crew, but denied that they had anything to do with the lootin'? What? An' then they had the bally cheek to offer you a block of their treasury stock if, at any time, you give them reliable information of a large gold shipm'nt upon any particular boat—provided they act upon your information an' get away with the gold? Aye?"

"That was the gist of it. I told Britton

and two of our American secret-service men—to whom I showed that cable—that I meant to accept the proposition if I happen to get accurate information concerning any gold shipment. They'd been taking the ground that neither the owners, the shippers nor the underwriters ever would see a penny of the *Luzon's* gold again, and that the organization had been so perfectly figured out that getting evidence leading to conviction would be almost impossible. I didn't agree with them. An organization big enough to do business upon any such scale as this must have weak points which no amount of forethought can guard against."

"Don't overlook the fact, old chap, that every man connected with it stands to get in good hard cash—is getting, at short intervals—more income than he could in any other line of business. He'll not be chuckin' that up, d'ye see, for anything he'll get by blabbin'!"

MORTON nodded. "True, Leffingwell—unless he keeps mulling over in mind, or with some crony, that his cut is far too small for the risks he runs. That's pirate psychology as far back as Phœnician days."

"Er—would you mind tellin' us, Morton, just what your idea would be in acceptin' that cable proposition—becomin' an actual shareholder with a lot of bloody pirates?"

"The game of speculation, for one thing. If they can actually pay me a dividend from stolen money in defiance of all laws and government, without being caught, I'll bank it and spend it—unless some of you prove a connection between the money I get and the stolen shipments. That's up to you to do if you can—and I'll hand over my dividends if you do. Aside from this, after giving them the information by radio, I mean to book on the boat carrying that gold-shipment and do my damndest either to prevent those pirates from getting it or to pick up some clew which will enable me to run them down. If I can persuade Miss Maitland to change her plans that much, I'll be glad to have her along too—because I consider her brains better than mine along some lines."

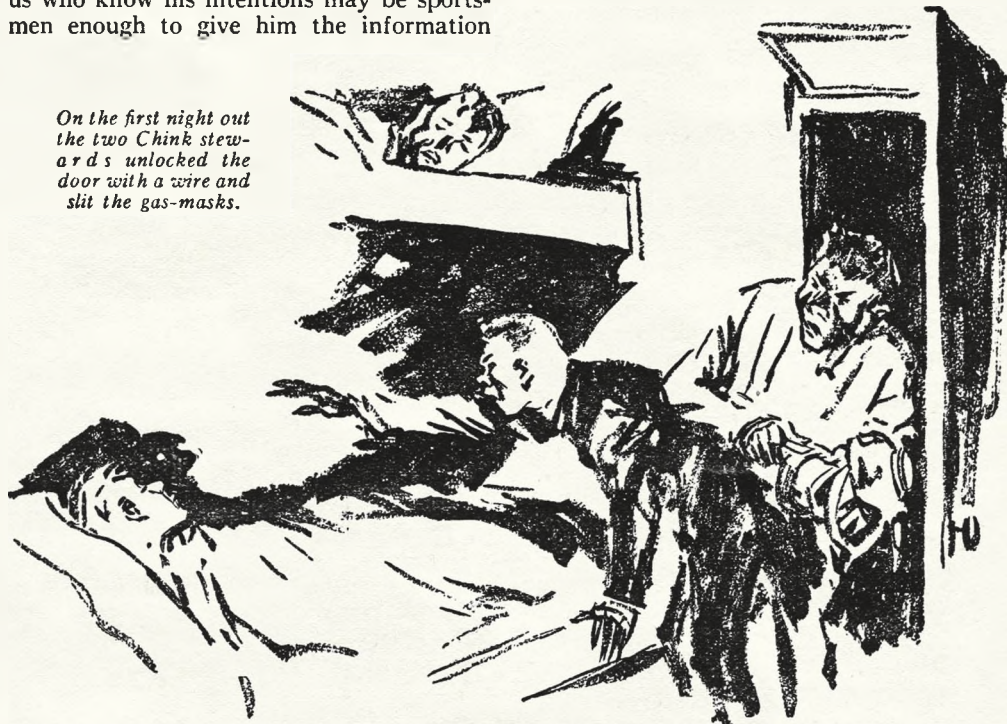
"Fancy you're not likely to get the information, old chap, from any shipping-man or banker who may have heard of your intention in this matter. If one of 'em told you something of the sort in confidence—not havin' heard anything of this—it

wouldn't be a sportin' proposition for you to betray it! We've heard enough of you to assume that you're a fairly decent sort, an' you'd know that kind of welshing isn't done." This from Britton, the Foreign Office man. But Leffingwell took him up on it.

"Simply for the reason that Morton is too decent to let his friends lose a pot of money in that way, I'll wager that some of us who know his intentions may be sportsmen enough to give him the information

a pretty serious maritime menace—all the more serious because it's for the interest of everyone concerned to keep it from being generally known. If any ship he's on is looted in spite of his and the owners' precautions, with full knowledge of the risk, nobody can blame him for taking and spending any dividend he gets from the pirates as long as there is no direct evi-

On the first night out the two Chink stewards unlocked the door with a wire and slit the gas-masks.



with our eyes open—provided, of course, the underwriters will take the risk."

"Which, naturally, they'll not be fools enough to do! Bit of cheek, don't you think—askin' 'em to kiss two or three millions good-by without any visible chance for recoverin' it?"

PHILIP FERNSHAW, of Lloyd's, had been thoughtfully following the discussion—and now amazed them with a quiet remark:

"Lloyd's will gamble upon *anything*, gentlemen—provided there is some common-sense reason for it. In this case, Morton's object appears to be identical with ours or the shippers. He's already given proof by running down five of the *Luzon's* crew who undoubtedly were implicated in the looting, that he is willing to spend his time and current expenses in getting evidence against

dence that his money was actually a part of the loot. Circumstantial evidence would scarcely hold a man in such a case—the proof must be more direct than that. Well—our position is this: Suppose that Leffingwell, here, obtains a large gold shipment from one of the banks—shipped on one of his boats to some British or European port? We'll underwrite that shipment with full knowledge that Morton has sent the details by radiogram to these Buccaneers Limited. Naturally, we're not keen about throwing two or three millions into the sea. On the other hand, it seems to me that those bounders can scarcely get away with such a gold shipment, in the circumstances, without giving some of those concerned a clue which may lead to breaking up that lot and putting them out of business. So, as I said—Lloyd's will sit in and gamble with the rest of you. Seeing

that they can't lose—if we underwrite the shipment—I've no doubt the Hongkong and Shanghai will accommodate you if the stuff is taken out on your new liner, *Touchan*."

Morton grinned like a pleased boy.

"Is that an open offer, Fernshaw? No restrictions or provisos?"

"Merely that we reserve the privilege of putting aboard the *Touchan* four or five of our own men equipped to protect that gold and given facilities for doing so. That's understood, as a matter of course. Also, that no word of this discussion is repeated to anybody outside of us five except the manager of whatever bank ships the gold, and the master of the boat. Morton will broadcast his message to the pirates in one of the codes they mention—so there'll be no leak in that direction."

"Hmph! Leffingwell and the shippers will be jolly glad to have you give 'em that much assistance! Now—say! How about it? Will you try to wangle a shipment out of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation this afternoon, old chap—and give me all the details, including sailing-date? If you will, I'll broadcast 'em from the Brock radio-station at the Peak this evening and see if we can get an acknowledgment from Buccaneers Limited. Eversley Brock, Sir Jason's nephew, is a good friend of mine. Fernshaw's, too. He'll be interested in seeing how this proposition works out. I'll have to give him the facts, also—but he can be trusted to keep his mouth shut."

COCHRANE had been an attentive listener during the discussion. He now presented another angle of the proposition.

"It occurs to me that there's a bare possibility of our being useful in this matter, gentlemen. It's decidedly for our interest, as well as the banking-houses, to have this sort of thing stopped before we're compelled to send our gold-shipments in war-vessels. As you know, we're bankers and traders in pretty much everything. Among other things, we buy and sell quantities of secondhand arms an' munitions—various factions in China are buying such material anywhere they can get it. We also contract to deliver airplanes an' whatever war-gas happens to be obtainable. Last year we even sold a couple of submarines—obsolete type, but workable for a cruise or two. In short, we're general traders having all sorts of things offered to us, some of which we buy on commission, some we

don't care to handle at all. Well, d'y'e see, chap may come to us with a new gas or some other weapon. A little careful pumpin' might turn up a hint as to whether he sold any of it before—an' how much. It's known that we occasionally pick up stuff of the sort for governm't experimentation—so we're sometimes approached by chaps who fear that any governm't might confiscate their discoveries without compensation. I might notify our London an' New York branches, in code, to get all possible information from persons of that sort—an' if anything interestin' turns up, pass it along to Britton, Fernshaw an' Morton. What?"

This seemed like a good suggestion—though Britton doubted if anything definite would come of it. He had been working for six months—ever since the looting of the *Saigon* in the Bay of Bengal—to pick up some shred of evidence upon which he could run down members of the pirate organization. But the more study he devoted to it, the more he was convinced that it had been too perfectly conceived and carried out to be exposed by anything short of blind chance.

WHEN the party broke up, Cochrane took a rickshaw in front of the club, on the Bund, and was trotted around to his big godown on Queen's Road, where, passing through the main counting-rooms, he went back to his private office in the rear, an office familiar to nearly every merchant, banker or shipping-man in the Eastern ports, but which had a smaller one back of it that very few even knew to be in existence, as the door was concealed behind a massive filing-cabinet which swung out from the wall upon concealed cantilever-hinges of ponderous size and strength. In this secret office, the walls of which were of two-foot reinforced concrete with no other door or window, there was a very large safe of the latest improved type, with time-locks—and a desk, lounge, chairs and big Persian rug of the most luxurious sort. Ventilation was obtained by means of concealed ducts in the walls and electric blowers. The governor of the colony and the chief of police both had had conferences with Cochrane in this smaller room—it being as obvious to them as anything else about Cochrane, Maxwell & Company that it was used as a reserve or emergency safe-deposit vault for the storage of funds and special documents when it was not

desirable to keep them in the main vaults under the counting-room floor.

When he could do so unobserved, Cochrane pressed a concealed spring which swung the massive filing-cabinet outward—another, which caused a small section of the concrete wall to slide noiselessly backward on steel tracks embedded in the floor—and locking himself in, proceeded to decode a cablegram which his confidential manager had handed to him in the counting-room. In a few moments, he had translated it.

Cochmax—Hongkong.

Approached by Dutch chemist with formula for anesthetizing vapor similar to "X-32" but apparently much more powerful—more instantaneous expansion. Claimed to be noninjurious except in case of weak heart. Chemist of very limited means—afraid to approach governments. Might sell or lease. Cable instructions.

Hallowell—London.

Cochrane read the message over a second time—then took a letter-file from the big safe and went over three sheets of bond-paper covered with code-memoranda which, translated, were so many chemical formulæ concerning as many different types of war-gases. After replacing these in the safe, he coded a reply to the Manager of his London branch:

Cochmax—London. Hallowell—Personal.

Offer hundred thousand dollars for ten thousand cubic feet improvement on X-32—chemist to keep formula. If demonstrated by practical working experiments your satisfaction offer two hundred thousand for formula—chemist relinquishing all claims and producing no more.

Cochranes. Hongkong.

Returning to his larger private office on the other side of the concrete wall, the merchant sent a messenger around to the cable office with the dispatch, and was commencing on the last of his day's correspondence when his manager came in to ask if he would see a man who had come in that morning from Vancouver on the C. P. R. boat.

THE man who accompanied Cardigan when he returned appeared to be somewhere in the thirties, well but not expensively dressed, alert in manner, with keen gray eyes, a closely trimmed Van Dyck beard and mustache. He seemed to be American, might have been Colonial—but was unmistakably Anglo-Saxon of some breed. Taking a neat brown wallet from an inside pocket, he produced a letter from

the manager of the Cochrane branch in New York stating that he had known the man Ferris in France, as a sergeant in the A. E. F.—that the ex-soldier had since found difficulty in getting a good berth, and trying to obtain some outdoor occupation which offered adventure and excitement—not afraid to tackle anything. There was in the letter an underlying implication that the manager was vouching for the ex-sergeant in more ways than appeared on the surface. After going through it carefully, Cochrane pushed a box of choice cigars across the desk to his visitor and clapped his hands for one of the China boys to bring in a couple of brandy pegs.

"Mr. Ferris—suppose you give one some idea as to what you'd best like to do?"

"Well—go out chasing a few submarines. Take a shipment of guns and munitions out to some place where there's a war going on—and manage to deliver 'em in spite of all opposition. Run a cargo of Chinks across to the Pacific Coast—and land 'em. Something with plenty of action and head-work in the open air. Anything but squatting on a stool in an office or trying to sell some article to a lot of dealers who don't want to buy it!"

"H-m-m—I fancy there should be something in your general line out in these waters. Of course, in our business, we try to be respectable and keep within the law. We buy an' sell guns, munitions, arms of various sorts, but we do not run them. We deliver F. O. B. steamer in Hongkong, London or New York harbor. However, I've a very good friend of many years' standing, up in Canton—you'll not object to working for a high-caste Chinese, I fancy? So far as anything I actually know, Wu-Tsi-Lin does a law-abiding, respectable business like our own. But his country is at war, all up an' down the place. Trade goin' on most everywhere, to be sure—but no law or order, conditions chaotic. I'm of the impression that he may have a few private int'rests of which I know nothin' at all—an' that some of 'em might run to very much what you've outlined to me. If such happens to be the case, he would pay so much more for a confidential man than any commercial house, that I fancy it'll be well worth your while to go up by the night boat to the Shameen an' see him sometime tomorrow. I'll give you a letter, of course, and furnish you with transportation. How does this strike you?"

"Why—you seem to be doing the best

you can for me, Mr. Cochrane—considering that I'm not looking for a counting-room berth, such as you might offer me here in Hongkong. So—I'll naturally do anything you say—take the night boat up to Canton. And thank you in advance."

WHILE Ferris was booking a stateroom at the steamboat office, a dignified Chinese for subordinate work. Of course rickshaw in front of the arcade protecting the entrance to the Cochrane-Maxwell go-down, and with the manner of long acquaintance, walked through to the private office in the rear, where he was received by the head of the house as a fellow merchant who was also an old friend for many years and of mandarin rank as well. After one of the China boys had fetched in tea, cakes and wine, he was told that the "head" could not be seen by anyone for the next hour or two, and that nobody was to be admitted as far as the private office.

"I'm sending a man up to you in Canton by the night boat—which your power-launch will pass before it's halfway to the Shameen," remarked Cochrane.

"The one New York cabled you about—some weeks ago?" inquired Wu-Tsi-Lin. There was scarcely a trace of accent in his Cornell English. "They have satisfied themselves, I presume, that he is of sufficient intelligence to see the pecuniary advantage of working for our corporation—and not lose his sense of proportion?"

"He was an army sergeant—restless, like so many of the demobilized men. Distaste for the old commercial life—craves excitement. Still ethical in theory—but will jump at anything promising risk and adventure. From our talk, I fancy he's brains enough to see that his proportion of the earnings is fair, considering the immense overhead of such an organization and the difficulty in disposing of the goods."

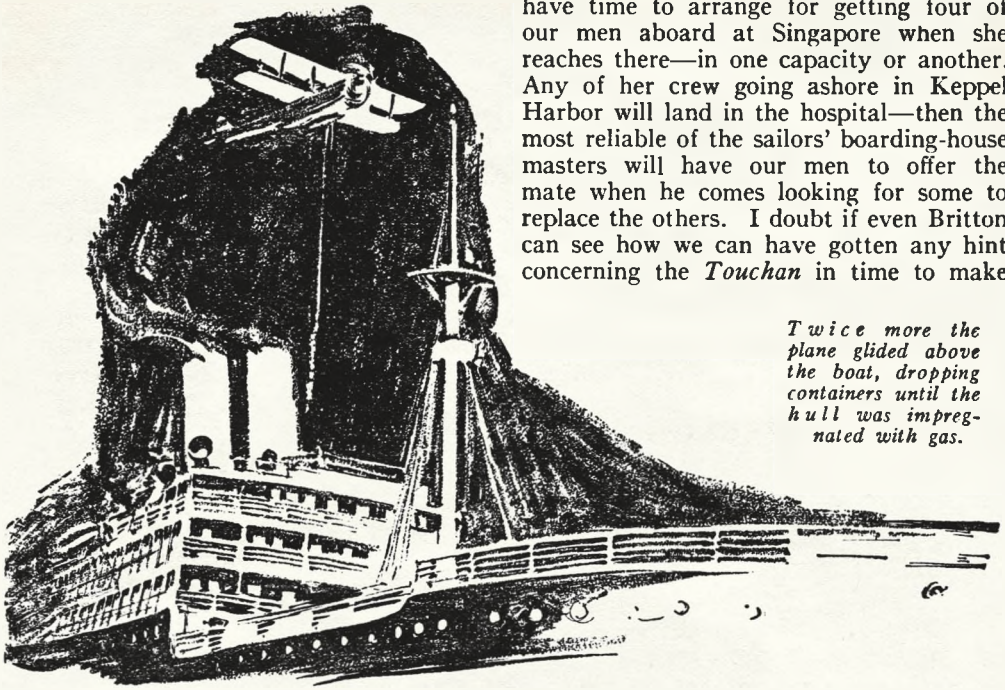
"Ah! The sort we need most, if he can be trusted. Er—did he—ah—present himself to your New York branch in search of employment?"

"No—Manning would have gone a bit slower if he had. He was Ferris' captain, in France—but Ferris didn't even know where he was or with what business-house. Manning had kept track of him through the regimental secretary—saw him at a meeting of the Legion—asked him to drop in and have a chat. Ferris was sore at everybody and everything—restless—getting into a reckless condition. So Man-

ning told him there was occupation of various sorts out here, for a red-blooded man—offered transportation if he'd come out for a look-see. As Ferris couldn't possibly have anticipated anything of the sort, he certainly couldn't have been doing any sleuthing in our direction."

"H-m-m—sounds like precisely the type we need. About thirty English and Americans are all it is safe for us to handle in our actual operations—with forty or fifty Chinese for subordinate work. Of course the banking houses throughout the world know nothing of us except as *bona fide* Chinese merchants doing a perfectly legitimate business. Those five men on the *Luzon* were about the least reliable of all we have—and Morton's scheme of concealing a dictaphone under the berth in the steamer's brig was a clever one. The two they locked up in it for a few days certainly talked in a way which gave some idea as to how we carry on our business. But three of them murdered and threw overboard the other two—which reduced our risks just that much and cast a good deal of doubt upon the credibility of anything they said. I heard this afternoon that they had been set at liberty and put ashore—with the idea, of course, of shadowing them for several months. In spite of that, however, one of our coolies will easily manage to slip them ten thousand dollars each—send them away in three different directions to places where we can find them again when wanted. This man Ferris should be worth any three of that five—to us. And I've another man coming up from Sydney who, one imagines, is much the same type—an ex-Anzac. Have you had a chance to talk with Morton?"

"We had tiffin together at the club—with Britton, Leffingwell and Fernshaw. I fancied, d'ye see, that the bankers and underwriters would be quite reticent as to what they said in Morton's presence—if they'd happened to hear of his intention to accept that offer of treasury stock. But quite to my surprise, they're a decidedly sportin' lot—two or three millions is a bit of a stake, you know! Fernshaw says that Lloyd's will underwrite a gold-shipment on Leffingwell's new boat, the *Touchan*, regardless of whether Morton radios information to the Corporation or not—there'll be no question as to Leffingwell's getting the gold on that basis. But Fernshaw will have several men aboard to guard it—an' Morton himself will be on the boat. Their wits



Twice more the plane glided above the boat, dropping containers until the hull was impregnated with gas.

against ours, you know—an' they're none of 'em fools."

"H-m-m—rather like a game of chess! That's the sort of challenge which holds my interest quite as much as our profits in the various operations."

"By the way, we'll probably get a large supply of a new gas much more powerful than X-32—enough of it to use in quantity if necessary. A Dutch chemist approached our London branch with the proposition. He was afraid to deal with any government officials—had heard that we pay cash for war-material to be used in government experimentation. He'll be offered a hundred thousand for ten thousand cubic feet—or two hundred thousand for the formula."

"If your London manager is satisfied with the test under his own eyes, offer a quarter-million—but get the formula and have it cabled in code. My chemists up back of Canton will be able to produce all we need for the *Touchan* before she arrives, discharges and clears for Tilbury again. But if we wait for the stuff to come from London, it can't be used on that boat—and it would be foolish to attempt the *Luzon* method over again. They'll be anticipating that—prepared for it. We'll have to use gas in quantity on the *Touchan*—it will be an int'resting problem to figure out. At last reports, she was momentarily due at Colombo, outward bound. So I'll

have time to arrange for getting four of our men aboard at Singapore when she reaches there—in one capacity or another. Any of her crew going ashore in Keppel Harbor will land in the hospital—then the most reliable of the sailors' boarding-house masters will have our men to offer the mate when he comes looking for some to replace the others. I doubt if even Britton can see how we can have gotten any hint concerning the *Touchan* in time to make

such an arrangement at Singapore when nobody outside of you five men even overheard the discussion, this noon. Any idea where Tarlton is with the yacht, just now?"

"Manila harbor at last accounts—dancin' with the officers' ladies at Manila Hotel, or aboard the yacht. Tarlton deserves all he gets of the profits even if he's wealthy enough to be above needin' 'em. He couldn't have outfitted that boat of his better for our purpose if he had had the scheme in mind for years! I say he's in Manila—but he's expected for one or two social functions both at the Peak an' up the River at the Shameen—so the *Fan Chu* is likely to anchor out here in the harbor any morning. He'll be needing to have you put a large supply of gas aboard of him before leaving port again. By the way— isn't that reducin'-plant on the south side of Dutch Papua a bit risky?"

"Somewhat—of course. But not as much so as any of the rest of our operations. You've seen the place—landlocked bay, very small but very deep—narrow and rather blind entrance with twisting channel. Sixty miles from the nearest Dutch trading post—no native village within seventy or eighty miles, as far as we could discover with the airplane. Ten Chinese and two Englishmen on guard all the time, with half a dozen machine-guns and a five-inch navy rifle. No occasion for any Dutch patrol-boat going in there unless on survey—they

might visit the place a dozen times without discovering the entrance to our tunnel. The whole plant, including the mint, in chambers blasted from the inside of that rocky bluff—nothing to show outside except a wisp or two of smoke, and there's none of that when any other craft is passing along the coast. Even if the Dutch or any of the British F. O. men got in there, they'd not find one scrap of evidence connecting any of our board with the activities there."

"Isn't there some chance of your place outside of Canton an' your godown in the city bein' looted in some of the fightin' that's likely to occur at any time?"

"Probably not much more than an attack in force upon Hongkong Island itself. Canton isn't fortified to any extent—it's a city of the trading-class. No object in bombarding it except to extort tribute—and the Cantonese would tell any hostile army to go ahead with their bombardment. If half the houses and godowns were knocked into match-wood, the occupants would be safe in the cellars under them, or back in the interior—in houseboats on the canals. If a hostile army invaded the city, it would lose two-thirds of its strength in street-fighting. Of course the whole country is upset with constant skirmishing in sections which vary each day. Murder and robbery are hourly occurrences. But the *tongs* manage to protect their members fairly well, and there are but two of any account in Canton. My godown in the city is much nearer the river-wall than anyone might think from the twisting streets he walks through to reach it, and is honeycombed with cellars underneath—waterproofed in the method I learned as an engineering student at Cornell. My house east of the city is surrounded by a thick concrete wall fifteen feet high, enclosing the dwelling, the gardens and the lotus-tank—with a navigable canal at one side. A houseboat of medium size can get right up to a little door in the wall—going out, it gets into the river a mile above the city. Under my house and gardens are two levels of cellars with the entrances so well concealed that a hostile force or ordinary robbers would find it almost impossible to discover them. You've been in those cellars, to be sure—but I'll wager any reasonable sum that you didn't see how I opened the doors or wall-sections. Considering the condition of the country, it could scarcely be a more favorable headquarters for activities such as ours."

THE following morning, the nine hundred ton, deep-water yacht *Fan Chu* dropped anchor in Hongkong harbor a short distance out from Blake Pier—the owner coming ashore in one of the power-launches and proceeding directly to his bankers—the "Hongkong & Shanghai"—for his accumulated mail. Randolph Tarlton is known in many of the world's ports—particularly those around the Pacific and Indian oceans—as a millionaire yachtsman and occasional speculator. The general impression is that there are always guests on board wherever he cruises. If, for example, he comes into Hongkong with one party of friends whom he puts ashore there, it is understood that after filling up his oil-tanks and painting for a few days, he is proceeding to Manila, Singapore or some other port to pick up another lot of guests for a southerly cruise—at times going to some port with the proper facilities for overhaul. Supposing that a secret-service man, following a blind hunch, undertook to check up on this general impression, he would next see the *Fan Chu* reported about where she was supposed to be—with guests on board. There might be an intervening week or fortnight in which there was no mention of her in the maritime news—but in one way or another her movements would appear to be known for almost any day in the year one cared to look up.

IN reality, however, the *Fan Chu* managed to get in at least ten days out of every month—even three weeks, if supposed to be in dock somewhere—without a soul on board outside of the owner, six British and American officers, and her Chinese crew. There were often times when she was communicating with ship or shore-stations by radio when the guests on board hadn't the slightest idea that the radio was working. Contrary to the usual custom on liners, the *Fan Chu's* radio-room was built at the bottom of what would have been the No. 3 Hold in a cargo-boat—a space between the engine-room and the stern of the yacht, used as a lazaret or storage compartment for provisions and ship supplies. Access to this was by means of a manhole and iron ladder under the deck-plates of a stateroom just forward of the saloon—a room assigned to the operator and always kept locked. When a guest desired to send a message, it was handed to the sailing master, who took it below to the operator's room. In Tarlton's pri-

vate cabin aft of the saloon there were duplicate sets of instruments which he could switch in at any time.

Certain writers of sea stories mention tourists or guests aboard a deep-water boat "seeing the blue flashes on the antenna-wires" when a message is being sent, and being able to read them by the sparks if they happen to understand the code—when, if they knew more about electricity, they would avoid making such statements. Any break in a circuit over which current is passing will produce a spark—small or large according to the voltage on the wires. Closing and opening the circuit by the movements of the operator's key in code-transmission produces, upon the anvil under the key, a spark which may be heard several feet away if the windows are open. A loose connection of the lead-in to the antenna-wires would produce a spark at that particular point—nowhere else. But such connections are always well soldered for obvious reasons and such a break wouldn't occur once in fifty thousand times. In radio-telephone broadcasting, the writer has never seen the slightest spark or even incandescent glow on any of the antenna unless short-circuited when carrying heavy voltage.

After Tarlton had obtained his mail and drawn some money at the bank, he stepped along to Cochrane, Maxwell & Company's godown to make a tiffin appointment with the "head" at the Hongkong Club—then took the "funicular" up to the Peak, where he called at three villas before noon, assuring himself that the guests he had brought from Manila had safely reached either their own homes or those of friends whom they were to visit. During the next two evenings he was present at dinner-dances. Then he took the yacht up-river to Canton—where the Hongkong papers reported him as doing much the same thing at various homes on the Shameen—an island in the river, opposite the city, which constitutes the European quarter of Canton. In all of this, you will notice, Tarlton's activities were as obvious as those of any other millionaire yachtsman—and because of his well-known preference for the Orient during half of each year, his movements were so well understood, so frequently reported in the newspapers, that any suggestion of irregularity connected with him would have been simply laughed at in any Asiatic port.

Here, then, were three men who had been prominent for years in Eastern waters,

whose lives and activities were so entirely open that there would appear to be no possibility of either one engaging in any enterprise whatever outside of the law! Cochrane, the widely known banker and Asiatic merchant; Wu-Tsi-Lin, the cultivated, powerful mandarin and Chinese merchant; Randolph Tarlton, the millionaire yachtsman and speculator—a lover of all things Oriental, a student of Asiatic literature, a popular club and society man in many of the world's ports.

A WEEK after the tiffin-discussion in the Hongkong Club, James Morton dined with the Eversley Brocks at the Peak—his friend being resident manager of the Hongkong office for Brock & Co., of Liverpool, and his wife an American girl whom Morton had known in Washington. The Brock liners, as everyone knows, are cargo-boats of six thousand to ten thousand tons, with accommodations for twenty to sixty passengers. It is the policy of Sir Jason Brock to keep the equipment of each boat as thoroughly up-to-date with the recent navigating and safety devices as the latest liner off the "ways" is supposed to have—including ship and shore radio stations powerful enough to communicate, either directly or by relaying, with any of the fleet in any part of the world.

After dinner the two men went into Brock's study while his wife was entertaining callers in the drawing-room, and took the precaution of locking the door. Morton then described to his host the dinner on board the *Luzon* in mid-Pacific when everyone on board suddenly found it impossible to resist a paralyzing sleepiness which overcame them and remained unconscious for three hours—during which time nearly three million dollars in bullion and specie were looted from the boat's strong-room in some manner yet unknown. He explained that but nine of those on board—including three of the crew who had been locked up until they reached port—had any knowledge whatever of the looting. Then he described the radio message he had received, and the discussion at the club.

"I mean to accept the proposition of those pirates, and the bankers, with full knowledge of that fact, are going to ship something over two millions on the E. & O. boat *Touchan*, sailing from here for Tilbury on the 22nd. The pirates gave me a choice of their own code—which of course I don't know—or two of the commercial

ones. So I've written out my message in the A. B. C. If we attempt to call 'Buccaneers Limited' from your station, here, we're likely to get all sorts of joshing up and down the China Sea—will have difficulty in picking out the real acknowledgment from the jokers. But in their radiogram they said preferably to use their own call-letters. I don't know those either—but I've a sort of hunch that if we call, 'BLTD,' we'll probably get them. How does that strike you?"

"No harm trying—we can easily tell from what they say whether the right parties are acknowledging or not."

"Your station must be at least a third of a mile from this villa—have you a direct connection from this room?"

"Aye—most of the talkin' with our ship-masters is with me, personally, if I happen to be within reach."

"I see you have a radio-compass over there in the bay-window. Do you use it when communicating with your ships?"

"Occasionally. But we know about where our boats should be every day, d'ye see. No point in usin' the compass all the time."

"But there certainly is in this case of mine, old chap! Can you switch it in without too much trouble?"

"Of course!"—pulling down a double-throw switch connecting with a hundred-foot antenna above the roof of the villa. "An' this other switch puts you on to the antennæ at the station—with fifty kilowatts of power. You may now proceed with your callin'—as you please."

"But—how do you manage to broadcast and receive on the single grid of wires?"

"Same way as communicatin' between two boats at sea—I forgot to show you that. This switch under the edge of the table cuts out the receivin' set an' throws in the power for broadcastin'. Shovin' it the other way cuts out the power an' throws in the receivin' set. An' there'll be another point you may not have considered: You've no idea what wave they'll be usin', d'ye see—so you've to keep turnin' your dials as you listen an' call, until you strike 'em. Throw the antenna switch as quickly as possible after you stop talkin'—an' then back again when t'other chap stops, before you answer him. It's not diffic'lt when you're accustomed to it—though naturally much slower than usin' two diff'rent stations as they do across the Western Ocean. Go ahead, now!"

"BLTD. . . . BLTD. . . . BLTD. . . . BLTD!" he called, swinging the dials slowly from one wave to another. As nothing seemed to happen, a thought struck Brock, and he beckoned Morton over to another set which recorded the band from one thousand to one thousand eight hundred meters. In a couple of moments a voice very distinctly replied:

"This is BLTD. Who's talking?"

"James Morton—Hongkong. Who are you, please?"

"Buccaneers Limited, Mr. Morton. Glad to hear your voice. What can we do for you?"

"Take a code-message, please."

AFTER the pleasant voice had acknowledged receiving the last word, it said that they would decode and call again in a few minutes. It was scarcely five when the receiving cone said: "Mr. Morton?"

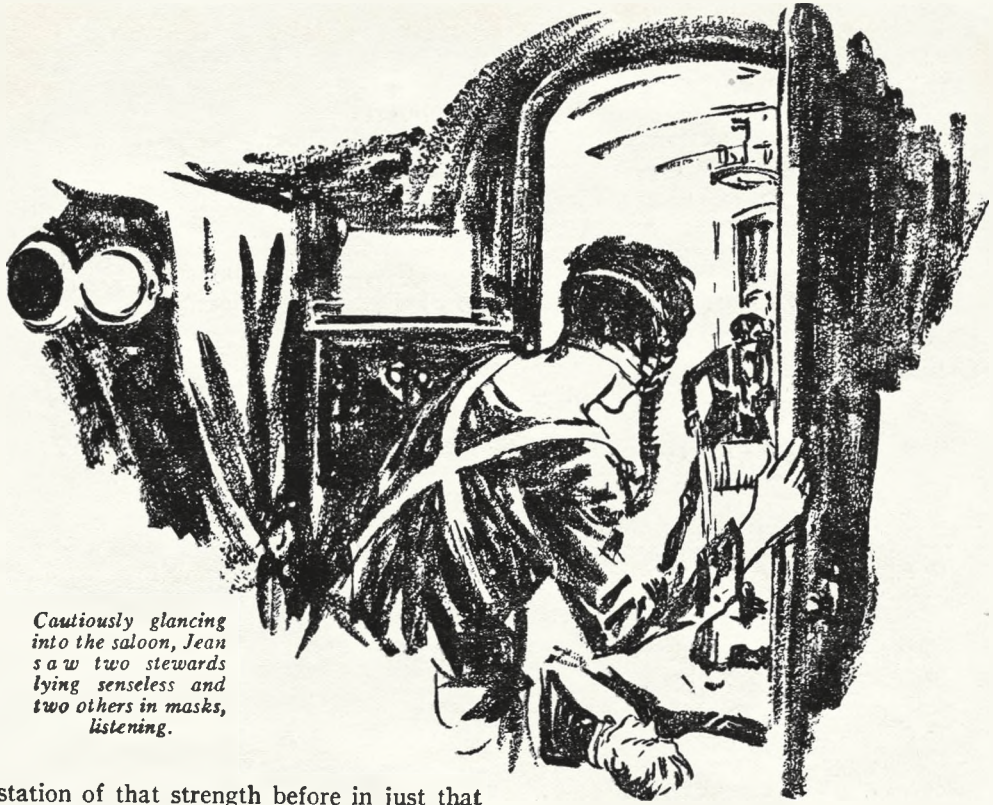
"Right here!"

"Your message appears to be quite explicit. We will give the matter our earliest possible attention and communicate with you later—probably through your bankers. Many thanks."

The voice was that of a cultivated man—pleasant and courteous. When Morton looked across to where Brock was sitting by the radio-compass in the bay window, he saw that the loop stood at right angles to the window itself. The expression upon Brock's face was one of puzzled wonder.

"What's wrong, Brock?"

"Dash it all! I swung this loop a dozen times while you were listening to that chap—an' the signals were noticeably stronger from that direction than any other. We've been assuming that those bounders would be on some boat at sea or on one of the sparsely inhabited islands of the Eastern Archipelago. But if this compass doesn't lie—an' it seems to work as reliably as ever it did—the fellow was talkin' from some point between one and two hundred miles north of here—up-country, in China. If he was usin' reduced power, he may have been a bit nearer than that. Of course there may be any number of stations up there—we get all sorts of Chinese messages from the various forces in the field—mostly from equipment usin' less than one kilowatt. But this chap was supposed to be usin' at least twenty—which would mean noticeably high masts of some sort. That is—much higher than any house or tent-pole. An' I don't recall havin' heard any



Cautiously glancing into the saloon, Jean saw two stewards lying senseless and two others in masks, listening.

station of that strength before in just that direction an' at that presumable distance.

"How about a steamer in the river, some distance above Canton?"

"Might be that—but I doubt it. Deep-sea boats rarely go above Canton—an' there's not any too much water in the river at that point. I'd say it's a powerful shore-station which may be very thoroughly concealed—but I never heard one in that direction before. . . . Stop a bit! I've never listened in on twelve-hundred meters before, either! Might be."

As Morton thought this over, he was inclined to question the possibility that the pirates had recently installed a powerful radio plant that far up country from the coast. Granted that the unsettled conditions were in favor of the Buccaneers' operations in the way of concealing or melting up their loot, it was still, on the other hand, almost certain that any leader of the fighting forces would promptly commandeer such a radio plant for his own uses the moment he saw it. In the morning, he went around to see Leffingwell.

"I'm wondering if you could give me, or obtain in some way, a bit of information connected with this pirate proposition, Leffingwell? Isn't there some department, here, that would know exactly what vessels go up and down the river?"

"Aye—the Customs service'll be keepin' close tab on every one of 'em. Drummond's at the head of it in Hongkong—very good friend of mine. What did you wish to know?"

"Names and general description of every ocean-going craft—or any boat carrying a radio outfit—which was between here and a point fifty miles above Canton last evening."

"Drummond's at Canton now. Fancy I can get him on the telephone an' give you the data by night. What's the bally idea?"

"I was talking with Buccaneers Limited from the Peak, last night—somewhere in that direction. Located 'em with a radio compass. This information may not pan out anything at all—yet it might give us a clue. Of course you'll not tell your friend anything about these crooks."

CHAPTER V

WHEN the 22nd came along, Morton sailed on the *Touchan* with the intention of remaining aboard for the entire voyage if necessary. Miss Jean Maitland, who had been with him on the *Luzon* and was making a leisurely trip around the

world, also booked with her friend Miss Burns as far as Colombo. If nothing happened before they reached Ceylon, they could go ashore there and see India, or go on as far as Egypt with the boat. An hour before leaving, Leffingwell introduced Captain Williams to Morton—and Fernshaw also brought up his four men who were making the voyage with them—keen-eyed, intelligent ex-Army men who had served with the engineers in France, two of them proposing to remain on duty in the engine-room and the other two having the run of saloon and pantries as inspectors put aboard by the port captain to check up commissary and saloon-efficiency.

AFTER the steamer was outside the Lardones, Captain Williams invited Morton and Jean Maitland up to his own cabin in order to get at just what all the precautions were about. As his coöperation was absolutely necessary, they gave him all the facts concerning the *Luzon*—and Morton's accepting the Buccaneers' challenge. Williams, however, was inclined to ridicule the idea of anyone's taking over two millions from his strong-room at sea while he was on duty. He didn't question their word as to the loss of the *Luzon's* gold, but seemed inclined to think the whole thing a gigantic hoax, saying that the missing gold probably would turn up some day hidden in one of the *Luzon's* holds.

"Now—just a moment, Captain! We've told you we got proof from those men we locked up as to the operations of this pirate organization, and the fact of their taking the gold off our boat. The bank and the underwriters are gambling over two millions of hard cash that the pirates will not take them from your boat without, at least, leaving us some clue to work upon in running them down. If through any disbelief and carelessness upon your part they do take it off your boat, your ticket won't be worth a damn! Can't you see that?"

"But deuce take it, man—the idea's simply preposterous! How the devil can they do it?"

"That was Selby's position before they got *his*. Fortunately, the evidence of exactly what happened exonerated him. You might not be so lucky. . . . How many passengers now on board were with you when you arrived in Hongkong?"

"Not one of them, as far as I know."

"Have you taken on any new men in your crew since leaving Tilbury?"

"None—wait a bit; we did, though! A deck-hand, two stewards an' a greaser from the engine-room requested permission to go ashore at Singapore an' make some purchases. My mate let 'em go. Naturally, they went to a pub. for a few drinks, first—then took an electric tram up to the city. Got into a fight somewhere an' landed in hospital—all four of 'em. Mate had to go ashore to one of the boarding-house masters along Keppel Harbor, an' ship four other men in their places."

"Do you remember what date that was?"

"The tenth—we sailed for Hongkong at four that afternoon."

"And I talked to those Buccaneers five hours later, that same evening. I don't see how they could have had any knowledge of my intention to accept their challenge before that night; certainly they couldn't have known anything about this bank-shipment of yours, because it wasn't definitely agreed upon by the bank and underwriters until that afternoon. All the same, it's exactly the sort of move that crowd would make if they had advance information. So if you'll quietly point out those four men to me and Miss Maitland, some time within the next few hours, we'll keep a close watch upon them—and the underwriters' men will, also."

"Very good, sir, I'll point 'em out to you—an' laugh at the absurdity of it. You've admitted that yourself! The deck-hand is a Malay—the stewards, both Chinks—the greaser American, I fancy—decent enough chap with some education."

When Jean was talking over the situation with Morton that afternoon, she wanted to know if there wasn't some probability that other people had overheard his brief talk with the Buccaneers.

"Scarcely a chance of it! When Brock saw I wasn't getting anybody on the regular wave-channel set, he beckoned me over to another which tuned from one thousand to one thousand eight hundred meters and threw a switch that put it in circuit. One thousand six hundred is supposed to be reserved for Government use, and the other waves are strictly taboo for commercial broadcasting. But that Buccaneer crowd are breaking so many laws that a few odd ones don't bother 'em. Probably not a soul within a thousand miles heard even a squeal from that talk."

"What data did Mr. Drummond, of the Customs, send you?"

"Names and descriptions of thirty-one vessels ranging from six hundred to four thousand tons, and carrying wireless equipment—including three ocean-going yachts lying around the Shameen at Canton. There were also smaller craft and power-launches carrying radio of low power—but they, of course, are outside of the question because of their limitations. Drummond figured it probable that the equipment on two of the yachts and four or five of the steamers might have a range of five hundred to one thousand five hundred miles—but said that the fastest of the steamers wouldn't do better than sixteen knots with picked coal. As two of 'em are turbines, he may be wrong, at that—you can generally get a few reserve knots out of a turbine-engine, particularly a twin-screw, and they're building some of the cargo-boats that way, now. The only way to pick reliable circumstantial evidence out of that information of Drummond's is to keep track of each boat in that lot of thirty-one—which Leffingwell has agreed to do for me through the Maritime Exchange for the next three months. Any one of those boats proceeding from port to port half around the world, in that time, may be safely eliminated. On the other hand, any or all which got no further than Singapore or Darwin in three months, seemed to be hanging around these waters, would come under suspicion, though I should imagine that the Buccaneers will try to throw us off our guard by doing nothing until we get as far as the Sea of Arabia at least. If they do, the boat following us might put in at some port in that general neighborhood—Aden, Bombay or Colombo—and that fact would implicate her if she was last reported up around Canton."

"H-m-m—perhaps your psychology is right, but if I were in their place, I'd get busy within the next forty-eight hours—before we're expecting them."

THE underwriters' men were quartered in two different parts of the boat—two as passengers in a stateroom at the head of the saloon-companionway, and the others in a room on the main-deck adjoining that of the second assistant engineer. These last relieved each other, watch and watch, one being constantly on duty in different parts of the engine-room and stokehold, always with an up-to-date gas-mask slung around his neck and hanging down on his chest. Having used such things repeatedly

in France, it was assumed that they could adjust the masks over their faces before getting a full breath of any gas which might be released near them. The two in the saloon carried with them, everywhere, rolled-up gas masks which they had practiced opening-out and adjusting about as quickly. Each of the four was armed with a brace of automatics and a knife. Morton and Jean Maitland had also fetched along masks and practiced adjusting them in their staterooms. A spare one had been given Captain Williams—but he declined to carry it about with him.

Now, an intelligent Chinaman is possibly about the nearest to a noiseless, impalpable ghost, when he goes about any sort of nocturnal prowling, of any race in the world.

On the first night out one of the two new Chink stewards unlocked the door of the greaser's room with a piece of wire shoved through the slats of the blind. The underwriters' man off-duty was sleeping heavily and snoring. Without the slightest noise the Chink felt over his gas-mask, which lay upon the transom, and slipped the razor-like blade of a small, thin knife through the rubber covering of the tube in two places where the slits were not likely to show—then unscrewed it from the chemical chamber and blocked the inside opening with a wad of paper. While he was doing this, the other steward was attending to the mask of the underwriters' man, as he slept. Both he and the greaser went on duty at midnight when the others wakened them, and turned in until four in the morning. At two o'clock the Chinks put their masks out of commission also. Next morning, while Morton was at breakfast, one of them—when making up his room—saw *his* gas-mask on the upper berth and very effectively rendered that useless. Jean Maitland had taken the precaution of locking hers in her steamer-trunk under the berth, during the day—but took it out as soon as her door was locked at night and placed it where the thing could be adjusted in a second or two.

WE now go back to the yacht *Fan Chu*, which had come down the river from Canton on the 15th and remained in Hong-kong harbor until the 21st—while Tarlton spent most of his time ashore with various friends at the Peak or took them for short cruises out through the Lamma Channel, around the Island, and back through the Ly-ee-mun Pass at the eastern end. When

the yacht left on the evening of the 21st, it was understood that he was bound for Batavia and Sourabaya, where he had been invited to a wedding among his Dutch friends, and was taking the couple on a honeymoon cruise.

Outside the Ladrone the *Fan Chu* was slowed down to half-speed during the whole of the following day, in the steamer-track for Saigon and Singapore. Late in the afternoon Tarlton made out a steamer's smoke on the horizon astern. Telephoning down to his radio-operator in the hold, he learned that it undoubtedly came from the *Touchan*, as she had been talking both with Hongkong and Manila, the signals coming in more distinctly than any others at the time. Speeding-up his engines a trifle, the yachtsman kept his craft about the same distance ahead until an hour after dark—when he stopped until the *Touchan* had passed him without suspecting that there was any other boat near her. All next day he kept her smoke in sight—creeping up again after dark. At midnight he called his sailing-master and another man down into the saloon, where he was examining a large-scale chart of the China Sea—on the dinner-table.

"Sit down, men—help yourselves to the whisky and cigars. I've just been talking with Wu-Tsi-Lin on twelve hundred meters. He says his men who were shipped at Singapore were to have everything ready for us tonight—any time after twelve. Of course they may have slipped up somewhere, but Wu is pretty confident they won't. They've been warned that there are special guards on board with gas-masks, and will put those out of business the first thing they do. The gas we took aboard at Canton, Wu has tested out in his laboratories until he says it's at least ten times more powerful than anything we've used yet. Harmless except in case of a very weak heart. Now, we've got to attack in a different way, this time—one they'll not be looking for. I'm going to use the hydro-plane. We've a flat, oily sea tonight—couldn't be more favorable for the plane unless a typhoon blows up, though the air does feel a bit like that. What's your opinion, Gunning? Think you can shut off power and glide over that boat slowly enough to drop containers on her bridge, well-decks and engine-room gratings?"

"Using the exhaust-muffler?"

"Yes—you'll have to. There's no moon, but they mustn't have warning enough to

see you by starlight before you're right on top of them."

"Reckon I can do it—but I may waste a lot of gas before I put them completely out!"

"Well—that's what I'm afraid of, and we may need all we have. Guess I'll have to take the plane up myself—with you to drop the containers at exactly the right moment, when I signal for 'em. I was pretty good over the enemy lines, in France."

"Seems too much of a risk for you, sir! If anything happened, it would cripple the organization!"

"If we botch this *Touchan* job, it may cripple us worse—give 'em more confidence in beating us at the show-down. No—we'll both go. So far, we haven't killed anybody—we don't want to! It gives me a creepy sensation down my back just before each new job—lest in bungling somewhere, we're forced to shoot people, which, of course, we'd have to do if they were blocking our escape. Killing is a hanging matter for all of us. Looting gold is merely imprisonment—after they catch and convict us."

THE "exhaust-muffler" was a patent of Tarlton's—worked out from his experience as an aviator in France. It cut down the power of the motor somewhat but made the plane almost as noiseless as an expensive motor-car on an asphalt street.

The first intimation of anything serious which the mate of the *Touchan* had, on the bridge, was a noticeable *plop* in the well-deck below him. Before he could look aloft to see where the dark object had dropped from, the instantly expanding gas was making his nostrils smart a little and his eyelids so heavy that he never even saw the plane as it banked and came back over the boat. This time two containers burst—one squarely upon the engine-room grating back of the funnels, and the other upon the edge of a large ventilator supplying fresh air to engine-room and stove-hold, the gas being sucked down through both and into the blower-fans of the steamer's ventilating system. Twice more the plane glided above the boat, dropping more containers until there was no confined space within the hull which was not impregnated with gas. Then the engines stopped—after which Tarlton flew back and came down alongside the *Fan Chu*, where the plane was hoisted aboard with a derrick-boom

and rapidly dismantled. Then the yacht raced up alongside her victim.

The slight smarting in his nose warned the watcher serving as a greaser in the engine-room that some kind of gas was loose, but his mask didn't keep it out. It came in through the knife-slits and put him out of business inside of a minute. His partner in the saloon managed to get his mask adjusted, but soon knew it was leaking and tore it off so that he wouldn't suffocate while unconscious—provided, of course, the gas didn't kill him. Morton, all the passengers in their rooms, the men in the wheelhouse—everyone on board save the four pirates and Jean Maitland—were completely unconscious.

Some instinctive hunch had kept Jean awake after she had locked her door for the night and taken her gas-mask out of the trunk. Her room was a corner one, forward, one of the ports looking down into the forward well. She heard the *plop*—remembered the same familiar sound on the *Luzon*—and adjusted her mask in a couple of seconds, before the gas came pouring in through the port. *Her mask didn't leak.* Cautiously unlocking her door and glancing down into the saloon, she saw the two stewards of the night-watch lying senseless between the tables, while two other stewards in masks were listening intently for sounds indicating that anyone else was still conscious. Then—the engines stopped.

Rapidly getting into riding-breeches and moccasins, with an automatic belted upon her hip, she took from her trunk an amateur movie-camera with a roll of speed-film in it. Then watching her chance when the masked stewards had disappeared, she ran down to the saloon and concealed herself under one of the tables in a position where she was facing the stairs of the companion-way, and the saloon-gangway under which the strong-room was located. She knew without any question that if she were discovered by the pirates, their own safety would compel them to shoot her—knew there was no possibility of her saving the gold-shipment unaided. She might kill eight of them with the cartridges in her automatic, but the rest would finish her. There was, however, the bare chance of her getting a fifty-foot reel of pictures as evidence. All the saloon lamps had been turned on, and the light was fairly strong

—so that even with underexposed film she would probably get something of value.

IN half an hour a dozen Chinese in masks came down the companion with a tall, dark-complexioned white man who had peculiarly shaped ears and a right hand with one finger missing. There was distinct individuality in his motions. After the boxes had been taken up out of the strong-room and the gangway runner replaced over the trapdoor, this tall man made a point of picking open the lock of every stateroom door—leaving it on the hook—and seeing that a draught of fresh air was blowing through from the open port. Presently the engines started up again and fresh air came pouring into the saloon from the ventilating-fans.

In the morning, those of the passengers who appeared at breakfast, and most of the rest on board, had the appearance of having been up all night at a pretty strenuous party. Williams was too depressed to talk—his bluff self-confidence entirely gone. None but he and the purser, Morton, Jean Maitland and the four pirates, knew what had happened on board. At ten o'clock, this radiogram was handed to Morton:

James Morton—S. S. *Touchan*—China Sea.
Thousand shares treasury stock mailed
care your Bankers—Hongkong. First dividend due March 1st.

BUCCANEERS LIMITED.

Morton didn't show this to Captain Williams—it was too much like rubbing it in. But Miss Maitland told them of the roll of film she was going to have developed in Singapore.

"Those crooks are ahead of the game so far—but I'm positive this film will identify that white man in spite of the mask, and some of the Chinks with him. In two or three months we'll know pretty closely what boat that message was sent from up around Canton. We've spotted these four men on board and can have them shadowed when they go ashore. I'll have the purser lock this roll of films in his safe—just in case somebody takes a notion to go through my luggage. The affair of the *Touchan*, like that of the *Luzon*, appears to be closed. But we now have a good many more threads of evidence which sooner or later will break up this organization. All things considered—we've done a little better than I really hoped for."

The daring of *Buccaneers, Ltd.*, is carried to still greater lengths in the fascinating chapters that follow—in the next, the October, issue.



The CUSHY JOB

By E. K. R. TURNOUR

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

BLIME! If I ever git a blighty I'm gonna myke old Tickler put 'oles in the top of 'is blinkin' cans!"

Number 29321, Private Joseph Henry Judson—ex-driver for the London General Omnibus Company, and now permanent bomb-fatigue in the Third Battalion Grenadier Guards—sucked his punctured finger and growled thus across a box of dry gun-cotton primers at a companion. The two sat cross-legged on the floor of a bomb and shellproof dugout. Between them were an open box of primers, a can of detonators—tiny brass tubes two inches long and the thickness of a pencil, each containing enough fulminate of mercury to blow off a head or hand—and a roll of time fuse. Before them was a pile of one-pound jam-tins, emptied clean by hungry troops, a collection of horseshoe nails, brass buttons, shell fragments, empty cartridge-cases,

stones—everything grumbling fatigue parties could pick up in the war zone that would make a dangerous slug.

Beside each man was a little pile of heavy canvas cut in six-inch squares. The remainder of the equipment consisted of one pair of pliers between the two, an issue knife containing a small marlinspike, and a quantity of thin, pliable wire cut into three-foot lengths.

"You aint gonna git no blighty down 'ere," predicted Joe's companion, a pale-faced youngster whose skinny neck stuck like a beanpole from the ample collar of his khaki tunic. Robert Clark was his name—"Nobby," to his pals. He was a product of Billingsgate, London's great fish market-place where language and product are equally malodorous. "You bloodywell aint gonna git no blighty," he repeated "It's just a cushy job."



A tremendously vivid story of the great war—of the early days and the first gas-attack—vividly set forth by a man who himself was there.

Judson picked up the jam-tin that had wrecked his finger and dropped a layer of missiles in the bottom. "Plum and bloomin' happle," he grumbled, holding the can aloft for Nobby to read the gaudy label. "'Tickler's Plum and Apple.' For Fritz!"

On top of the first layer of slugs he placed a round primer of guncotton and packed more slugs around it. Next he carelessly extracted a detonator from its carefully padded slot in the tin box, squeezed a four-inch length of time-fuse into the open end and ground down upon the joint with strong teeth.

"You'll get the bloody clink if the corporal lamps yer a-doin' of that," Nobby cautioned.

"Not arf—seven d'ys!" Judson agreed cheerfully. "But 'oo the 'ell wants ter be fiddlin' abaht wiv pliers?"

"Oh, well, if yer blows yer blinkin' 'ead orf, hit's yer own fault," Nobby grinned.

Men hurled their arms to the skies and pitched forward—a gigantic unseen mowing-machine was cutting down the fleeing troops. "Gor bli'me—runnin' aw'y from nothin'!" Joe screamed.

"Wot's the matter wiv that?" Joe asked belligerently, extending the fuse and detonator for Nobby's inspection. "It'll 'old, wont it?"

"Course it'll 'old. I'd do it meself ef I could," Nobby appeased, revealing decayed teeth as mute evidence of his inability to clinch the detonator ends without pliers.

Satisfied with his superiority, Joe continued his task. Into a second primer, which is a wad of guncotton weighing two ounces and drilled through the center to hold the detonator, he jammed the loaded fuse. This he placed upon the top of the first primer and it barely reached the top of the can, leaving almost four inches of fuse protruding. Around the space between primer and can sides he dropped slugs until the can was full. Next he plugged his marlinspike through the center of a piece of canvas, threaded the fuse through and wrapped canvas tightly over the top of the can, securing it firmly with wire. After three or four turns around the neck he twisted the wire into a hole he

previously had made in the tin—the hole which had cost him a punctured finger.

"There," he grunted contentedly, tossing the loaded can on to a pile near the dugout entrance. "Gi' us a fag, Nobby."

"Gor bli'me! Smoke orl yer own, then cop mine!" Nobby protested as he tossed a package of cigarettes at Joe. "'Ere's a match, too. Want me ter spit fer yer?"

Joe lighted the cigarette and inhaled deeply. "When this bloody war is over," he began, but stopped suddenly at the sound of footsteps outside and hurriedly squashed out the cigarette.

A corporal entered, followed by four men, each carrying a sack.

"Smokin' ag'in, eh?" The corporal sniffed audibly and suspiciously.

"No, we aint, corporal, honest," Joe lied. "It's the 'eat and smell in 'ere."

"Don't pull me leg," the corporal gibed. "Bli'me! If you blows this place hup I'll pinch yer fer wastin' Government supplies." He paused to let the warning sink in; then added: "'Ow many prize packets 'ave yer got done?"

"There y'are," Judson pointed to a pile of completed bombs by the door.

"Zat orl?" the corporal inquired disgustedly. "We'll want ten times as many afore mornin'. Might be a set-to around 'ere termorrer."

"We aint got many more detonators," Joe complained.

"I'll send a man over wiv some," the corporal promised. "Awright,"—he turned to the men accompanying him—"grab 'em up quick!"

"FER Gord's syke, corp! Are we gonna be kep' on this job w'ile there's fightin' goin' on?" Nobby whined plaintively as the men gingerly loaded the jam-tin bombs into their sacks.

"It's part of the gyme," the corporal replied. "Wot yer 'ollerin' abaht? Yer syfe in 'ere, aint yer?"

"We come over 'ere ter fight," Joe cut in. "We aint even seen a 'Un yit."

"Wot the 'ell! Yer warm and dry 'ere, aint yer? Yer aint crawlin' on yer belly like worms wiv water an' mud arf an' arf underneaf like we is, are yer?" The corporal assumed an expression of envy. "Yer bloodywell well orf—and don't know it!"

"Well orf!" Joe sighed disgustedly after the non-com and his party had gone. "Well orf in a bloody 'ole, for the duration, at a bob a dy! Well orf! Gor' bli'me!"

THERE was a time, now little remembered, when the European conflict was a regular war. That was in its early days, before it became a scientific slaughter with poison gas, Mills bombs, tanks and propaganda—a time when airplanes were the eyes of the armies, not the wasps.

At such a time occurred the first battle of Ypres, October, 1914. The regular British army, crushed, broken, beaten, yet too stubborn to admit it, had retired from Mons slashed and hacked by pursuing Uhlans, mowed down by swift-moving machine-gun corps, footsore from unending days and nights of fight and flight, driven by hunger to the raw beets, turnips and potatoes in tiny Belgian gardens along their route of retreat.

Kitchener was calling and an army of millions was springing into being. Volunteers from every walk of life were being rushed, with little training, into the maw to check temporarily the awful toll of German victories. Munitions factories were rapidly taking form in every factory and machine-shop. They were working to capacity on shells and bullets. They had not yet turned to bombs, machine-made hand grenades and trench-mortars.

But bombs were not unheard of; centuries before, the British Grenadiers had been aptly named—throwers of bombs. The Fusiliers were throwers of blazing fuses.

Britain at war was a nest of armchair strategists. Too old to fight, there were many not too old to remember. Some were good, some bad. One historically inclined egg, restored from half-pay retirement to polished boots, shiny buttons and a desk in the War Office, remembered his pet regiment, the Grenadiers. If they once threw grenades, why not now?

Word went forth that each brigade should organize and train a number of bomb-throwers. And expeditiously, because it was war time, bombers were organized, trained in throwing tactics and became attached units, all ready to throw bombs they didn't have.

Then an engineering genius, viewing with regret the stacks of discarded jam-tins that littered the battlefields where the pride of old England had fought and eaten their biscuits and pound of jam per week per man, realized that this refuse was a waste that impeded the progress of troops backward or forward. He, or somebody to whom he turned for advice, hit upon the bright idea of jam-tin bombs. A few men

were rapidly trained in the art of nihilism. They trained others and soon each battalion had its own bomb-makers to supply the throwers. The makers were chosen, not for intelligence nor mechanical ability, but from the weakest links in the battalion chain.

Judson, for instance, had weak arches that sneaked by a hurried medical board and collapsed altogether after the first forced march. Nobby Clark's puny frame had wilted completely under a forty-pound pack, nine-pound rifle and incidentals in the first seven hours' plodding through mud from Hazebrouck to Erquinghem-sur-Lys.

The Third Grenadiers—not the Grenadiers who had been hacked to pieces at Mons, leaving nothing but a nucleus around which to build new regiments to uphold the old glorious name—the Third Grenadiers had been stuck in outside Ypres between a battalion of French Zouaves, still wearing scarlet jacquettes and voluminous blue pantaloons, and a regiment of Belgian infantry.

ATTACK, counterattack, take and re-take! Day by day the armies swayed back and forth on an ever-changing line skirting the Belgian city of magnificent Cloth Hall. Now the Germans, temporarily checked in their juggernaut push on Paris, were in possession, now the Allies.

And doing their bit, growling because they saw none of the fighting, Joe and Nobby made jam-tin bombs in a funk hole.

"Bloomin' well orful, I calls it!" said Joe, picking up another empty jam-tin. "'Ere I chucks a good berth wiv the bus company at thirty bob a week ter fight fer me bloody country and I git stuck in a 'ole."

"I should write to Kitch abaht it if I was you," Nobby advised sarcastically. England pinned its dwindling hopes on Earl Kitchener in those days.

"'E wouldn't never git the letter," Joe sighed. "But if I 'ad pyper now I'd write to the bloody *Times* abaht it!"

"'Ere's pyper," Nobby offered, diving a grimy hand into his breast pocket and drawing forth a crumpled piece of notepaper. "They's a henvelope over in me knapsack."

Judson extracted a pencil stub from his trousers pocket, spread the paper on a full box of primers, and dabbed the pencil on his tongue.

"'Ow d' yer spell Wipers?" he asked.

"*Y-P-E-R-S*," said Nobby loftily.

"And wot d' they call them blokes at the pypers, Nobby?"

"I dunno. Call 'im sir."

Joe's tongue licked the pencil; then he wrote laboriously for a few minutes.

*Somewares in France
Near Ypres in Belgium*

Dere sir

*Wot I wants to no is is this a war or aint it
i joynd the army to fite and hear i am wiv
nobby clark of billingsgate down in a hole
making boms out of ticklers jam tins they
say england eckspecs every man to do his
dooty is that my dooty i arsk yer i come
hear to fite germans and aint fort no ger-
mans yet. i got bunged into a cushy job and
if the peepul of england new as how thare
swaddies is been used for jobs wivout ftin
thaird be a bloody row, i can tell yer.*

He surveyed his work proudly. "'Ow's this?" he asked and read it through to Nobby.

"That's good," was the verdict; "but yer'd better s'y bloomin' instead of bloody. They wont print swearin'."

Joe made the correction, folded his letter into the envelope and addressed it to the *London Times*, London, England. Across the top, in lieu of a stamp, he wrote: "On active service."

The squelch of running feet in the oozy mud outside caused both men to reach for jam-tins in pretense of work. A bedraggled soldier slid into the trench-like entrance carrying a fresh box of detonators.

"Bli'me, the 'Uns is 'oppin' it hup," he said breathlessly. "Startin' ter give us a dose of shrapnel."

"Garn! 'Ow the 'ell do you know?" Nobby taunted. "You're be'ind the lines, aint yer?"

"Lines!" The newcomer laughed bitterly. "There aint no lines! The Fritzie's are only a mile aw'y and movin' on."

"We might be able ter see the scrap from 'ere," Nobby interjected, having little or no idea of how battles were fought.

"Garn! They wont come near 'ere," Joe growled.

"Gotta double back," the fighting man said. "Got any jam tarts done?"

"There's a few there," Judson indicated.

"Well, toodle-oo," said the stranger. "Better 'op to it an' myke plenty." He put the bombs into a haversack slung from his shoulder and climbed onto the parapet-like top of the entrance trench.

"Now wot d'yer fink abaht that?" Nobby asked excitedly when the man left.

"W'y, it means our mytes do orl the

fightin'—an' we sit 'ere puttin' mizzels in jam-tins," Joe retorted disgustedly.

And the two again began methodically filling the tins with deadly slugs.

IN the eyes of their fighting pals Joe and Nobby were the luckiest pair in the Third Battalion. Their dugout was well hidden in the fringe of the Woods of St. Julian whose shell-torn trees formed a natural camouflage. The roof was only slightly above the ground, covered with two feet of mud over a corrugated steel plate. The entrance was entrenched and protected against stray bullets entering the magazine by a sandbag parapet. A hand-pump kept the floor fairly dry. This had been installed, not for the comfort of the men, but to insure dryness for the great quantity of dynamite, cordite, guncotton and fuse stored there. It was a combination magazine and mine-supply hole and had made a convenient workshop for the bomb-makers. The German front lines were three miles away—six miles away when the shelter had been built and it was infrequently that a misplaced shell dropped in the vicinity.

"Orta put in some o' them biscuits they give us," Nobby suggested as he reached for a handful of slugs.

"Norty boy," Joe said waggishly. "Don't yer know them 'ardtacks 'ud kill Fritzzy boy? Those aint like the nice sorft bits of iron we put in them."

"Bli'me," said Nobby, ignoring the humorous exaggeration, "'ere's a bloody fight comin' on and we aint got no chance ter win the V. C."

"Wot's a nipper like you want wiv a V. C.?" Joe grinned. "Now if it was *me*"—his chest swelled—"wouldn't the old storm and strife be proud?"

"Well, there's Rose," Nobby answered softly. "I bin finkin' abaht 'er ever since they dumped me 'ere. 'Nobby, my 'ero,' she says, as she wiped the fish orf 'er 'ands and put 'em rahnd me neck—'er 'ands, I mean—'Nobby, my 'ero, you learn them blarsted Germans Hinglish! Land the old Kaiser one fer me, wont yer?"

"'Rose,' I says. 'Bli'me if I wont! I'll bring yer back a V. C. and a 'Un's 'elmet.'"

"'Ere—tyke 'er a jam-tin," Joe sallied unfeelingly, tossing an empty at him.

"Aint yer got no 'eart?" Nobby snarled.

"Yus," said Joe, his voice soft and as near tender as his overflowing heart could make it. "I know 'ow it is. My old

'ooman cried 'er blinkin' eyes out when I left. 'Joe,' she says, 'it's goin' ter be 'ard wiv six little kiddies ter keep. Come 'ome syfe, wont yer?'"

"'Ow can we 'elp comin' 'ome syfe?" Nobby grunted savagely. "We got a cushy job, aint we? Bli'me, I 'ad a 'ard time coppin' Rose. She's a queen down our w'y, yer know. Never even blinked at me until I put on the kharki. Then she says, 'Bring 'ome the V. C. and I'll marry yer, Nobby.' I aint even 'ad the 'eart ter write much since I been 'ere."

"A bloomin' fine time I'm a-goin' t' 'ave when I git 'ome," Joe complained. "When my nippers grow up, they're gonna s'y: 'Wot did *you* do in the war, Daddy?' And wot'll I tell 'em?" He glared viciously at the pile of jam-tins

Shrrr—wham!

Both men sprang to their feet.

"Wot was that?" Nobby asked huskily.

"A bloody shell. Wot d'yer fink it was, a bloomin' homnibus?"

"It must 'a' been close," Nobby opined.

JOE slid to the entrance and peered over the parapet. "Fer— Look at 'ere!"

Nobby sprang to his side. Through the woods and across that flat muddy ground skirting them came a motley crowd of Zouaves, Grenadiers and Belgian troops, running as though devils were at their heels. Rifles, bandoliers, knapsacks, overcoats, hats—everything that impeded progress—were being scattered.

Shrrr—wham! Shrapnel burst overhead. Several fleeing men hurled their arms to the skies and pitched forward on their faces.

Shrrr—wham! Nobby felt a warm splash on his cheek.

"'Oo the 'ell are yer spittin' at?" he snarled at Joe.

Shrrr—wham! A gigantic, unseen mowing-machine was cutting down the fleeing, panicky troops.

"Runnin' aw'y! Gor' bli'me—runnin' aw'y from nothin'!" Joe screamed.

The frenzied troops were not running, they were tearing—hurling their bodies forward with a speed induced by terror. Behind them, over the clearing and through the woods, rolled a great wall of yellow fumes. Carried by a brisk wind, it was pushing forward like a steam-roller. None in the allied ranks knew what it was. Those who first felt it knew it made them cough and feel as if their lungs would

burst. Later, analysis by chemists proved it to be chlorine gas, the first attempt ever made by an army in combat.

"Stop the bleedin' cowards," screamed Nobby, a sob in his voice as he recognized the khaki uniforms of his own battalion among the routed troops.

"Give 'em some bloody jam tarts," Joe shouted, plunging back into the dugout.

and fight!" He grasped the fallen body. It rolled face up and blood gushed from the half-open mouth.

The surging tide passed on. Joe and Nobby were left alone.

"Wot a bloody outfit," Nobby said sadly.

"Blinkin' bybies!" cried Joe hysterically.

"Not a bloody 'Un in sight," Nobby



"One—two—three!" Joe counted the seconds aloud, then hurled the bomb at his enemies.

He returned quickly with an armful of bombs that he tossed to the parapet. With arms full the two ran towards the fleeing mob.

"Stop, ye cowards—or we'll blow yer to 'ell!" screeched Nobby.

"Fight, yer bloody 'ounds," Judson howled, dancing before the oncoming tide like a puppy yelping at an elephant.

Men with eyes staring rushed past, oblivious to their threats. Coatless, hatless, weaponless soldiers, terror-stricken by the new and unforeseen, pelted by their heavy feet pounding through ankle-deep mud.

Shrrr—wham! Two men fell close to Nobby, one clawing at him as he pitched headlong, his back filled with shrapnel.

Shrrr—wham! A fleeing Zouave tumbled into Joe and slipped wearily to the ground.

"Yer bloody fool, yer damn' near broke my arm," Joe cursed. his left shoulder stinging from some sharp impact. "Git up

moaned in disgust, peering into the wall of yellow smoke that rolled toward them.

"Gor' bli'me, and they wouldn't let *us* fight!" Joe sobbed.

Advance wisps of yellow smoke curled about their mouths and nostrils. "Bloody shells is smoky," Nobby spluttered; "mykes me froat 'ot."

"Let's duck inside," Joe suggested.

They ran to the magazine below ground. The yellow smoke, heavier than air, poured about them.

"You've cut yer bloomin' fyce," Joe said to Nobby.

Nobby wiped his hand across his cheek and stared stupidly at the blood. "Bli'me," he laughed, "I thort you spit at me!"

"Smoke's gettin' bloody orful," he spluttered, a moment later.

"Like a blinkin' garage," Joe coughed. "Let's wet our coats and cover our 'eads."

Joe felt a twinge of pain in his left arm as he tugged at his coat.

"You've bin 'it," Nobby said excitedly, pointing to Joe's blood-stained shirtsleeve.

"Well, Gor bli'me! 'Oo'd ever 'ave thort it?" Joe said incredulously. "'Ooray! I got a blighty!"

They dashed their coats under the hand-pump. Nobby pumped while Joe turned the coats for a thorough soaking. Then they wrapped them around their heads and pressed the wet cloth close to their nostrils and mouths. For twenty minutes they sat silent until the yellow smoke began to show streaky and thin.

PEEING at Nobby, Joe shuddered.

What part of Nobby's face could be seen was horrible—it was a deep blue in color and worked spasmodically. The eyeballs protruded and were streaked with red. The tongue was swollen and black, protruding from gaping lips. Joe tried to speak; his teeth closed on his own swollen tongue.

As if by spoken agreement the two struggled painfully to the entrance. They climbed on the parapet and drank deeply of the fresh, rain-soaked air.

"Bli'me, that was a garsper," Joe managed to mumble. "Musta bin petrol in them shells!"

"Look!" cackled Nobby, pointing a shaky finger across the soggy expanse of barren ground. Twenty yards from the edge of the woods helmeted figures in gray were weaving about. Behind them, in the trees, to the left and to the right were thousands of the same uniforms. All was bustle without confusion. More than a half-mile away, where there had been a line of reserve trenches and sleeping-holes for their own pals, the two saw a line of spiked helmets bobbing about—shock troops following the path of their poison gas.

Around the fringe of woods men were toiling at the wheels of light artillery caissons, helping straining horses to plunge through the mud. Other men trudged past carrying dismantled machine-guns. Less than a quarter of a mile away a great crowd of gray figures swarmed like busy ants around an iron monster that stuck its ugly black snout straight into the air. Spluttering tractors were tugging, supplemented by many horses. Trucks plowed through mud and dumped bags of cement, heavy timbers and steel beams about ten yards to the left of the magazine. Coatless men were digging frantically to make a great square foundation in the ground.

"Gord A'mighty—Germans!" gulped Joe. "Duck yer bloody napper," Nobby hissed, diving into the dugout.

"Now wot d'yer fink abaht that?" Joe whispered, striving to keep from spluttering in the thinning fumes that still floated about the shelter.

Voices shouted hoarse commands. One voice sounded exceptionally close. The two cringed into the shadows behind boxes of dynamite. Presently two voices could be heard above the entrance. Joe reached over and seized a completed bomb.

"'Old yer bloody 'orses," Nobby hissed savagely. "They'll 'ear yer."

"They'll 'ear this lousy jam tart first," snarled Joe.

The owners of the voices stopped walking. Nobby could see a pair of boots standing upon the parapet.

"Here's a handy shelter," said one voice, his guttural German meaning nothing, however, to the cowering pair below.

"Let's look inside," said another.

"Better not, yet," the first voice cautioned. "There'll be gas fumes down there. Plenty of time after we get the gun placed."

The boots moved away. Nobby and Joe breathed easier as they heard the squelch of the receding footsteps.

"Bloomin' close—that," Joe whispered.

"Not arf," Nobby agreed. "We better 'ide 'ere 'til dark, then sneak back and report."

"Gi' us a fag," Joe begged.

"Gor bli'me! Smoke orl yer own, then cop mine!" Nobby tossed his cigarettes at Joe. "'Ere's a match, too. Want me ter spit for yer?"

The two sneaked from behind the dynamite cases and squatted on the floor in their accustomed places.

"Aint no use mykin' any more o' these," Joe commented, indicating the small pile of completed bombs.

Above ground, the bustle increased. The splutter of tractors mingled with the hoarse shouts of men. With fluctuating front lines and incessant forward push of German troops the armies were considerably more mobile than later, when the quarrel settled into a deadlock. Trucks roared back and forth, making roads where none before existed. Two miles behind, where the comparatively safe headquarters of the Allied division had been, German shock troops were digging their new front line, halted at last when the playful wind changed its mind and direction and ren-



Nobby jammed the bomb between boxes of dynamite, and lighted the fuse.

dered the gas attack worthless. The Woods of St. Julian had been selected as a temporary "Bertha" nest until it was spotted by enemy planes or searching gunfire.

FOR two hours Joe and Nobby crouched in their hole listening to the new tenants. It was growing dark. Now shafts of light dropped into the entrance trench to reveal the interior of the dugout. Close above them was the roar of tractors, the *squidge, squidge* of horses' feet, the creaking of straining harness and the grunts of laboring men. Officers gave orders in guttural shouts.

"I'm gonna 'ave a look," Nobby whispered softly. "They sound bloomin' close."

He rose and crept softly to the entrance. Joe followed. They craned their necks cautiously over the parapet.

Less than twenty feet from the dugout loomed a great shapeless bulk of iron and steel in the gathering darkness. Horses were being unhooked and led away. Gray forms were plodding about.

"*Heraus mit!*"

A startled exclamation came from behind them. Both men twisted their heads quickly. Their eyes met the incredulous stare of a German standing upon the roof. The German snatched for his pistol and Joe and Nobby ducked into the trench as the automatic spit fire in their direction.

"Jam tarts, quick," Joe snarled.

"I'll light—you chuck 'em," Nobby panted, digging into his pocket for a box of matches.

Joe poked his head above the parapet, holding the bomb down for Nobby to light the fuse. Gray figures were swarming toward the dugout.

"Light!" Joe grunted, watching the oncoming mass. Nobby touched a match to the end of the fuse.

"*One—two—three,*" Joe counted the seconds aloud, then hurled the bomb at the faces of his enemies. With one second to go, it burst in midair just above their heads, spraying death about.

"Another!" Joe shouted.

"Lighted!" screamed Nobby, pushing the bomb into Joe's hand. The hand came up

The Cushy Job

in an overhead swing and the hissing jam-tin whirled on its mission.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Bullets spattered about Joe's head. One seared a deep furrow in his cheek. Another crashed through his jaw, tearing away several teeth. A third caught him in the neck. The Germans had halted, temporarily dismayed.

"Another!" Joe gurgled and sprang in frenzy to the very top of the parapet.

"Come down, yer bloody fool!" Nobby yelled, pulling at his ankle.

Crack! Crack! Rifles and pistols spat viciously. Joe tottered, knees sagging, and pitched headlong back into the dugout.

There were exultant shouts from the enemy. Several men ran forward, but stopped at a hoarse command.

Nobby was crying. Tears poured down his cheeks. He grasped a jam-tin and looked at Joe. The eyes were half open, the mouth smiling, lips moving. Nobby knelt beside him.

"Tell the old 'ooman I died fightin'," Joe gurgled, the voice rattling in his throat. "I 'opes you'll git a V. C. for Rose." His jaw dropped, his muscles relaxed. His body stiffened, quivered, and was still.

Nobby sprang to his feet, and jammed the bomb between boxes of dynamite. With steady hand he lighted the fuse.

"'Opes I gits a V. C. fer Rose," he smiled.

TWO items were contained in the London *Times* of November 1, 1914. One was of interest to few, and difficult to find. Sandwiched between hundreds of names in small type under the heading "MISSING IN ACTION" were the paragraphs:

No. 29321, Pte. Jos. Henry Judson, 3rd Gren. Next of Kin, wife.

No. 29786, Pte. Robert Clark, 3rd Gren. Next of Kin, none.

The other item was a lead story:

In a counterattack, following the capture by the enemy of an Allied position near Ypres, the Third Grenadiers, reinforced by two battalions of the Middlesex regiment and a handful of Belgians, retook the ground lost by the dastardly and uncivilized use of poisonous gas. During the counterattack a terrific explosion occurred behind the German position. It was afterwards ascertained by Royal Engineers that an enormous gun, one which it is believed would be capable of hurling a projectile thirty miles, had been demolished. A tremendous hole in the ground, and the number of enemy dead strewn about in horribly mutilated condition, indicated that a deserted magazine had been exploded by shell-fire.

Sweet Little Ewe

By

DICK WICK HALL

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

A joyous comedy from down Arizona way, whence comes humor as dry as the climate—by the author of "Why All the Howling?"

THE Rail Road and Archie Bald Doveface are to blame for a lot of my troubles, more than Mrs. Hick Pruning, I think. I blame the Rail Road the most, because if they hadn't gone and built in here, fifty-five miles across the desert from Hydersburg, Archie Bald Doveface wouldn't ever have been here and neither would Hick Pruning, and then I wouldn't have got mixed up the way I did. How Come it all happened was this way.

Archie Bald Doveface's Folks sent him out here for Their Health, at a hundred dollars a month so long as he stays here and only writes home. He don't have much to do except to wait for Pay Day and set around smoking tailor-made cigarettes and reading when he gets tired of smoking, and one time, when he run out of reading matter, he got hold of an old copy of the Revised Statutes of Arizona and got to reading some of the funny things in it. One day he comes to me and wants to know why don't we organize a School District and hold an Election and Vote some School Bonds to build a good Dance Hall so the folks from Buzzard's Roost, Gold Gulch and the Renada Ranch will come here to dance and spend their money.

I was surprised how easy it looked, when Archie Bald got the book and showed me the Law for it, telling all about how it was done, which we went ahead and done just like it said in the Book. We took in about



She put on one of the records she had brought and took me out on the Porch, where it was cooler.

Seven Hundred Thousand acres of desert land and seventeen miles of the Rail Road and organized the School District and held the election and voted Five Thousand Dollars worth of A. No. 1 School Bonds to build us a Dance Hall. The Rail Road didn't have no Vote but they furnished seventeen miles of good Rail Road assessed at Sixty Five Thousand Dollars a mile and paid about ninety-nine per cent of the taxes of the district, so seven of the rest of us did the voting and made it Legal for the Rail Road to pay the Bonds.

The Rail Road didn't kick none, because they didn't know nothing about it until after it was all done. If we had known how easy it was going to be and hadn't been so scared about it, like some country boy kissing the hired girl the first time, we could have voted Ten Thousand Dollars worth of Bonds just as well as not and have made the dance floor bigger, and put in a stage at the back end for the orchestra, and maybe got a Pipe Organ to play when the Politicians come up here from Yuma every two years to tell us all about the roads they are going to build for us and ask us to vote for them again.

We sold the Bonds and got a contractor to come up from Phoenix and build the

School House for us, out of adobe, with a Hard Maple floor, which the contractor said was the best kind to dance on, and so as the little Mexican kids wouldn't get splinters in their feet when they recited. After it was all done and while we was looking around for a good-looking School Teacher who could dance and start up school in the fall, a Music Man come up from Phoenix and sold us a Piano, which we bought on time as we didn't have no money left and he said it could be put in our Budget after school started and added on to the Taxes for the Rail Road to pay.

As soon as the Piano come, everybody said to let's have a Big Dance and not wait for school to start in the fall. I was one of the Trustees, so I told them to go ahead and have the dance and I would help pay the bills, even if I didn't dance none. I had learned to Dog Trot a little back in Iowa when I was a boy, plowing corn barefooted behind a team of Wild Mules, and I never could see no sense in Crow Hopping around all night for nothing, when I could get \$16 a month and my board for plowing corn day times and not have to pinch my feet all night in a pair of shoes—so I never learned to dance. But they didn't dance in those days like they do Now—and I didn't know

so much then as I do now or I wouldn't have plowed no corn for Nobody.

THE Grand Opening Dance of the Salome Sun Kissed School House was all the talk for six weeks, a hundred miles around. Me, being a Trustee, a lot of folks said I would have to lead the Grand Parade, which I told them was impossible on account of me not knowing How to Dance. Things run along like this for a while until one day Mrs. Hick Pruning come over to the corral where I was doctoring a horse for saddle gall and wanted to know how about this talk about me can't dance and not a-going to go.

I told her Yes, I couldn't Dance but I was going to pay my part, and then she wanted to know was I crippled anywhere or What was the Matter with me so that I couldn't dance. I told her there wasn't Nothing the matter with me, Nowhere, but I just hadn't never had No Chance to learn yet, and then she said if that was all, it would be Easy and she could learn me How in less than no time—which I was kind of Dubious about any little Blonde like her showing an old dog like me nothing—which only shows how far behind the time some of us Old Timers are.

Hick Pruning is the General Manager of the Tooth Pick Factory here, which makes them out of Cactus Thorns to sell to Tourists to send Back East. Hick is from College and San Francisco and is a pretty nice boy in his Way, and as this is his First Job, he thinks it is Important, answering mail and herding the two Mexicans that do the work. Hick thinks and says he is Some Dancer and he can Improve Steps, new and Fancy Ones, which he likes to do to astonish the Natives when they have dances up at Buzzard's Roost and Gold Gulch. I saw a Blind Mare with the String Halt once, that had eat some loco weed and got in a Cactus Patch and she acted the same way.

Alnita is also a Nice Girl and is Hick's Wife. She is one of those Apple Jelly Blondes that gets right up close to you when she talks and looks up at you and makes you feel like you was all alone out in some corn field and had just found a nice Ripe Water Melon—and had Lost your Knife, dog gone the luck. Coming from San Francisco and not being married very long yet, she was kind of Restless out here where there wasn't much going on, so she run around a good deal and was

mixed up in everything going on, to keep from getting homesick I guess; which is how come, maybe, that she picked on me for amusement. These attractive acting and energetic looking little Blondes generally always has to have somebody to pick on to and I must have looked like an interesting subject and the Next Best Bet—Good Men being scarce out here.

I managed to get along all these long years without ever learning how to dance, before and after getting married, with My Wife and other folks always after me why didn't I learn—and me always afraid to try the first time—so when Alnita says she would learn me How, I thought this would be a good time to learn and the best chance I would ever get to Surprise My Wife, who was away visiting relatives just then. I told Alnita all right, that I guessed maybe I could learn a little if she would show me, and she said she bet she could Show Me a Lot of things I didn't know yet if she ever got a good chance and I was willing to Learn. I ask her when would my Education start and she said that very night and she would come over to my house and bring some new and Jazzy Records for my phonograph that would soon have me Stepping Out like Salome on the Hot Sand.

Hick and Alnita come over that night and I opened up some Home Made Grape Juice that I had forgot and left the cork out of on purpose and it had got kind of Excited and run Wild, so that it tasted pretty good and felt better.

Hick likes his Grape Juice pretty well when it is wild enough and he didn't seem to mind much when she told him to get a magazine and read and not to tip the bottle over too much or too often while she was giving me a lesson. She wound up the machine and put on one of the records she had brought and took me out on the Porch, where she said it was cooler and more room and I wouldn't be so nervous like as I would where it was all lit up and somebody watching me trying to learn.

That was sure some Fancy Prancy High Stepping Music she had brought, different from any I had ever heard before, and I had a devil of a time trying to Hop Around keeping up and in time with it without stepping all over her with my hobnailed shoes, which I did once, and then I asked her maybe I had better go it barefooted until I had learned more, so as not to hurt her none. She said nobody could danced barefooted, which is all wrong, be-

cause when I lived with the Indians up among the Snake Dancers, they always went without anything on their feet.

Not knowing Alnita very well yet, I had been holding her off as far as I could so as I could see her feet and look where I was a-going, and finally she stops and asks me was I afraid of her or what was the matter

music until I couldn't help doing it myself—and forgetting all about my feet now, the way she had a hold of me—and finally I says to her that she might know more about Dancing than I do, but we can't do Nothing Like This at the School House right out in front of everybody and My Wife, and getting so close and holding me so tight I don't hardly know Which is Which and Where is Who—and Somebody might see us—and What could I say and



Mike Malloy pranced out with Birdie Bassett, the Cow Queen of Cactus Flats, and the Fun began.

with me, holding her off and acting that way like I thought she had the hydrophobia and was going to bite me.

I told her I was just a little bit afraid of her yet, but not so much afraid of her as I was of Hick, and she says to never mind Hick as I wasn't learning nothing from him and nobody couldn't dance away off from each other that way and for me to get up Close and Hold her Tight and she wouldn't Hurt me none—and then she got right up next to me and got her arm part way around me and I got up a little Closer and got my long arm wound around her and held her Tolerable Tight and she held me a little Tighter and we started out, so close to each other that I couldn't have stepped on her then if I had tried to, without stepping on myself too.

She started dragging me around like this, which you wouldn't think a little thing like her could do, and keeping time to the

What would Hick do if he was to get tired of reading and come out and see me holding her like That—and maybe the Music Stop when I'm least expecting of it, me not knowing nothing about these newfangled tunes, and being all Nervous already, anyway, on account of never having Hugged nobody to Music before, especially with her Husband right in the Next Room.

ALNITA just laughs and says I might be over Forty Years Old and Fifty Years behind the Times, but I am doing Fine and to come on—everybody dances that way now and it is Perfectly All Right and My Wife would Certainly be Surprised when she got home—none of which I don't deny—but I told her I know My Wife better than she does and I aint got No Desire to try and Surprise My Wife Too Much all at once, even if it is Perfectly All Right—and I don't know Hick well

enough yet to want to surprise him a-tall—but she just laughs some more and says she understands Women a lot better than I do and not to worry none about Hick, because he is a Good Scout and likes to have her Dance and Enjoy herself, and anyway, he is Asleep Now—and for me to Learn All I can while I have a Chance.

She went in and put on another Record and come out on the porch again and Continued with my Education, which she said she could see had been pretty much Neglected. This piece had a Song on it, besides the music, something about "Sweet Little Ewe." I told her if Hick didn't wake up and Shoot me, some of the Cow Boys would if they ever caught me dancing around to any sheepherder song like that, but she told me to never mind the Cow Boys now and pay More Attention to Her.

I learned a lot about Dancing that night, before Hick Woke Up—all together different from what I had ever expected to at my age and from what I had ever seen at any dances back in Iowa when I was a boy—but I am glad there was a lot of vines around the porch so as the Neighbors couldn't see me Hip Hopping around and Hugging the Tooth Pick Factory Manager's Wife to that new kind of music while the Manager was Asleep, which I don't see how he done it, him knowing as much about Dancing as he is supposed to know! I can see now where I missed a Lot of Fun back in Iowa, if I had only learned to dance before I got so Old—but by golly, I aint so Old yet but what I'll bet I do a lot of Musical Exercising and have some more Fun before I die, if nobody don't stop me before I finish my Education. I'm glad now I didn't take that Correspondence Course in Dancing by Mail, which I pretty near done once a long time ago. It was advertised pretty good—but some of the best things don't advertise much, I guess.

Anybody that has ever learned to Dog Trot around a Corn Field behind a team of Wild Mules can learn to Fox Trot—especially if some one like Alnita ever got hold of him on the Porch and held him tight with four drinks of untamed Grape Juice under his belt and the Talking Machine playing one of those Sweet Little Ewe hop-stepping hugging tunes, while his Wife is away visiting relatives. *I'll Say So*—and after Hick had woke up and they had gone home and my legs had commenced to ache from not being used to it, which I hadn't noticed during the Excitement, I got to

wondering What would My Wife Say when she got home—and What wont an Old Fool do next if you just give him a Good Chance with his arm around Alnita and his Soul is Filled with Music and his Feet don't Get in the Way. Don't ask me. I'm just Starting to Learn.

The date of the Big Dance kept getting closer and the women got to gathering together afternoons figuring on the Eats they had agreed to furnish and what they would have and Who was going to make Which, and Which one was going to bring What etc. We sent to Phoenix, hired the Sage Brush Saxophonic Orchestra and made all arrangements for a Big Time.

Meantime I was practicing and Learning Something nearly every night, with Alnita when she could come, and with a Kitchen Chair when she couldn't, and I got so as I could Fox Trot around with either one of them as smooth as the differential in an old tin Lizzie. I broke all the rungs out of three of the Kitchen Chairs, dancing around with them and getting so Interested in the Music that I forgot Who I was hugging and holding them too tight without thinking what I was doing—but what does a few Kitchen Chairs amount to when a man gets a little Old and then Wakes Up and commences to Run Wild to New Music out on the Porch with somebody else's Red Hot Mamma. "Sweet Little Ewe!" That sure is some Sweet Sounding Melliferous Melody that would make almost Any Cow Boy forget he hates a Sheep Herder.

I didn't try Waltzing but once. It was too slow and I couldn't keep my feet up in the air long enough to wait on the music—but I was Right There when it come to Fox Trotting, and when the Saxophone Man on the Record would turn loose one of those Wild Wailing Whoop-eee Wow-wow Leg-lifting Blue Notes, it was just like Old Times back in the Iowa Corn Fields, Hollering at the Mules and swinging around the end of a corn row with Both Feet in the Air and hanging onto the plow handles with both hands—excepting, of course, you understand that I'm Not Comparing Alnita to no Plow Handles or a Wild Iowa Mule.

What I'm making a feeble attempt to endeavor to express is that swinging Alnita around in the Moon Light on the Back Porch to "Sweet Little Ewe" on the Saxophone is just as thrilling and exciting and makes you Want to Holler, like when the Mules Run Away down the Corn Row with the Lines around your neck in the Spring



*Me and Alnita
was All Alone
out there and
Pete left the Or-
chestra and come
a-tooting at us.*

Time back in Iowa, and Wondering whether you could Make the Turn at the End of the Row or was going right on through the Barbed Wire Fence and get drug into Heaven behind a team of Wild Mules without No Clothes on. If you understand What I mean, that's more like how it makes an Old Timer feel, learning to dance these New Dances with one of these Alnita kind of girls and getting ready to Surprise your Wife who is away Visiting and don't know nothing about it, Yet.

TIME flies, and before I had learned All that I Wanted to know, the night of the Big Dance come and My Wife got home, not knowing the Big Surprise she was going to get. I let on and acted like I didn't want to go and wasn't much interested, as usual, but My Folks and everybody else insisted, so I finally said Yes and went, which I had been intending to do all the time.

Everybody come from seventy-five miles and more around, on account of the Free Eats being advertised and the Imported Orchestra, etc. You wouldn't believe it How Many Folks you can rustle around in the greasewood and stir up out the sage brush and cactus to come to a Dance, out in the Desert where it don't look to Strangers like Nobody at all lived. But you just advertise a Free Dance and Free Eats

anywhere, and folks will gather around like ants at a sugar barrel.

We fixed up in the Back Room for a big Stud Poker game, for those that don't dance, and for the benefit of any strangers that might happen along and like to get Acquainted, and was willing to Pay for the Introduction into High Life on the Desert, Bill Bordue acting as Dealer and looking out for the Rake Off to help pay the Orchestra and get all the Gold Gulch and Buzzard Roost money we could, while they was feeling good.

It certainly was some Snappy Affair, when the Imported Orchestra tuned up and Saxophone Pete got up on top of our new Piano and blew into his Horn and started out with that old time Song of the Desert, "It Aint Going to Rain No More," which is sure some Truthful Mouth Full of Tune-ful Music. It would have took Ten Men to have held Mike Malloy, the section Boss, and he pranced out on the floor with Birdie Bassett, the Cow Queen of Cactus Flats, and the Fun begun.

Nobody knowed that I could Dance yet, except me and Hick and Alnita, who was going to help me Surprise My Wife pretty soon, which I was commencing to feel kind of dubious about trying to do it in front of all that crowd. So I played Poker and kept out of sight as long as I could, but finally Alnita come around and found me and says

she has arranged for the Orchestra to play "Sweet Little Ewe" for the next piece, and Her and Me is going to get out on the floor and Do Our Stuff and Surprise everybody.

I was so nervous I would rather have slapped a Big Policeman in some strange town than to be making a break like that at something new out in Public before everybody and My Wife, so I beat it back into the Poker room and got me another big drink of Cactus Juice from one of the Gold Gulch boys, a regular Rip Snorter of a Jolt, which I sure needed, and just then the "Sweet Little Ewe" stampede started, and Alnita come and dragged me out of the Poker room and I had to sashay right out on the floor in the middle of everybody and start to dance with Alnita—which was a whole lot different than out on the Porch with her alone, where nobody was watching.

Suffering Side Winders, but I was Scared! And how I did Sweat, and I bumped into everybody in sight, backwards and forwards and sideways, me never having danced in a Crowd before. The Folks all commenced to stop and look at us and by the time we got to the end of the School House, we passed Hick and My Wife and they missed a couple of steps and stopped and commenced to watch us—and the first thing I knew, me and Alnita was All Alone out there and Pete left the Orchestra and come out on the floor a-tooting at us and everybody else watching and clapping their hands—all except Hick and my Wife. I sure felt like the Devil out there that way, and didn't know What to do, but Alnita says to Hold her Tight and Do my Darndest, which I sure did, whirling her around in the air and back onto the floor again and Originating a Lot of New Steps which nobody there or anywhere else had ever heard of or seen before.

I don't know how long it lasted, but it seemed to me like it was a Year before Pete quit and Hick come out and grabbed Alnita by the arm and wants to know What did she mean by showing me all his New and Fancy Steps and trying to Imitate him and making ourselves conspicuous that way. So I told him I was just Learning yet and if I didn't do it right it wasn't her fault. He said I had learned too much.

My Wife wasn't anywhere in sight just then, so I went back and got another shot of Cactus Juice first, and then I hunted her up and asked her wasn't she Surprised. She said Not Near So Much as I was a-Going to be, and then the music started

up again and I asked her didn't she want to Dance this one with me. She just looked at me a minute and Laughed and asked me Who ever told Me that I could Dance, and then she turned around and danced off with Archie Bald Doveface, who had come up just then—and That is all the Thanks I got for trying so hard to learn to Dance.

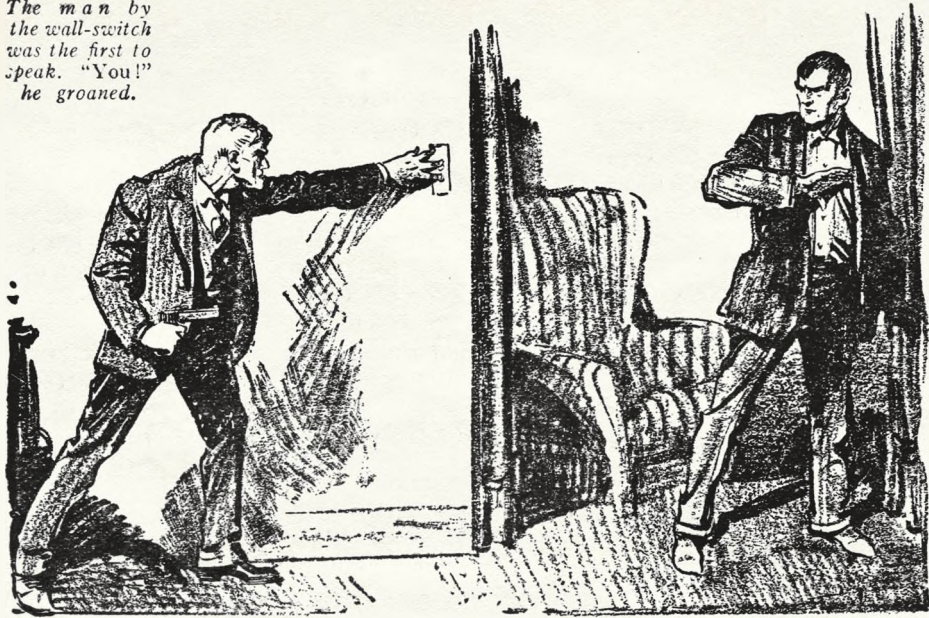
I didn't do no more Dancing that night, which I didn't feel much like doing anyway, so after awhile I says to My Wife to let's go home, which we did—and after we had got home My Wife says if I want to Dance so bad she will Learn me a Few Little Things herself, and then she danced me around there until daylight to that old Talking Machine—and then she went to bed and I had to build a fire and get my own breakfast and go to Work.

That night My Wife invited Hick and Alnita to come over and I had to dance a lot more with Alnita, tired as I was, and feeling all rheumatically on account of being up all night the night before. This kept up night after night, Hick and Alnita being invited over to our house and me having to Dance with her until me and the "Sweet Little Ewe" record was both all wore out. I thought this would settle it then and maybe I would get a little rest, but My Wife had sent down to Phoenix and bought Six new "Sweet Little Ewe" records, which she showed to us—and the next thing I knew Hick and Alnita had Moved Away, without ever saying Why, Good-By, Where they was going, or nothing.

I don't care so much about dancing like I thought I would and I am commencing to think maybe I would have done better to have always kept on Plowing Corn behind a Wild Mule and not tried to Surprise My Wife, which can't be Done, I don't think. The best way, I guess, is for an Old Dog to stick around his own Kennel and not be running around trying to Learn No New Tricks while his Wife is away visiting.

I'm Staying At Home Nights all the time now, like I always like to do when My Wife is at home. I always was a great hand to set and rest at night and read a good deal, and sometimes now when I'm setting there reading and Satisfied, My Wife will look up and kind of Smile and ask me How would I like to Dance a little—and when I look over at the Talking Machine and see those Six new "Sweet Little Ewe" records laying there waiting, I'm Sure Glad that I've got a Lot of Mail-order Catalogues that I aint read yet.

The man by the wall-switch was the first to speak. "You!" he groaned.



Denver Dan

By LEMUEL DE BRA

The able writing-man who gave us "The Kang-he Poison Jar" and "The Return of Stiletto Sofie" here offers a vivid and authentic underworld drama.

IT was midnight. With the veering of the wind, the mild spring rain that had set in at dusk was fast changing to icy sleet. In the fashionable hill section of Riverside the streets were deserted.

A man in a black mackintosh and rain-hat walked boldly up the front walk of the Winston Brevord mansion, circled to the rear and jimmied one of the kitchen windows. Inside, he closed the window and drew the shade. With the aid of his pocket flashlight he located a door and unlocked it, thus making sure of his "get-away."

Slipping off his rain-coat, hat, and boots, he proceeded to the front of the house. As he turned into the library the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Denver Dan, jewel-thief and cracksman, known to the underworld as "The Diamond Kid," snapped around, his right hand dart-

ing to the automatic beneath his left armpit. But he did not draw the gun. Instead he stood rigid, staring—first in amazement, then with a look of intense relief in his dark eyes and pale face.

The man by the wall-switch was the first to speak. He was a thin, stooping man with sharp, white face. Close to his waist he held a blued-steel automatic. The hand that held the automatic suddenly trembled.

"Good God!" he groaned huskily. "You!"

Denver Dan nodded slowly. A smile softened the hard lines of his pale face.

"Thought you were still in the big house, Whitey!" He flung a quick glance around the library. "Beat me here, eh?"

Whitey Carson gulped nervously.

"Yes," he said, his cold gray eyes bent searchingly on Denver Dan's face. "I—I did; but—not the way you think. I'm workin' here, Dan. I've quit—the rotten game."

The Diamond Kid arched his dark brows. He put the flashlight in his pocket.

"I mean it!" Whitey Carson declared, again gulping nervously. "I aint turned

a trick since I got out o' stir. Been with the Brevords about six months now. An' they trust me." He flung a quick glance at the gun in his hand.

WITH a graceful gesture, habitual with him, Denver Dan raised his slim, well-manicured hands and adjusted his cravat.

"Whitey, you always were a liar," he said without malice. "I'm afraid you're still practicing the art. I read in the paper that the Winston Brevords had left for a month in New York; and I concluded that this cold slough would be good pickings. While spotting the lay I filled in with somebody's chauffeur down the street and he told me the house had been left without a kipp."

"I don't get out of'n," Whitey Carson explained hastily. "Hardly anyone around here has seen me. I—I'm afraid some dick will make me an'—"

"And put you where you belong!" The Diamond Kid turned and calmly surveyed the library, noted the well-filled bookshelves, the mahogany writing desk—and the cold fireplace. "Does your work for the Brevords keep you up all night?" he asked, smiling.

Whitey Carson licked his dry lips.

"Denver," he said huskily, "I'm goin' to come clean with you. Flop on that chair by the desk an' we'll chew the rag. No, first let me have your rod!"

"You don't trust me—" The Diamond Kid raised his arms.

"I don't trust any crook!" Whitey Carson broke in. He slipped a hand beneath Denver Dan's coat, took the automatic, then swiftly patted his clothes wherever a weapon could be carried. "Guess you're clean now. Go an' flop!"

Denver Dan sat down in the chair at the left of the writing desk. He noticed now that all the shades had been carefully drawn over the windows. The driving sleet storm outside was deadened to a baffled murmur.

Whitey Carson laid his automatic on the desk beside the reading lamp, moved the chair a little farther away from the intruder, and sat down. He did not look at Denver Dan.

"I s'pose you think I gave the mob a rotten deal back in Frisco," he began nervously. "But, Denver, I never meant to turn you. Honest to God, I didn't! The dicks—made me do it. They—"

"Never mind that!" snapped the Diamond Kid. "I got life—on your squawk. Of course, I had it coming sometime.

'Habitual criminal,' you know." He smiled bitterly. "Well, I got a chance and walked out. Been through hell the past year. But"—he waved a slim hand in a gesture of dismissal—"what's on your mind now?"

Whitey Carson looked up. The hard glitter in his gray eyes matched the hardness of his smile.

"I'm goin' to do something for you to even up!" he explained, lowering his voice. "Denver, you couldn't find more'n a century's worth o' loot in the house. But it's here! Big stuff! These people trust me, an' I've seen the box. There's twenty grand in sparks! More'n that in paper. Not greenies, Denver! Yellowbacks, every one!"

The Diamond Kid smiled.

"If you know where the stuff is, why were you hunting for it when I came in?"

"I wasn't. When I heard you workin' at the window, I was tryin' to open the box. I doused my glim an' waited. Of course, I didn't want to phone the cops! An' I thought—" Whitey Carson leaned forward, his eyes glistening. "Denver, you're just the man! I can't open the box. You can open it with a hot candle, but you wouldn't ever find it. Split with me an' I'll put you wise!"

The Diamond Kid's face showed no surprise.

"I was sure you weren't playing the honest racket for nothing. So they trust you, eh? Took you into their home; gave you more than you've ever had in your sneak-thief life. And now you offer to help another crook rob them! Whitey, this *is* the rotten game, isn't it?"

"Don't preach to me!" snarled Carson. "You'd do the same! An'—"

"I suppose I would," Denver Dan admitted. "Anyway, I'm going to do something that amounts to the same. I'm going to accept your proposition. Where's the box?"

For an instant Whitey Carson appeared to hesitate. Then he sprang up. He put the automatic in his pocket. "Come here!" he said, and crossed quickly to a small bookcase that stood against the wall between the fireplace and a window. Switching on the wall-light above the bookcase, he removed one of the books and thrust in a hand. The bookcase swung out like a door, disclosing a small, built-in wall-safe.

IN one swift, comprehensive glance Denver Dan knew that safe—knew its maker, its period, its "works"—just as any auto-

mobile mechanic knows a car. "Give me a half hour," he said, smiling. "Maybe less. Get that screen and put it behind me. Can't work good with my back exposed. And shut off all the other lights. But first you'd better go out and lock that door I fixed for a get-away."

A half hour later Denver Dan stood up, looked around at the eager, tense face of Whitey Carson.

"Nervous job," Denver Dan whispered. "My hands are like ice, yet I'm wringing wet. I'll have it in a—"

He broke off, staring at Carson. From the rear of the house came a scraping sound that the two men instantly identified.

"Hell!" breathed Whitey Carson, amazed. "Another crook!" He drew his automatic and started for the door.

"Stop!" Denver Dan ordered sharply. "We can't have any trouble. You get behind this screen. Shut off the light. Give me my gun and let me do the talking."

Whitey Carson frowned, but instinctively yielded to the leadership of the other man. Before he could shut off the light, Denver Dan was halfway to the hall door. He stepped out; then at what he saw down the hall, drew back quickly. As he waited, a finger on the wall-switch, he listened, reading the intruder's noises as a musician would analyze the playing of another. "Rank!" he muttered; "but not his first job."

A MOMENT later a circle of light swept across the polished library floor and rugs, lifted to the screen that hid Whitey Carson, then started around the wall.

Denver Dan punched on the light.

The flashlight clattered to the floor. In the doorway, a slender, stooped youth with pinched, white face beneath a dripping wet peak cap uttered a startled gasp, turned as if to run, then, seeing the automatic aimed at him, shot up both hands.

Denver Dan smiled.

"Scared you, eh? Queer! I always heard it took nerve to be a burglar. And I thought a burglar always carried his flash in his left hand and his gun in the other."

"Mister!" cried the white-faced youth desperately, "I aint no burglar! Honest to Gawd, I aint. I—"

"Just dropped in for a visit! Of course!" Denver Dan glanced down at his own stockinged feet. "Well, I was about to retire. However, I'll give you five minutes. But, first, let's start off as friends!" he added quickly and, with expert hand, picked a re-

volver from the intruder's pocket and put it in his own. "You didn't mean any harm, of course," he went on; "merely carried this to murder anyone who—"

"I didn't, Mister!" the youth protested, and suddenly began crying. "I—I'm honest. But my dad's dead an' I'm supportin' my old mother an' a crippled sister. I was a sweeper in the oatmeal mill until they closed. For two months I aint had more'n two or three days o' work. I—I could stand it; but I got to get something to buy food for my mother an' sister. You folks are rich; an' I read that you'd all gone away. I never done anything like this before, but I thought—"

"What's your name?" Denver Dan broke in impatiently.

"Charley Watkins. I—"

"What did you expect to find here?"

"I—I don't know. Silver, mebbe. I thought I could pawn it an' get—"

"A tenth of what it's worth! See here, Charley! I'm a—criminal lawyer. I know more about this rotten game you're starting in than you'd learn in the next ten years. I don't believe a word you've just told me; but we'll suppose that it's true. *You can't make a thing right by doing something that's wrong!* Get me?"

Watkins nodded. He had lowered his hands to cover his face. Through his opened fingers he cast a furtive glance at the man with the automatic.

"I suppose you've read in the papers about the rich hauls made by crooks." Denver Dan went on. "Well, I happen to know the truth about many of those cases. When the paper states that a crook got away with ten thousand, you can tell yourself he got maybe two thousand. You ever hear of Denver Dan?"

"Yes!" Charley Watkins suddenly lowered his hands.

"He has told me about many of his cases. He's been a crook for twenty years, spent half that time in the penitentiary, and couldn't raise a thousand dollars tonight. He has told me how crooks are robbed by everyone they have to deal with, by fences who buy their stolen goods, by crooked lawyers, bond brokers, crooked cops, crooked politicians—all the dirty mob who play safe by living on the poor boobs who take all the chances. And maybe you've read about Denver Dan's wonderful nerve! Bunk! I can tell you that there isn't a night that he doesn't wake up in a cold sweat, stiff with terror, just at the sound of a heavy step in

the hall. And that's what you have ahead of you. Cut it, son! It's a rotten game!"

Charley Watkins said nothing. Denver Dan put his automatic in his pocket. He took out a few bills.

"Here's fifty dollars, Charley. If you have a mother, go buy her something to eat. Anyway, make that last you until you find honest work. You hear?"

The youth's fingers closed over the bills greedily. "Fifty!" he exclaimed. "You—you givin' me all this, Mister? Why, I—"

"I'm not giving it to you!" snapped Denver Dan. "I'm buying your gun. You have no business with such a thing. Pick up your flash now. I can't spare you any more time. But I'll be watching you from now on. Remember that!"

Charley Watkins picked up his flash and put it in his pocket. "What's your name, Mister? I'll pay you back when—"

"I'm Winston Brevord's nephew," Denver Dan cut in impatiently. "Now go ahead of me down the hall. No, I'll use my own flash!"

They passed down the hall, through the dining room and into the kitchen. Charley Watkins glanced at the raincoat and boots on the floor, then at the window.

"How'd you get in?" Denver Dan asked.

"There," Watkins said, pointing to the window. "The lock is busted."

Denver Dan stepped to the door. He was not surprised to find it again unlocked. He shut off his flash, then swung the door open, letting in a gust of the sleety wind.

"Good night, Charley," said the Diamond Kid. "And remember what I said!"

"Good night, Mister," said Charley Watkins. "An' God bless you!"

DENVER DAN closed the door, locked it, and hastened back to the library. "Well, Whitey," he said, punching off the lights, "I'm out ten minutes and fifty dollars; but if I've talked that kid out of this rotten game it's a good investment. Now to finish my job!"

"Get it over quick!" growled Whitey Carson. "I'm gettin' a hunch that something's goin' to happen!" He glanced toward the darkened hall. "Say, while you're finishin' that, I'm goin' down to my room an' pack my keister. Storm or no storm, I'm goin' to blow as soon as we get the stuff!"

Whitey did not linger for a reply, but hastened out. A moment later he came back carrying a hat, an overcoat, and a

large suitcase. He set the suitcase on the writing desk and opened it.

Denver Dan stood up, nodded to Carson, then took hold of the handle and shoved it back. He swung the door open and looked in. "No duster door," he began, then jerked around, staring at the muzzle of an automatic.

"Get up!" Whitey Carson ordered, gesturing savagely with his automatic. "You've done your job; now I'll do mine! Back into that chair!"

For just a second, Denver Dan hesitated; then, shrugging, he stepped back to the chair by the writing desk and sat down. "I deserve it," he said, indifferently. "Should have known better than to trust—"

"Shut up!" snapped Whitey. From a drawer in the desk he had taken a ball of heavy twine. "You were thinkin' o' doin' the same to me!" He took the two guns from his prisoner, then began tying him to the chair.

"Maybe I would, at that!" Denver Dan admitted, smiling. "I've often wondered who it was that started that bunk about 'honor among thieves.' But to tell the truth, Whitey, I was thinking only of that kid Watkins."

"You'll have plenty o' time to think!" Whitey growled. "Guess I wont have to gag you! Imagine—Denver Dan yellin' for the cops!" Carson chuckled as he snatched up the suitcase and stepped quickly to the safe. Denver Dan could not see what Whitey took from the safe, but he saw the exultant look on Carson's pallid face as he snapped the suitcase shut and stood up. "Glad you dropped in, Denver!" Whitey said as he hurriedly donned his overcoat. "A good time was had by all, eh? Tomorrow—mebbe not for several days—I'll try to get word to the cops to come an' get you. I'm afraid o' you, Denver; an' I'm damn' glad that you're goin' back to stir—for life!"

He picked up the suitcase and turned to leave. "Oh, say, Denver!" he called back; "since you're not goin' to use it again—ever—can I borrow your raincoat? I wouldn't think o' stealin' it, you know!"

Denver Dan did not bother to reply. The other man paused in the doorway, a hard glitter in his gray eyes, a mirthless smile on his thin lips. Then Whitey Carson was hurrying down the hall toward the dining room.

A moment later Denver Dan heard two muffled explosions.

Then—a long silence. Outside, the sleet storm pelted the library windows.

And then—heavy steps in the hall. Into the library strode a red-faced man with drawn revolver. On his glistening raincoat was a policeman's star.

"Here, officer!" cried the Diamond Kid, huskily. "Help!"

"O-ho!" boomed the policeman. He strode forward, laid his police .38 on the writing desk. He got out his knife, then hesitated. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Nice time to be asking that!" said Denver Dan sharply. "Don't you remember seeing me with Winston Brevord the day before he left? I'm his nephew from San Francisco—Maxwell Brevord."

"That's right, Mr. Brevord!" exclaimed the patrolman apologetically. "I remember you now. Just in time, eh?" He slashed the last cord.

Denver Dan sprang up. He pointed to the open safe. "I heard a shot! Did—did he—"

"Sorry, Mr. Brevord, but I—I had to do it. The dirty crook pulled his gun. It was me or him. I give it to him twice, straight in the face. He was dead when he hit the ground."

Denver Dan shuddered.

"Shoot 'em first an' talk later is my motto," the patrolman went on. "Anyway, he's better off dead. Playin' a rotten game, he was. I'd like to use that phone, Mr. Brevord."

"It—it's out of order, officer. Sorry; but I—"

"Doesn't matter. The cap'n an' a bunch o' men will be here in a minute. Le's get that stuff back here by the safe!"

"Yes, certainly! I—I'm still a bit upset and—"

The patrolman started for the door, leaving little pools of rainwater where he had stood by the desk.

"I—I had taken off my shoes and was reading," Denver Dan said as they went down the hall. "Must have fallen asleep. How long before the other men can get here? I—I'd like to have the grounds searched."

"Be here any minute," the officer said as he opened the door to the kitchen.

Denver Dan followed him in. The patrolman had found the wall-switch and had put on the lights. He had dragged the body of Whitey Carson back into the kitchen.

Whitey Carson lay on his face, his arms limp at his sides, his gun nowhere

in sight. He had thrown Denver Dan's raincoat over his shoulders. Water dripping off the raincoat was mingling with a widening pool of blood by Whitey's face.

AGAIN Denver Dan shuddered. He looked up. The patrolman was watching him, a queer gleam in his shrewd eyes. "Say, you ever hear o' Denver Dan?" he demanded abruptly.

Denver Dan, feeling a sudden constriction in his throat, shook his head.

"Well, that's him!"

Denver Dan looked down at the dead man. "Oh!" he muttered. "Then—then you've seen—this Denver Dan before?"

"Never did, but I'm sure it's him. When the captain gets here, he'll identify him. He knows all them big guns. Me—I been in the sticks all the time. Never had a chance to do anything until tonight. When that kid tells me he's seen Denver Dan here I know my chance has come. So I tell him to phone the captain, and I beat it for the Brevords."

Denver Dan nodded slowly. "I'll make it a point to give your informant a suitable reward—"

"He'll get enough reward, Mr. Brevord! Dirty little crook wouldn't tell me what was on his mind until he had made me promise him half the reward for getting Denver Dan! He ought to be put away for keeps, himself; but he always pulls the weepin' act an' gets off. That's why some call him 'Cryin' Charley' Watkins. He said he recognized Denver Dan from pictures he'd cut out o' papers an' pasted in his room. I told Charley I bet he'd come around here to steal the silver, himself; but he swore he'd quit the rotten game. Well," the patrolman concluded as the front door-bell rang, "guess that's the boys!"

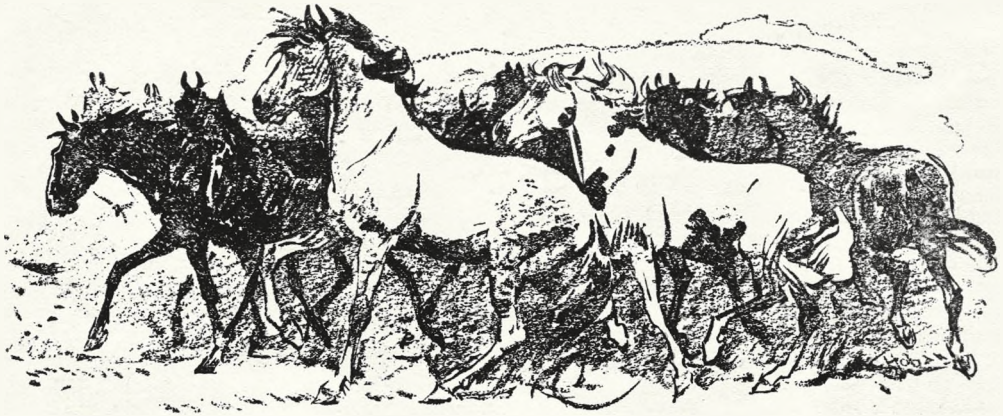
With a graceful gesture, Denver Dan raised his slim, well-manicured hands and adjusted his cravat.

"Would you mind letting them in, officer?" he asked, smiling. "I'll stay here and put on the yard lights."

"Sure," said the patrolman, and hurried out.

Denver Dan reached for the suitcase, but drew back with a shudder. The handle was spattered with blood!

A moment later, his stockinged feet slipping on the wet grass, the icy sleet pelting his white face, Denver Dan, alias the Diamond Kid, empty-handed, was running, panic-stricken, for the first time in his life.



Wild Heritage

By HAL BORLAND

You will not soon forget this vivid story of horses and men, by the gifted author of "Blue Moonlight" and "A Cougar Strikes."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THOUGH Amos Noel had only surmised that was what they were doing, Art Wilcox and his half-dozen relay riders had been on the heels of the big bay stallion's herd since dawn. From the pool at Three Cottonwoods on the Solomon, where they had jumped the horses before sunup, the riders had driven them across the ridge twenty miles north to the Hidden Springs waterhole, among the sandhills. There the wild ones had drunk and Art had detailed three men to wait. After Art and the other three had trailed the herd to the Solomon again, the horses would swing back toward Hidden Springs. And when they did, the big bay's mares would find the three fresh riders waiting to keep them from the water, and to take up the shuttle chase between the waterholes.

By such tactics Wilcox and his men had run down and captured four of the biggest herds of wild horses on the plains in the last few months, with such famous members as old Satan, the night-black stallion who had lost one eye in a long-ago battle with a bobcat, and his big roan lead mare, whose ability to smell a rider two miles away had saved the herd a dozen times.

When he had taken Satan and the roan in to Norton, gaunt from water-starving, footsore and drooping from the long chase, Wilcox had been cheered by everyone until old Amos Noel had shuffled across the street to see the cause of the excitement.

Amos had edged through the circle of men until he could see the horses. Then his heavy white brows had drawn together while the corners of his mouth drooped in a scowl. Wiping his short white chin-whiskers with the palm of his hand, the old man had muttered something and turned away. But before he could go, Wilcox had hailed him.

"**H**HEY, Ame! I got 'em! This is old Satan, and his sharp-nosed lead mare."

The old man had turned with a glint in his deep blue eyes, and the muscles in his jaws had bulged in anger before he spoke.

"I know it, Art. I seen Satan and his lead mare long 'fore I ever seen you! I seen 'em out where they belong. And I don't want to look at the poor critters now, after you've run 'em down and broke their wind and their feet."

"Broke their wind, hell!" Wilcox retorted. "They aint—"

But the old man paid no heed.

"It aint no credit to you that you run 'em down! It was the fresh horses you rode that done it." Old Ame glanced at the drooping captives. "Now what you going

to do with 'em? Sell 'em!" He spat in disgust. "You're like the rest of 'em. Can't shoot one buffalo for a robe or a hump of meat—got to kill a hundred. Can't catch one horse or two to ride—got to catch a whole herd, leave the colts for the coyotes, and sell the rest."

Grimly the old man pushed his way from the crowd, shouldered a pack he had dropped beside the Black Joe Saloon, and vanished down the street with his peculiar shuffling gait.

Wilcox and his audience had guffawed, then gone into Black Joe's place to boast and listen, and before he had left the bar Wilcox had declared he would get the big bay stud from Hidden Springs—"or eat my shirt, and old Ame Noel's, too, by Gad!"

That had been less than two weeks ago.

AMOS NOEL scowled at a dust-cloud as he trudged steadily toward the southwest. The cloud was traveling north at far too rapid a pace to be from an unmolested herd, and when the old man had watched its progress for a while he muttered to himself, "Art Wilcox, I'll bet, raising more devilment!" Once he even went several hundred yards aside to mount a ridge and watch the dust-beacon. Then he returned to his path, straight as a bee's flight, toward Three Cottonwoods.

The sun dropped closer to the horizon, but the old man paid no heed, neither quickening his pace nor lengthening his stride. When he had set out this morning he had marked Three Cottonwoods as this night's destination, and had gauged his pace accordingly. He would reach the waterhole by sundown. Then, and only then, would he unsling his eighty-pound pack, drink his fill, cook and eat a light meal, rest on the earth that mothered him.

So Amos Noel traveled, from dawn to dusk, from point to point, precise as a watch, his proud old legs as steady in their gait as those of the best saddle-horse. Thirty miles a day was an easy matter for Noel: he had done forty a number of times, and once, while camped on the Republican, he had walked to Fort Wallace and back, a hundred and twenty miles all told, in thirty-six hours, merely to renew his ammunition-supply.

He had just assured himself of that supply now, shifting the heavy cartridge-belt, when he glanced up and halted. In the hollow below him, a scant hundred yards away, stalked Death.

A black colt of perhaps four months wavered beside a cut-bank, one white fore-foot held high in pain. Ten feet to one side ranged a big coyote, his yellow eyes eager, his narrow jowls dripping in expectation of the feast. A dozen feet to the other side sat another coyote, merely waiting. And beside the little black, head low, eyes flashing, tiny hoofs dancing in anger, pranced another colt, a fawn-colored little stallion with a jagged white flash down his face.

With fangs bared, the nearer coyote leaped toward the little black. In a flash he was faced by the baby sorrel. The little stud's white hoofs shot out, bowling the attacker into the grass, but failing to hurt him. But while the sorrel watched the one coyote, the other sneaked close, leaped. There was a nicker of fright, a snarl, a jagged wound; then the sorrel was at the second coyote, battling with all his baby heart.

Ame Noel's rifle was at his shoulder in a wink, his blue eye squinting down its sights. A coyote hesitated, crouched for a leap—then a flash, a crashing roar echoing down the valley, and one coyote lay kicking beside the cut-bank while a yellowish streak up the hillside told of the other's flight.

But in the valley stood two colts, one with a foot too sore to touch the ground and a gash on her shoulder from the coyote's fangs, the other ready to do battle unto death for the two of them.

Old Ame was swearing great oaths as he strode down into the hollow, and Art Wilcox was the burden of his plaint. But as he neared the colts he became silent, then crooned soft reassurance.

The sorrel, snorting like a bull, tail in the air and head up in excitement, edged back. The black followed, limping. Ame continued his crooning. A hundred yards down the draw they went. Then the little sorrel "Lightning," as old Ame silently termed him, broke into a nervous lope and dashed fifty paces. But his little black playmate could not follow.

Amos held out his hand and finally touched her black muzzle gently. With a snort she sat back on her haunches; then with strength induced by fear she fled a hundred yards, to pull up lame.

Again the old man approached her, touched her black nose. This time she fled only half as far as before. By the time they were in sight of Three Cotton-

woods and the waterhole, the sun had set and old Amos was walking close beside the baby black, his soft voice soothing her and his gnarled hand smoothing the dust-ruffled hair along her silky neck.

But Lightning, the little sorrel, kept his distance. And until the little mare colt had walked with old Amos to the very brink of the waterhole, had drunk her fill and turned to lie down on the soft grass beneath the cottonwoods, her sorrel companion continued to snort defiance at the old plainsman.

AS the old man unslung his pack and arranged his simple camp, he noted the signs at the watering-place, read them easily as a scholar his Greek, and swore anathema on horse-hunters in general.

"That's Art's boot-track. Never mistake that twist to his heels. And he didn't let the wild ones drink here. Headed 'em back north. Hidden Springs. He'd have fresh riders there, too. And by this time of day he'd have the herd pretty well wore down. Nope, they wont be back here tonight. They wont much more than get turned away from Hidden Springs before the last of 'em gives up. Poor devils! And the coyotes'll feast on the colts,"—he glanced at the little black, lying utterly exhausted, and at the sorrel, standing guard twenty yards away,—"all but two." Then he delved in his meager stores and drew out a handful of salt. The little black sniffed at it when he offered it, finally licked it tentatively, then licked again, nibbled the last crystal of it from his palm. And when he returned to his tiny fire, she followed him with eyes no longer wide in terror, but almost eager in friendship.

Before he rolled in his blanket—supper over and pack ready for the morrow—old Amos warmed some water and washed out the little black's wound received from the coyote's teeth, and rubbed the cracked hoof with warm oil. For a long time he squatted on his heels beside the little colt, rubbing her head and neck, scratching her itchy forehead, soothing her with his low, crooning voice. And when he finally went to his blankets it was with the question: "Are you going to be here in the morning, little Gypsy-baby? Or are you planning to pike off with that little sorrel upstart and make a couple of meals for a pair of coyotes before you're through?"

Little Gypsy-baby was there beside the cottonwoods when dawn flushed in the

east. A hundred yards down the valley her fawn-colored consort waited impatiently.

Old Amos rose, breakfasted quickly, and approached the Gypsy with a handful of cornmeal. She ate it, and looked for more. Then, as dawn came with its full flood of light, he shouldered his pack and faced the southwest.

Little Gypsy limped to his side, begged for more cornmeal.

"Can't do it now, young lady! I'll need it tonight and tomorrow. But there's more where I'm going. Come along, and you'll live high at old Ame Noel's dugout." He swung off on his day's hike.

A moment the little black watched him. Then a nicker from the sorrel turned her head. Irresolute she stood, a full minute. Slowly she turned toward her own kind, limping slowly away from old Amos.

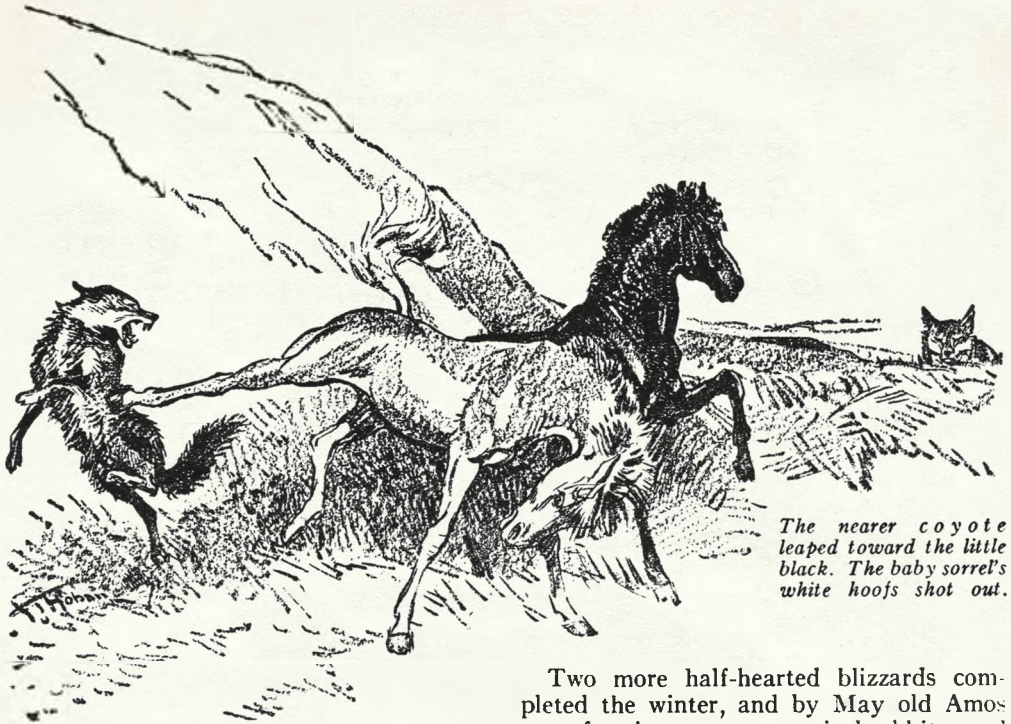
But as she reached the spot where she had lain the night before, her muzzle went to the ground. She hesitated. Her sensitive lips found a few crystals of salt, a dozen grains of cornmeal.

When those morsels were gone she turned, for she was but a baby—a hurt and orphaned baby—and swung off at a limping trot after old Amos Noel, while Lightning nickered in vain, followed at an ever-increasing distance, and finally came to a halt in a valley where the sweet grass grew almost to his thin belly.

WHEN Amos Noel promised Gypsy that they would live high at his dugout on the Smoky, he was right only in part. For though the fare was high throughout late summer and early autumn, when the frosts came they bit fierce and often. The tall grass in the hollows was cured overnight into standing hay, and the green flats turned to bronze, as in a wink. And the leaves from the half-dozen cottonwoods and willows along the fitful stream shattered down in one brief golden shower.

In October it snowed. The first fall had scarcely begun to melt when another came, and by Thanksgiving there was a foot of hard-packed white over everything. Only the tips of the cured blue-stem showed above the glistening crust in the hollows.

The little heap of stunted cornstalks and hay that Amos had laboriously cut with his butcher-knife vanished from the corner of the dugout in a few weeks, and Gypsy demanded more. At last, when the snow showed no sign of giving way before the



The nearer coyote leaped toward the little black. The baby sorrel's white hoofs shot out.

icy sun that swung so far off in the white sky, old Amos swathed his feet and legs in buckskins, pulled a rabbit-skin over his ears, and plunged out into the drifts. A hundred yards he led the way, with Gypsy close behind, her black muzzle puffing unwelcome vapor on the back of the old man's neck. Then in a hollow where the mice and the birds had stripped the exposed heads of the blue-stem, the old man broke the crust over a large circle, scooped out the loose snow from one bunch of cured grass after another, and invited Gypsy to the feast.

"Here you are, young lady! Eat and grow fat. And when you've finished this bunch, and this, use your own feet to dig it loose!"

And so they lived, "hand-to-mouth," not elegantly nor yet quite starving, until mid-February.

Then a thaw came, on a warm southwest breeze. The white crust sank like water behind a crumbling levee, and on the second day there were black patches along the southern slopes of the hills. Then came the chortle of water in every hollow as the melting snow on the hillsides swept away that in the valleys from underneath. Overnight the waterhole became a stream that stretched far away down the valley, and the Smoky River flowed in its annual rebirth.

Two more half-hearted blizzards completed the winter, and by May old Amos was feasting on young jackrabbits and Gypsy was shedding her shaggy, rust-colored winter coat to reveal a sleek, well-filled body beneath.

Early in June Ame Noel took stock of his position, and confided his findings to Gypsy.

"This is a fine country, black baby, and I'll be homesick for the Smoky and the Republican and the flats between them. But I'm getting old and you're still young, and we both need a milder winter than we've just had. Supposing now, Gypsy, we wait here another week—and if we don't get any word from Fort Wallace that we're needed there this summer, then we'll hike out. There's a Cimarron and a Canadian river a week or so south of us, and there's flats between them where the snows come and go but don't stay long."

And when no word came from Fort Wallace, they hiked out, as Amos had said.

IN the fall Amos built a dugout on a fork of the Canadian and that winter while Gypsy foraged in the valleys Amos took buffalo pelts, 'coon-skins, and a few beaver-skins, and tanned them. When spring came again, finding Gypsy now a fine, sleek two-year-old, Amos had goods to trade for tea and salt and cornmeal—delicacies for the two of them.

That summer when they wandered southward, Gypsy's strong back carried old

Ame's blankets and his frying-pan and ax. But never old Ame's body. "Not while I can walk!" the old man growled to himself at the thought. "My old feet have took me too far to hand over the job to some one else now."

And when fall came that year Amos built a log shelter on a fork of the Washita, on a south slope where he could sit of a morning and sun himself while he looked down at the willows and the wild-currant bushes in the valley, and hear the trickle of the stream as it spread itself fanwise over the shoals just below. That was a happy winter—the grass was good, keeping Gypsy's ribs well covered, and the profusion of small game kept old Amos always in fresh meat.

The season passed quickly, and it was January before Amos realized it.

The first week in February a torrential rain swept the district. The Washita roared and growled all night, tearing at its stony banks, ripping out willows and ash trees. When dawn came and the flood had subsided a little, old Amos went out to see what had happened.

The stream still roared, plunging from bank to bank, yellow with mud, its surface littered with grass, weeds, branches and foam. And just opposite the cabin, where the stream made a sharp bend, it had swept away a whole ledge of gravel and slate.

The old man wandered about like one in a dream. This was a new valley, changed overnight! He paid less heed than usual to where his feet carried him.

Suddenly he slipped; the earth beneath him gave way. A whole section of the bank, undermined during the night by the flood, tumbled twenty feet to the bench below, which the muddy waters had quitted but a few hours before. And with the faller earth went old Ame, twisted, sprawling.

He fell in a heap on a gravel-bed. Beneath him, crooked like a branch, was his right leg. He felt the pain when he tried to raise himself, but could not believe the truth until a dozen efforts convinced him.

The leg was broken!

He lay back, examined it. Snapped clean off just above the knee! Not a jagged break, nor a splintered one, apparently; a typical old-age break, it was. The pain right now was numbed by the shock. But it would take weeks to heal, and he was alone, miles from help. Yet not alone, for there was Gypsy! The old man smiled, and reached for a broken

branch, hauled himself a few feet. First thing was to get to the cabin. After that—well, he'd see later. Slowly, in spite of the pain, he dragged himself along the bench.

HOURS later he reached his dooryard. He had had to travel nearly half a mile upstream to get up from the bench, and the same distance back to the cabin. The pain now was sickening, and Amos sank more and more often into periods of black emptiness. He dragged himself into the hut, found his blankets, sank into sleep. When the pain awakened him, it was night. He slept again, wakened in darkness, drowsed, and it was dawn.

For an hour he lay in the growing light and considered matters. And at last, decided, he drew himself over to a heap of firewood. Choosing splints, he shoved the swollen leg into position, tied the sticks in place with strips torn from a blanket. Then he gnawed the last of a roast pronghorn sirloin, and hobbled outside with the aid of his gun.

Gypsy was nowhere in sight. Old Ame called, and as his voice echoed he heard her answering whicker. A few minutes later she came trotting up, eager for the tidbit that was not forthcoming.

"Black baby," the old man addressed her, "we've got a job on our hands! The old man's busted a leg. He can't walk. And if he don't get well right soon he can't eat. Suppose you can help? It's up to you, now."

He urged her close beside the low roof of the hut while he groaned as he dragged his heavy, maimed self to the log crossbeams. "Easy, easy!" And with another groan he rested there a moment, forcing the dizziness, the terrible sickness, from his head.

Gypsy stood like a statue, her eyes wide in wonder, her sensitive nostrils quivering. Something was very wrong, and she knew it. Then the old man grasped her mane in his gnarled hands, drew himself up on her withers, rested there, finally pulled his good left leg up and over her back.

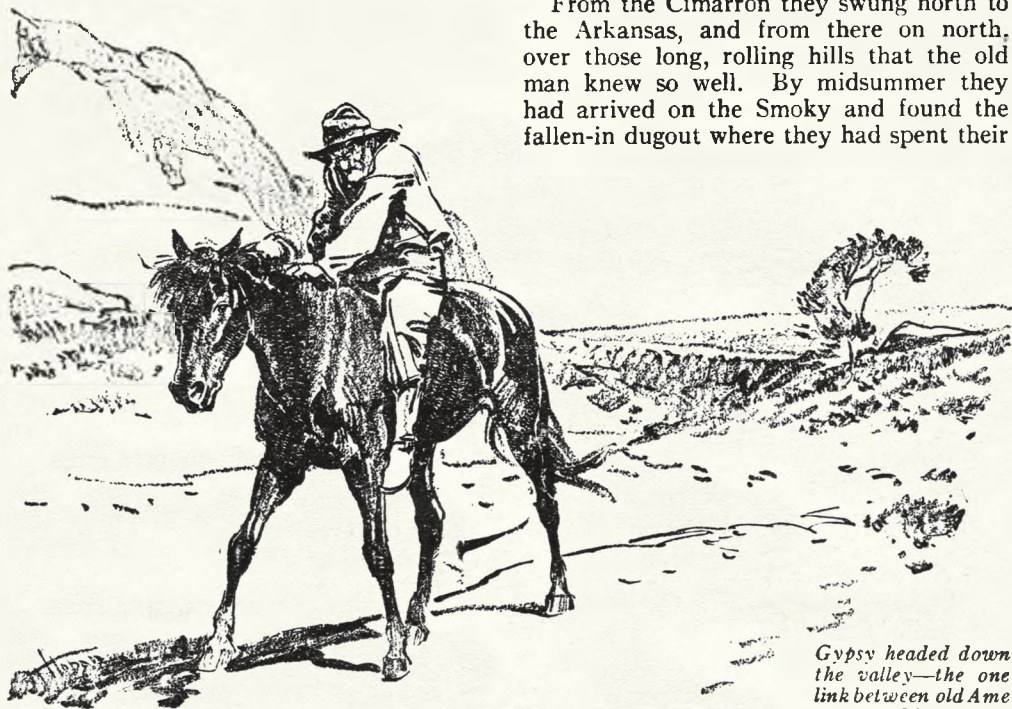
"All right," came his quivering voice. "All right, Gypsy girl. It's forty miles to Chickasha, forty long miles!"

And Gypsy, stepping lightly as if she knew she had something precious balanced on her back, headed down the valley—unsaddled, unbridled, the one link between old Ame Noel and life!

SPRING came slow as a porcupine for old Ame Noel. His leg had him flat on his back for weeks; when at last he did get on his feet again he had to confine his movements to a few yards and hobble that short distance on crude crutches. Life was "mighty pesky," and to sit by and watch the parade of hunters and trappers,

valley of the Canadian. When they had followed its course a few days they worked across another ridge to the Cimarron. There old Amos quitted the saddle for half a day—"to stretch my legs, black baby." And thereafter the old man alternated—half a day in the saddle, half a day on foot.

From the Cimarron they swung north to the Arkansas, and from there on north, over those long, rolling hills that the old man knew so well. By midsummer they had arrived on the Smoky and found the fallen-in dugout where they had spent their



Gypsy headed down the valley—the one link between old Ame and life!

cow-men and gamblers on the streets of Chickasha was well-nigh heart-breaking.

But however uncertain old Ame's legs had become, Gypsy's feet served him well. As soon as he could stand the movement he mounted her, bareback, and rode out into the hills for an afternoon.

The blackbirds trilled and the cotton-tails scurried into the underbrush. Strange flowers gleamed in the hollows, and strange men riding in from the hills smiled at the grizzled old man who sat so awkwardly on the black filly. But those brief rides stirred a longing in old Ame's heart, and after fighting it off for a month he dickered for a battered old saddle, tied his blankets on it one May morning, stiffly drew himself up on the filly's back, and headed north.

Day after day they worked up the valleys, approached the headwaters of the Washita, crossed the flats and ridges to the

first winter together; and from there on north, to the Solomon.

They had just topped the last rise and looked down on Three Cottonwoods water-hole—the same white-rimmed, blue-depth pool as ever—when the old man spied a low, weatherbeaten cross, with the bleached skull of a horse at its foot. The old man halted to look, and found a few crudely carved words. As he read them a letter at a time, he frowned, and when he had finished he went on down the hillside, one hand lovingly on Gypsy's shoulder.

"A. Wilcox—HIS HORSE STUM-BLED," the legend had said. The old man knew that horses stumble fatally only when hard-ridden, and that Art Wilcox would ride hard only after a wild-horse herd. . . .

The sun seemed to hold a peculiar glow as it sank in the west that evening. And when supper had been eaten old Amos

sat a long time on the hill opposite that one with the cross, watching the stars. There was something soothing in those heavens, much as there was in these plains by day. A vast, friendly presence that hovered like the coolness of a shadow cast by a great white cloud on an August afternoon. Then a cool breeze blew up from the valley and the old man was about to go back down to his blankets when he saw Gypsy gazing intently downstream. Several minutes she stood so before she resumed her feeding. A moment later her head was up again; Amos could hear her soft wheeze as she nosed the air.

A dozen times she stared off into the darkness. Then old Amos heard a sound—one he had heard many times in past years: from far to the southeast came the high, quivering neigh of a stallion.

Gypsy's head was up in a flash. A moment later she answered.

For just an instant the old man started to cry out to her, to call her and silence her. Then he restrained the impulse. Gypsy belonged to these plains, not to old Amos! And he sat back determinedly. Then when for a long time he had watched, listened, but heard nothing more, he decided it could not have been the call of a stallion, as he had thought, but of another plainsman's horse, hobbled, at another waterhole. And he went down to his blankets.

But sleep would not come. Over and over in his mind recurred that scene in the hollow less than a mile from where he now lay—the scene with the coyotes, the little lame colt and her fierce little sorrel companion. And the scene when Gypsy had turned from Lightning to follow the old man who had given her salt and cornmeal from his pack. He remembered their first winter, their hardships, and their long trek southward, capped by the time she had taken him to Chickasha—maimed, fainting, all but delirious—and saved his life. Surely a daughter or a son could not have done more. And at last, when the Big Dipper pointed past midnight, the old man fell asleep, telling himself over and over, "She's *my* baby, my black Gypsy baby!"

Dawn came like a giant flare bursting over the plains, and old Amos had slept late. Rousing with a start, he looked about him, sought almost frantically for Gypsy. She hadn't gone, she *couldn't* have gone and left him! He started to run up the hillside to look for her.

Halfway up he heard a soft whicker and turned to see Gypsy watching him from behind a clump of willows.

Laughing at his foolish fear, the old man returned to his camp. But twice as he cooked breakfast he stopped to scoop a handful of cornmeal from his stores, and went over with it to talk to the filly, to rub her muzzle and to assure himself that she was there.

BREAKFAST was half eaten, when a movement on her part attracted his attention to the hill half a mile away where the valley turned to the east. At its foot, close beside a waterhole, stood a sorrel horse, a long-legged, fiery animal, his coat gleaming in the morning sun.

Gypsy watched, fascinated, while the sorrel approached at a leisurely walk. Then, when he had advanced a hundred yards, half a dozen others, mostly blacks and bays, evidently mares, rounded the bend. They were joined by eight others, and all but the sorrel halted to feed.

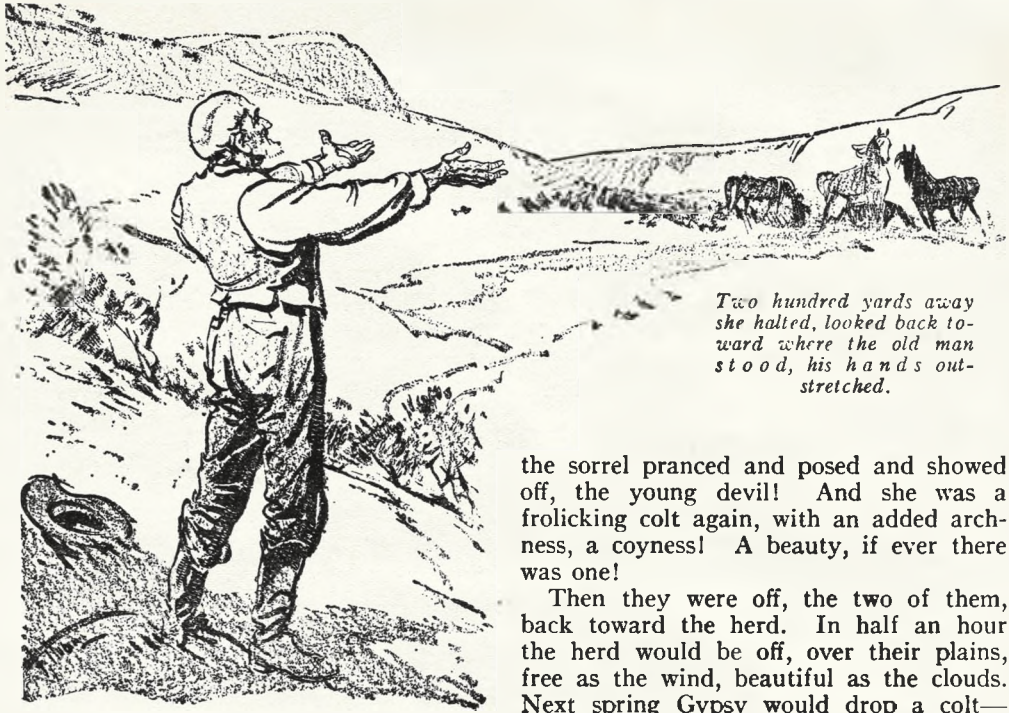
Another hundred yards and old Amos made out a jagged white flash down the sorrel's face. Then Lightning—surely it was he—lifted his fine head and whinnied. And Amos knew that last night's trumpeting call had come from this stallion. With the realization something inside the old man tautened like a fiddle-string and he choked down a sob.

Gypsy was walking swiftly down the valley. A hundred yards she went before she halted to look back. Then old Amos leaped to his feet, tried to cry out to her. But the words would not come.

Again the stallion called, now an abrupt, challenging note. This time Gypsy answered with a soft nicker—the call with which she so often had answered old Ame's voice. She trotted toward the stallion.

Two hundred yards away she halted again; looked back once more. This time she turned, and took a few steps toward where the old man stood, his hands outstretched in mute appeal. Ame's heart beat furiously until she swerved, answered another trumpeting call from Lightning, and trotted steadily down the valley.

Suddenly the old man leaped for his gun. There yet was time. He could kill the stallion—Gypsy would come back to him then. She couldn't run away with a dead stallion! An easy shot, at five hundred yards—he'd knocked down prong-horns at six hundred. Easy!



Two hundred yards away she halted, looked back toward where the old man stood, his hands outstretched.

He half-knelt, bringing the heavy rifle to his armpit. Then, as his blue eye squinted along the barrel, he wavered, shook his head, and turned away. Not that, not that; he couldn't kill a stallion for taking what rightly was his! Hadn't Amos once lifted that same rifle to save that same stallion's life? And hadn't Lightning defended Gypsy, when they were babies, wee babies left for the coyotes? Yes, and old Amos, with salt and cornmeal, had lured her away from Lightning, lured her away from her waterholes, her flats—her wild heritage!

The old man dropped the gun and stood up. He walked swiftly up the hillside, the better to see. Gypsy halted a third time to look back.

A moment the old man smiled after her. Then he shook his gray head, squeezed back the tears. For she was leaving him. She was running away, leaving him alone here on the Solomon fifty miles from Fort Wallace, probably even farther from other habitations.

For a minute the old man sobbed like a child. Then fiercely he looked up, brushed his eyes with the back of a gnarled hand, and as he watched, he smiled.

He knew her—Lightning knew her! See how he nuzzled her! Amos could hear the soft whickers of greeting. See how

the sorrel pranced and posed and showed off, the young devil! And she was a frolicking colt again, with an added archness, a coyness! A beauty, if ever there was one!

Then they were off, the two of them, back toward the herd. In half an hour the herd would be off, over their plains, free as the wind, beautiful as the clouds. Next spring Gypsy would drop a colt—her first baby—and become a mare. She would battle for that baby, as every wild mare battles—fighting coyotes and bobcats and heat and blizzards, perhaps fight horse runners! Thank God, not Art Wilcox, though! But she would live!

SLOWLY the old man retraced his way down the hillside. Only fifty miles to the Fort. A couple of easy days, on the old legs. His injured one was healed now, and those half-days on foot had kept him in shape. He'd been preparing for just this, and didn't realize it, after all. At the Fort—well, there'd always been something for him there, post-hunter, scout, roustabout, something. He would discard the saddle, and the rest of the stuff would make a light pack, just the right weight to balance his stride. . . .

Half an hour later Ame Noel swung a load up to his shoulders, shifted it into place. This was like the old days. A beeline, now, for Wallace. Let's see, where would he be at sundown? That waterhole below Signal Hill! And he swung up the rise toward the southwest.

On its crest he hesitated, turned toward the east. A dust-cloud hung on the skyline, shifted, kept moving. Old Ame rubbed his eyes with the back of a gnarled hand.

"Gypsy!" he whispered; "Gypsy baby! God, make her happy!"



Di Piatti took off his kepi and jabbed his sword through it. "Follow this, Hell's Angels!"

Little Gettysburg

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

"**Y**EAH, I knocked their haidt together, Commandant, but it didn't do no good. Mr. Dee, he prances up to Hortet—"

"*You* battered together, Sergeant Ike, the sacred heads of the Count di Piatti and Lieutenant Hortet of the Line?" demanded Commandant Knecht of the Foreign Legion, in tones of scandalized incredulity.

"Shore, Giner'!" Sergeant Texas Ike was unimpressed by the enormity of his deed—but craftily hoisted the Commandant's rank a peg or two by way of placation. "Any guys what starts a lodge-meetin' in *my* platoon, I warms 'em, and warms 'em good!"

"*Ouff!* What an American!" exploded Knecht. "Have you no respect for rank, for title?"

"Not when they starts a dog-fight in the ranks," retorted Ike. "I whams 'em! Then the Count, he rips out a dinky li'l cyard an' hands it to Hortet. The Looie, he smacks it down an' stamps on it; then he hands out a cyard of his own—which Mr. Dee, most onpolite, spits on—"

"*Hal! Challenge to a duel!*" interrupted Commandant Knecht, his eyes becoming serious as he gripped his bushy black beard with aroused concern. "An affair of honor?"

"Mebbe. They was fightin' about two gals," said Ike with unconscious irony. "So I pinches the evidence an' boots 'em to hell out'n thar." He produced a large folded sheet of paper, evidently a page torn from some illustrated Italian magazine. The Commandant spread it out on his tent table and studied the cartoon the artist had drawn.



A splendid story of the Foreign Legion in action and of an extraordinary duel between two of its hot-tempered members.

"Hum!" he said, "Tunis! Every Italian thinks he must have Tunis; and I ask you, Sergeant Ike, would such as Hortet, who gave their blood to conquer it, submit to the idea of giving it tamely up?"

"I'd jest as soon give Texas back to the Spigs, Commandant!" agreed Ike warmly. Over the commander's shoulder he studied the cartoon with more interest, for the "two gals" there meant more than they looked.

The artist had drawn a regal and splendid *Italia*, a goddess in classic costume, with the iron crown of Lombardy on her fair brow and the Star of Empire shining in her coronet. She was facing a most saucy and catty *Gallia*, who in revolutionary costume with red Liberty cap, sat on the Alps and was looking with an obstinate and belligerent expression at *Italia*. The caption under the cartoon was innocent enough: "If we only give way a little, Sister, all our differences will disappear," said *Italia*.

BUT the artist had said much more in that cartoon. The sword in *Italia's* hand hinted that she was amply able to take care of herself if *Gallia* remained ob-

stinate, and the star in the crown told of *Italia's* unalterable determination to regain the old glories of Roman empire. And was the old Roman dead today in Italy? He was not! In things of the mind Italy still led the world; in material strength the soul of the Cæsars was awakening. That girl was a type common in Italy today, yet she might have stepped down from one of Michelangelo's murals. The Count Di Piatti, now under discussion, himself might well be one of his own Florentine ancestors reincarnated—tall, martial, with flashing black eyes, long straight nose, high cheekbones, and clean-shaven lip, he was a figure of the old Roman nobility.

"Bah!" said Knecht. "All Mussolini needs to proclaim himself emperor is an Empire! Italy will never be happy until she has another Augustus Cæsar. A king? Yes; they love the House of Savoy. But—the first thing he wants of *us* is Tunis! A hundred thousand Italians are settled there; six thousand French. They will not take out French naturalization papers, but they want Italy to come and take them. And it is next door to Tripoli. . . . Is it not, for Hortet, a red rag to a bull this 'giving way' that the artist hints

at? And, regard the *Gallia*: she might be Hortet's mother, that one, for she is drawn with a subtle fidelity to our race. As she feels about it, so does Hortet. No wonder he flared out!"

"I didn't see all of the scrap, Commandant, but they both was shore some het up," said Ike sympathetically.

"*Eh bien?* But it is a matter for our statesmen, not soldiers, this Tunis. We must stop this duel, Sergeant Ike! It means cashiering for Hortet and life sentence for Di Piatti, if caught. Also, he was the best swordsman in the Italian Army, and my zouzou is a terror with either saber or yataghan. The zouaves wore them in the days of his youth—and you have seen him in action with one."

"One of 'em will get kilt, shore," agreed Ike; "we aint goin' to lose two of our best men over no Tunis!"

"*Parfaitement!* As they will meet secretly, and I cannot prevent it, you, my cowboy, will see that this duel does not take place."

"You gives me all the rope on my hoss, Commandant?" grinned Ike.

"*Carte blanche*, my Buffalo Bill! Do whatever your fertile ingenuity suggests."

"Sho! 'Taint no gre't job, sir!" laughed Ike. "Back in ol' Texas they took to their rifles, an' us fellers hunted kiver till the shootin' was over. Then we buries one of 'em and sets up drinks fer the other. Stop-pin' this one'll be easy, compared to them arguments with the ol' forty-four!"

"*Bien!*" chortled Knecht. "I rely on you, Sergeant!"

Ike saluted gravely and ambled out. A sar-major gets passed all kinds of bucks by the P. C., but heading off a duel was a new one to him. He started for the lines to seek out Criswell, the burly corporal of Hell's Angels Squad. You needed another American in a case like this!

THE Légion was on outpost reconnaissance. It had penetrated so far into the Riff lines that it could no longer return to the military base at Fes-el-Bali, so Knecht had established a sub-base, reached by mule-train, on the next mountain beyond Poste Tafrant, recently relieved and blown up. Their position overlooked a network of valleys below, valleys that swarmed with hostile tribesmen. It was fairly secure, as positions go—but nothing is really secure where the wily Riff is concerned!

On his way to his platoon Ike encount-

tered Lieutenant Hortet, who said nothing about his affair of honor, but announced gruffly: "Intelligence reports that the Metalsa are on our front, Sergeant. Eight hundred rifles. You have heard of them?"

"Shore, Looie! Them's the birds what pinched the war correspondent who was goin' to tell America all about the noble Riff. They put him in a cave an' fed him ol' tea-leaves for three weeks," Ike informed the grizzled old Gaul with his peculiar brand of information.

"*Morbleu!*" rasped Hortet, who had never even heard of the incident. He tugged at his gray mustache and added: "They are *bien* dangerous, those Metalsa! Every man a dead shot since childhood. I have given your platoon the center of our line, the old marabout of Sidi Zazour. Corporal Criswell is already there. Be on your guard, Sergeant!" warned Hortet and went on along the lines.

IKE turned toward the marabout. It occupied a clearing in the pines on the mountain-brow, and consisted of an Arab cemetery with low stone walls around it and the ancient tomb of the saint, Sidi Zazour, rising out of its center in a dome of white masonry—a strong military position. Ike found the whole platoon encamped there among the rude graves, and a line of pickets posted along the wall that commanded the pine-clad slopes below; also he there found Criswell, who, when asked about the causes of the duel, observed gloomily:

"It's no foolin', Ike! Mr. Dee began it. He spits at *Miss Gallia*; an' you'd have seen red too, if anyone did that to a picture of *Miss Columbia!*"

"Shore would hev lammed him!" agreed Ike. "But this sword-business, Jim—li'l Hortet aint got a chance against Mr. Dee, him bein' over six feet, with a reach on him like a windmill! Hey?"

"Mebbe. I don't want that little man in mine, when he's mad, though!" disagreed the burly Criswell. "You've seen Hortet with a yataghan, Ike. One of 'em will get his'n, this trip—an' it wont be Hortet!"

"I has orders from the Skipper to stop the hull thing," said Ike. "Ever stopped a jool, Jim?" he asked banteringly.

"Yup," said Criswell, surprisingly. "Two nature heroes, 'twas, up at a lumber-camp in northern Michigan. Them two nature-fakers gets inter an argyment about



"Address, gentlemen—salute!" barked Anzac Bill, commencing the duel.

the ol' cave-men, an' each challenges 'tother, can he go naked inter the woods—an' come back in three weeks all dolled up in skins an' things, an' with fire carried in a bark poke? We boys gits up a meetin' behind the hoss-barn an' we 'lows 'taint moral—might shock theyselves, or the dear little birdies or somethin'—runnin' around naked like that! So, the day they starts out, us fellers hides in the timber, an'"—he made a gesture that every school-boy knows—"we smacks them heroes; stings 'em good!"

"Yea, boy!" whooped Ike. "Slung-shots, hey?"

"You bet! It canned that jool, all right! Them birds was huntin' they clo'es, right smart! Lord, but they was peppered! Buckshot." Criswell grinned over the reminiscence, and Ike said gleefully: "I want to know!"

Then they looked at each other, with the beginning of a plot in the backs of their minds. It did not take much imagination to see how far even the fiercest duel would get—if two men handy with sling-shots stung the combatants in the pants every time they crossed swords!

"Kin ye do it, Jim? Quick as lightnin'?" Sergeant Ike grinned widely and made the motion of slapping a sling-shot down flat at his side and somewhat behind, where it could not be seen.

"Sure! Haint I stung cops in my day?" laughed Criswell. "'Twarn't me, Lawd; I 'spects it's Eve!" He assumed an expression of mealy-mouthed innocence.

"You an' me's goin' to be the int'rested bystanders in this here jool, Jim!" howled Ike delightedly. "Knecht, he says 'go as fur as ye like, on'y don't let her come off!'—Whar's this jool at?"

"Round behind the ol' marabout, at dusk tonight. Oh, it's all regular, all right!" sighed Criswell lugubriously. "Mora seconds the Count; that new Englishman runs Hortet. You know these fur-riners! It's a mortal insult to spit on another man's nation. Some day they'll be slaughterin' each other wholesale over Tunis—an' 'twont be long either, I'm thinkin'!"

"What's all that to the Legion?" growled Ike. "With them Metalsa birds on our front, an' likely to spring somethin' any time! They kin do their fightin' over Tunis when Mussolini starts it; not now, when we-all is as busy with these here Riff hosstyles as a boy killin' snakes in Texas! You make them crutches, Jim! I'll git me a shrapnel, an' open her for some nice li'l iron balls. Then we takes up strateegic positions, an'—"

"What'll you do for 'lastics?" interrupted Criswell.

"Steal 'em! How does the Legion git

anything it wants?" retorted Ike practically. "Intelligence clerk has some thick ones to go around dispatches."

Still Criswell hesitated. He and Ike could laugh their damn' duel out of court, make a comedy of it with those sling-shots artfully applied, but—

"This is an affair of honor, Ike," he objected thoughtfully. "These furriners looks at it different—"

"We'll honor 'em—in the pants!" affirmed Ike, vigorously chewing. "You an' me's *America* in this, Jim! You know what *Miss Columbia* would think of it, speakin' of artists' cartoons. Plumb foolishness! Besides, you can't kill Hortet, an' we can't afford to lose Mr. Dee. He's a fust-class soldier, though hot-haided."

"He'll go wild an' run us both through!" demurred Criswell, passing a hand like a ham through his shock of curly brown hair.

"Mebbe," said Ike placidly. "You an' me sorter hangs around when they stages their fool fight, that's all! Hortet has his uniform off, of course. That leaves me rankin' orficer present."

HE did not say what he was going to do with that situation, but both were busy as the long day wore on. Of the Metalsa there was not a sign. Those formidable riflemen were adding no interest to the day, save that two scouting parties sent out to locate them never returned. The silence was in fact ominous. They were up to something—and it would come off with the suddenness of a stroke of lightning, Knecht felt sure, as he strengthened his lines. The battalion numbered about six hundred men; their opponents eight hundred. Man for man, both commanders were about equal—Mauser against Lébel—sharpshooters all. Knecht kept thinking of a similar engagement at Sidi Brahim, back in Abd-el-Kader's wars, where the old cemetery around the tomb had turned into a death-trap. Abd-el-Kader had driven in both of Changarnier's flanks and then surrounded the cemetery on three sides. The center occupying it had been mowed down to the last man, after a desperate hand-to-hand fight.

"It shall not happen this time, my cowboy!" Knecht told Sergeant Ike as night-fall came on. "I have weakened my center to strengthen the wings, where Lieutenants Ressayot and Hortet are in command. You can hold the center, with the aid of those cemetery walls?"

"You watch my smoke, Commandant! They aint elbow-room for more'n a hundred men along that wall anyhow. Give 'em a bag of grenades apiece an' tell 'em be happy!" Ike assured him.

He did not tell Knecht that Hortet would *not* be in command of the right wing, but out of uniform and settling a private quarrel behind the old marabout. It was an ugly business, a devil of a lapse for the staunch old zouzou; but could you blame him?

The Commandant had that in the back of his mind, however, for presently he asked: "The duel, my cowboy? You have taken steps?"

"Nobody aint goin' to hurt nobody, sir," grinned Ike, and looked quizzically at his commander. "Me an' Criswell will fix 'em!"

"You Americans are not going to make joke of our ancient customs?" asked Knecht in some alarm, sensing mischief in that look of Ike's. "Remember, it is an affair of honor! The mortal insult has been passed. *Noblesse oblige!*"

"We'll honor 'em; an' we'll obleege 'em, too, Commandant," said Ike. And that was all Knecht could get out of him.

The sun had set over the Riffian mountains, and not a sign yet of the Metalsa. Whether it was an encircling movement to cut off their contact with the main military base ten miles back at Fes-el-Bali, or whether it was some well-planned night-attack in force, Knecht could not decide. The Metalsa had been as a rock against all advance against them in the Teza Corridor to the east. Man for man, they were a picked body of riflemen, and Abd-el-Krim had evidently moved them over here when all else had failed to stop the Légion advance into his center. It was with a tense eagerness that the battalion lay to arms along the crest of the mountain, expecting they knew not what. Pickets down in the pines reported nothing on their front; Knecht could not spare a single party to reconnoiter further.

And meanwhile a small group was gathering in the dusk behind the old marabout. Little Hortet, stripped to trousers and singlet, faced the tall and rangy Count di Piatti. His own sword, sharpened to more than its usual keenness, crossed that of Mr. Dee, borrowed from Lieutenant Ressayot for the occasion. They were intensely serious, these Europeans. It was an affair that only blood could satisfy, according to their code.

Young Geoffrey Royde-Austin—nicknamed "Jeff,"—the son of Lord Austin, had taken a position to the right of Hortet, as his second; Mora, who had no title but was a Spaniard of the old school of punctilious honor, was performing the same office for the Count. And Anzac Bill, a swordsman of note himself, had taken the part of referee, bayonet fixed, ready to knock up the swords at the first false stroke.

That was the tableau on which the irreverent and hard-boiled Americans looked with an amused grin. Each of them had a stout sling-shot behind his back and pockets full of iron shrapnel pellets, as he hovered at some distance from the duel, with one eye on the troops packed along the wall, the other on the rear view of his particular combatant. At strategic angles from Hortet and Mr. Dee they lounged, ostensibly to give warning should Commandant Knecht appear within the cemetery gate—as well he might.

"Address, gentlemen—salute!" barked Anzac Bill, commencing the duel.

The swords met, rasped, flew into whirls of steel that gave forth sparks.

And then— *Thunk! Thwack!*

Mr. Dee let out a yell and clapped his free hand rearward. Hortet jumped a foot, cursed a raging "*Diable!*" and spun around, looking. Ike, one hand at his side, the other in his pocket, was examining the stars. Criswell faced the angry and suspicious Mr. Dee with a saintly expression—there was almost visible a halo around his head. He even had the effrontery to growl: "Little more action into it, Professor! You birds call this a duel? Go git him! I got ten francs on you, Count!"

Anzac Bill called the pair to order, and once more they faced about, seething with bitter hate over the differences between their respective countries. The clash of sharp steel resumed—and again—*Plunk! Pinko!*

Roars of rage went up from both as they somersaulted backward and applied soothing fingers to their anatomy where something in the nature of hornets had stung them. Cursing, they belabored their mystified seconds. This adjustment of differences between gentlemen could not go on if some one was butting in with tomfoolery, Hortet growled savagely, and was assured by the Honorable Jeff that such a thing was farthest from their minds.

Then all looked at the two Americans, standing off there in the gloom. Could they

be at the bottom of this? In the clash of steel nothing had been heard; but Yanks were capable of anything; they had no reverence for those traditions sacred to the European heart!

"What ails you birds?" Ike called out scornfully. "We-all came hyar to see a fight, not no gymnasium! Get going, durn ye!"

No—it could not be they! The duel party scouted all around the marabout, looked suspiciously at the line of men along the wall, then placed their seconds a little farther off. For a third time the two principals toed the mark and crossed their keen sabers.

Ike stealthily raised his crotch, drew back the elastics to the limit, and took aim at the tautly braced left thigh of Hortet—

CR-A-A-A-ASH! It was the most appalling and terrific burst of rifle-fire the Légion had ever heard. Simultaneously it broke out in front of both right and left wings of the command, accompanied by thunderous shouts in Arabic, the sustained and vindictive return-fire from the Légion wing-positions, and the figures of their own pickets leaping back over the wall in a hurried retreat up through the pines below.

"All hell's shore broke loose in wagon-loads *this* trip!" said Ike uneasily as he pocketed his catapult and ran for his rifle. He saw Hortet salute with his sword and heard him snarl at the Count, "Another time, Mr. Wop!" Then Ike saw him turn and run for the right wing.

Mr. Dee, left without an antagonist, seemed to Sergeant Ike to be now behaving most curiously. His second had deserted him for his place in the wall, but he was still standing there, with sword in hand, apparently sizing up the situation, as a commander would. That sword in his hand seemed to cause him to forget he was a mere soldier of the Légion, and to make him once more the Count di Piatti, crack swordsman of Italy, commander of a regiment in his own right before his exile for political reasons. Ike knew that when an Italian's fighting blood is up all the old Roman in him comes out—but he was not prepared for the hollow, blazing eyes that glared at him imperiously as Di Piatti strode over to him.

"Sergeant!" he ordered, "send a man for Commandant Knecht at once! I must talk to him!"

"You git to yore place in that line,

bozo!" cut in Ike, hardening instantly. He was top sergeant here; no private could talk to him like that!

"Bah!" raged Di Piatti, "this is no time for petty regimentals, drillmaster! This is serious! It is Gettysburg in little, man! What does Lee do? Establishes himself on both of Meade's flanks, so he cannot move a man; then charges his center with fifteen thousand men against ten. Had it not been for the Federal artillery, he would have broken Meade in pieces! That is what is happening now, I tell you! Listen!"

Ike was impressed. Mr. Dee had never broken loose in this way before; and surely never had Ike heard such a vengeful fury of musketry as rolled on both sides of them now! The coughing roar of grenades also told him that the boys were hand-to-hand with them on both wings at this minute. And still the tense silence on their own front, though the pickets had told him the woods below were full of Riffians!

But Ike was top sergeant here—the Count a private. He pointed to Mr. Dee's place in the line of uneasy, waiting men along the wall.

"*Dio mio!* We are lost!" screeched the Count, waving his long arms like windmills. "Pig!" he thundered upon Ike, his eyes blazing. "*Stupide!* Now, *now*—is the time for the counter-charge! A wedge of men, driven into their center before they have time to form! *Madre de Dio!* Where is Knecht?"

Flaming Italy! Ike looked at the demented Count with something of awe. The old Roman conquerors surely lived again in him—those Cæsars who took the apt moment to drive home the blow that turned disaster into crushing victory! Was not Napoleon himself but a reincarnation of those old rulers of the world?

Ike wondered if the Italian was right about the Metalsa tactics. If so, they could not lose a moment in driving home that wedge of men! The attack on both flanks had slackened. The boys were holding them—but only *just* holding them. Not a man could be spared from either wing to strengthen the old cemetery held by Ike. And the Metalsa still had a preponderance of over two hundred men. It was cruel, but it was war, that launching of the main attack on Ike's weak center; nor could it be escaped. They had both of Knecht's wings gripped firmly. It was Gettysburg over again—but the center had no artillery.

Ike hesitated uneasily. He was only a

sergeant; Mr. Dee had been a colonel at home, before some quarrel with *Il Duce* had exiled him from Italy. The Légion called him "Mr. Dee" because he insisted on that "*di*" Piatti; but he knew military tactics inside and out, while Ike had never given Gettysburg a thought, save to wonder vaguely why Lee ever ordered that charge. Now Ike understood, and knew that the hero of the Confederacy was justified. Also the meaning of that great cavalry battle on the Union left flank was illuminated in great flashes; it was Lee trying to find out if the Sixth Corps had arrived, in which case his charge would be futile before it began. Again, the parallel of that great battle with their little affair here: that Metalsa commander was doing precisely as had Lee—at this moment he was probably drawing from the flanks every man not absolutely needed, to form them for a huge mass attack on the cemetery. Ike's thin line along the wall would be overwhelmed by Riffian hordes—the whole command cut in two!

Just then Mr. Dee burst into shouts of joy. Waving his sword like a madman, he left Ike, to run for the cemetery's rear gate.

"Commandant! My Commandant!" Ike heard him sob hoarsely. "I beg—I implore—a wedge of men, before it is too late! Let me lead them!"

In the gate stood the burly figure of Knecht; before him knelt Di Piatti, dramatic as always. The Commandant leaned nonchalantly on his drawn sword, looking questioningly at Ike, and listening to the heavy firing along the mountain-crest on both sides of him. He was unperturbed.

"He is mad, this one?" he asked Ike.

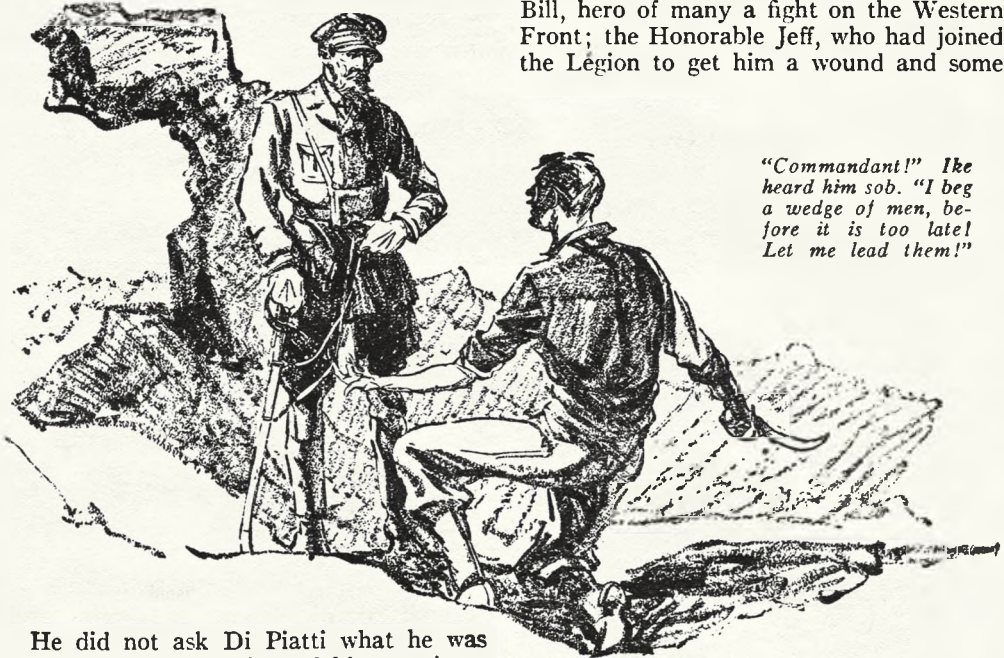
Ike pulled perplexedly at the black forelock that slanted down from under his *kepi*; but before he could say anything the Count had burst out, with passionate intensity:

"Sire, on my knees I beg you! They are forming heavily down below. You cannot send a man to help us. Let me move out and shatter them! It is now or never, my Commandant!"

AGAIN he held up the sword in both hands, dedicating it and himself to this furious counter-attack that would ruin the Metalsa sheik's plan. He was the logical man for it, thought Ike. And here, right in this cemetery, was the pick of the Légion, Ike's hard-boiled platoon, the Hell's Angels Squad. They only needed a firebrand at the head of their wedge to cut the

Metalsa in two, like an ax. Lacking Hortet, Mr. Dee was the next choice, give him a sword!

"*Hola!*" laughed Knecht. "The little Gettysburg, *hein?* We turn her inside out, that battle, *jaute de canon!* You have reason, Di Piatti! It is now that we must break them!"



"*Commandant!*" Ike heard him sob. "I beg a wedge of men, before it is too late! Let me lead them!"

He did not ask Di Piatti what he was doing with that sword—and him a private of the line. You needed a sword at the head of a wedge of bayonets like this, was Knecht's belief. Tradition demanded it—the men looked for it. Something to rally on, to follow, to look to for orders. As neither Hortet nor Resson could be spared—

"*Eh bien?* Take them, my Count!" snapped Knecht decisively. "When I hear your grenades, I shall advance both wings. Logically, he is now weakening them, no? *Pouf!* She works both ways, the little Gettysburg!"

Ike thrilled to hear both of them pitching in the same battle as a model. It was a tribute to our own great commanders, a tribute that Europe pays to this day. No military combination but has its examples in the battles of Grant and Lee!

Mr. Dee turned to Ike, ablaze with the intoxication of command, and sharply Ike snapped out the orders that caused all along the line a clatter of bayonets being fixed and heavy grenade-bags heaved up on stout shoulders.

The Count hastened over to the center of the line. There was the Hell's Angels Squad—his own buddies—and they gathered around him to form the head of the phalanx. That it would become a phalanx, they all knew, for Mr. Dee had long legs and the whole charge depended on speed, sudden, swift, shattering, driving power. Their eyes seconded him—stocky Anzac Bill, hero of many a fight on the Western Front; the Honorable Jeff, who had joined the Legion to get him a wound and some

experience, for the sake of a girl who had no use for tin soldiers; Rutli the Swiss "sho-sho" gunner; Mora the fierce and taciturn Spaniard, strong as a bull; Roskoff the Russian, who was lazy but a wow with the bayonet; and Criswell the giant Michigander, who was so tough that you'd have to drop a safe on him, even to dent his hide!

Di Piatti looked them over with sparkling eyes and distended nostrils as he took off his *kepi* and jabbed his sword through it.

"Follow this, Hell's Angels!" he bade them. "You are the head of the wedge! Cold steel, when we're into them! Keep up; that's all!"

He looked over the line, while Hell's Angels formed in a compact bristle of bayonets behind him.

"Not enough men!" murmured Mr. Dee, shaking his head. "Oh, Commandant!" he raised his voice, "one more company, I beg! We must maintain rapid-fire from both flanks to accomplish anything."

"*Bien!*" agreed Knecht, "I give you my reserve!"

It came in through the gate on the double, presently—and leading it was Hortet. Ike raised a bellow of joy. The picture did not seem complete without him; in fact you could not keep him out, once he learned there was a charge afoot! There must have been a stormy scene between him and Knecht!

"Go to it, Wop!" chirped Sergeant Ike, the minute that company had crowded into the enclosure. "Yo're the doctor now!"

Di Piatti nodded and Ike's whistle shrilled out. Over the wall vaulted the whole line. It swiftly took wedge form as Flaming Italy dashed ahead on his long legs, waving that cap on high. At his elbow pounded little Hortet, and packed close behind him, Hell's Angels. After them the whole line, solid inside with the reserve company.

Down through the pines they galloped; in less than a minute they had developed the main line of the Riff, three ranks deep and a fourth and fifth forming. A withering fire burst from them; answering sheets of flame from both flanks of the *Légion phalanx*; but on barged Di Piatti and Hortet—cut, lunge, and parry—through the Riff line, the impact of Hell's Angels widening the hole with their bayonets as they swept downward.

Ike glanced back over his shoulder; it was indeed a mathematical wedge that the Count was driving deep into the Riffian horde! They were all around them, solid huddles of burnouses, bewildered, yelling, crowding, every man trying to get to the front where he could use his rifle, those farther back firing futilely over the heads of their comrades. It needed but to separate the wedge into two lines of fire, back to back; then advance them, to turn the thing into a rout!

Mr. Dee's cap had gone sailing off his sword-point at his very first slash and had soared clam-wise, to land far ahead in the thick of the *Metalsa* not yet formed.

Ike had heard him growl at Hortet, "Match you for it, Frenchman!" and that seemed now the sole object of this battle. Like madmen the two cut and slashed onward, giving Ike's squad all it could do to keep up. Yataghans slithered and twisted, opposing them. They were the best defensive sword yet invented, but the two crack sabermen of Africa cut and thrust

through them—panting for that cap. Behind them sheared the wedge of bayonets—long lines of men diverging up the hill, flinging grenades, firing from the hip—advancing, always advancing.

THEN they were through. There was¹ nothing beyond them in the pines save scattered and disordered stragglers. Ike heard a triumphant, "*Ha!*" burst from Mr. Dee as his point speared the cap again, a bare inch ahead of Hortet's. It rose aloft.

"Take them, Hortet! Left flank! Wheel! You with me, Sergeant Ike!"

Flaming Italy was in the frenzy of victory. He stood on the extreme end of their line waving the cap and pointing—and the line did not need to be told what he wanted! Slowly they wheeled with him, swinging away from Hortet's men; a line of heavily sustained fire that drove the *Metalsa* back and back, ever herding them up and up the hill again. They were cut into two bodies now, with two straight and disciplined lines of battle pressing them back on their own wings. And then, above their own crash of *Lébels*, Ike heard the rolling musketry of Knecht's advance. Stragglers, wounded, appeared above them; more and more of them, coming down through the pines in disorder. They were the shattered remnants of those two companies of *Metalsa* ordered to hold Knecht's wings where they were, while the main center was to storm him in the cemetery. Well, the main center was having a hard time of it now! They were cut in two and being driven steadily up the hill toward their own wings. Hard-pressed wings, they were, not nearly strong enough. If that *Metalsa* chief expected to bluff Commandant Knecht, he had made the mistake of his life!

Smoke came rolling down through the pines, more stragglers retreating—then the main body of them, falling back before Knecht and Ressot. Their chieftains were striving desperately to rally them, but it was no use. Ike's men raised a cheer, followed the wildly waving Mr. Dee by the left-oblique—for the Count had seen an avenue of escape for this mob along the mountain-side and was hurrying them to close it. Ike could see Hortet's men stretching out by their right to do the same thing. He let out a bellow of triumph, blew for rapid-fire.

Heavy volleys from up above. Long lines of the *Légion* appeared in the pines,

a mob of retreating burnouses before them, the burly figure of Commandant Knecht leading their advance. Hell's Angels redoubled its rush to keep up with Mr. Dee. It was hand-to-hand again, for a moment, as they met the wild stampede of tribesmen trying to escape and stopped it.

Then Knecht's bugle-man blew a call, and there was a cessation of fire all over the field, ominous, menacing. Lines of gleaming steel, leveled, poised for the next note of the bugle. They pointed inward from all sides upon that mob of tribesmen. It was the Metalsa's chance to surrender—and their leader took it. He had been beaten by superior tactics, had been rolled up like a rubber blanket, had lost men like flies in the cross-fire of bullets from above and below. The rest was slaughter, and he knew it. Yells of "*Amam—amam!*" rose hoarsely. Arms stretched aloft, imploring mercy; weapons dropped. It was over; Abd-el-Krim had lost his picked body of riflemen, captured entire by the redoubtable Légion!

COMMANDANT KNECHT came striding down through the press of tribesmen being disarmed and secured by the command. His eyes beamed with satisfaction, and he let out a whoop of delight as he saw Sergeant Ike coming along the lines.

"*Holà*, my Buffalo Bill! It was *magnifique*, no? Our little Gettysburg upside down!" he shouted congratulations. "And the duel?" he asked cheerfully.

"Po'rest one I ever seed, Commandant!" grinned Ike. "They done nothin' but throw back-somersaults ev'ry time they got goin'."

"My friend," said Knecht, "do you wish your old commander to have apoplexy? I saw the duel! And *mon Dieu*, I suffocate, I explode, I have convulsions in the ribs that are dangerous, for a stout man! For I am behind the wall, you comprehend, and you must not hear me laugh. But, thanks to you Americans, she is no duel, she is a *comédietta*! For, when one would address with the sword—*thwunk!*—one must attend to the sting in the rear! Produce the admirable invention!"

Sheepishly Ike drew out his husky sling-shot. Knecht possessed himself of it and awaited the coming of the two belligerents, who had finished securing their prisoners and were reporting for orders.

"*Mes félicitations*, Count di Piatti!" he

greeted them. "It was daringly conceived and spiritedly executed, that move by our center! And you too, my old war-horse!" he included Hortet in the praise "Always in the forefront in these death-traps; but one cannot kill him, *ma foi!*"

Knecht toyed with the catapult in his hands, glanced at Ike, who stood solemnly chewing near by. "A souvenir, messieurs—presented to me by our esteemed Sergeant," he told them. "One loads it, so—" He drew back the elastics and let drive at a soldier not far off, who yelped and did an astonishingly faithful pantomime of their own actions not long since. Both Hortet and Di Piatti roared, then turned on Ike and Criswell for revenge—for their grinning faces told that they had indeed been the culprits!

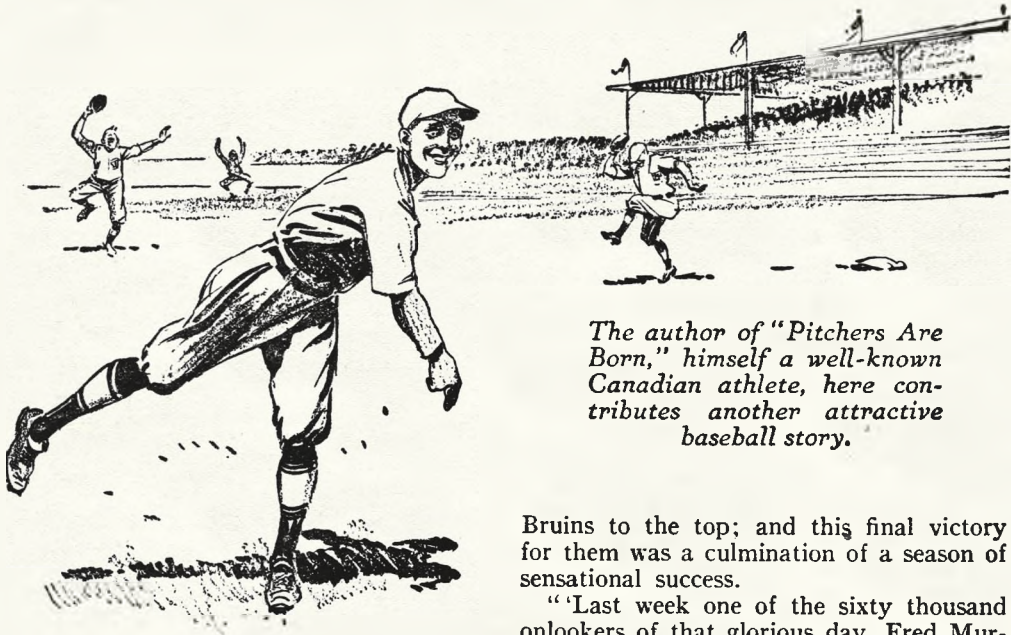
IT was the jovial atmosphere that Knecht was cannily waiting for. "*Prut!*" he said bluffly. "You gentlemen disagreed, no? And it was over Tunis, which is a matter for statesmen, not soldiers! And you would settle it with a duel, knowing my disapproval, the danger of disgrace and jail? *Eh bien?* This little invention—"

He dangled the catapult, and again there was a roar of guffaws. "America would not let you make fools of yourselves, *hein?*" Commandant Knecht asked shrewdly. "But *Miss Gallia* owes you many thanks for your work this day, Count!" the commander went on more seriously. "My Hortet, you will tender him those thanks, in the name of France! For the duel, I have laugh till I cry; for I saw it, messieurs! And I could embrace that dear cowboy and his big comrade that they bethought them of this so-useful American invention! She was *opéra bouffe*, that duel! Forget it, gentlemen."

He urged them together, and Hortet said softly: "If he retracts the insult to *Madame Liberty*, my Commandant, I apologize that I was rude to his *Italia*."

Di Piatti grinned. "Of course, old veteran! I'm sorry! Besides, we have business before us, Hortet! You wait, Top! You and Criswell!" He shook a menacing fist in their direction, and grabbed the old zouzou's arm: "R-revenge, old boy—if we have to sit up all night over it!" he laughed.

"*Bah!*" said Knecht, and hurried away to the methodical Resson and his prisoners. The confounded duel was going to have an aftermath, after all, before the Légion got through with it!



The author of "Pitchers Are Born," himself a well-known Canadian athlete, here contributes another attractive baseball story.

The Rise Ball

By EDWARD H. REEVE

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

SLUMPING his big frame into a veranda chair of the Downsview Hotel, Nick Cutler spread the Sunday paper and remarked: "Brace yourself, Comrade Connelly! They're writin' sob stories about us again."

Woe spread on the battered visage of Jeff Connelly, whose great limbs were sprawled in the next chair. "They'll be featuring us in the torch songs next. You'll be the 'Wreck of the '97' and I'll be the 'Old Wooden Rocker.' Who's delivering this requiem?"

"Joe Enderbrook. He heads it 'The Long, Long Trail.' That's a beautiful thought. He says: 'Three short years ago on a golden autumn afternoon, sixty thousand fans jammed into Bruins Park to roar in triumph as their favorites broke the thrilling series deadlock with the Sox to capture the baseball championship of the world. The winning battery that day was composed of Cutler and Connelly, the meteoric combination that had swept the

Bruins to the top; and this final victory for them was a culmination of a season of sensational success.

"Last week one of the sixty thousand onlookers of that glorious day, Fred Murdock, big-league ball-scout, sat in a ramshackle stand in the sticks, Downsview in the Valley League, an organization of Class C vintage; and there, in those faded surroundings, he was startled to hear again the sound of that old familiar coupling from the announcer's megaphone—Cutler and Connelly. Then, in the hour that followed, the spirit of the old scout groaned as he watched Nick Cutler, once mighty hurler of thunderbolts, standing to his guns beneath a battering barrage of blows from a band of bush-league batsmen, until a merciful manager removed the big fellow in the fifth and put him in right field. Thus from the heights of fame into the chasm of Hasbeenia' (boy, there's a top-spin) 'the fall is sometimes sheer. For one wonderful season, in which he equaled the best marks of Walsh, Johnson and other masters of the mound, Nick Cutler was on top of the world; and his friend big Jeff Connelly, the one man who could hold his peculiar style, was with him. But the next spring, where was that potent speed? Where had the startling curves been left? Who knows? Followed one season and part of another of rank failure in the majors, the rest of that second summer and another year of defeat in the top minors, and now Damon and Pythias are treading the tracks of obscurity. There are many who could have been better spared from the big-league circus than this colorful couple. A light-hearted pair they were, and the owners of as staunch a friendship as ever held two athletes together. If—'"

"Sign off, sign off! You're breaking my heart. That's three times we've hit the obituary columns this month." But for all the catcher's light-hearted tone there was a touch of wistfulness in his voice.

"When gurgling about obscurity," grunted Nick, "he forgot to say that you might still be up there if you hadn't been so damn' much of a Damon."

"You singing those blues again?" growled Jeff. "When you were knocking them dead, and every oil-can and his uncle wanted to shake your mitt, did you give little Jeffrey the run-around? No, you big so-and-so—no, you were with me. Now I'm with you, and when the old gray mare starts to register again, we'll go back up together."

"The old gray mare," said Nick glumly—they usually referred to his salary arm as the "old gray mare"—"has turned in exactly one win in six starts in this back yard. Try that on your Pollyanna."

Jeff repeated a phrase that had come to be his slogan: "Maybe it will come back just as sudden as it went."

Nick shook his head. "Well, I can hang in here this summer as an outfielder, but if the whip isn't registering by then, I hang up and get my old job in the foundry. I'm not going to be a load of coal on you."

"Aw, pipe down," said Jeff, driving a sentimental wallop into his friend's chest, "and let's take a canter in the woods before we get the willies."

THEY swung down the woody streets of Downsview and out into the bush that covered several hillsides, their shirts accentuating their powerful bodies. Nick was rangy and broad, and his catcher almost as tall, with a sweep of shoulder and depth of chest that spoke of tremendous strength, and made his husky companion look almost slight in comparison. To read swan songs about oneself at the age of twenty-seven is not a good way to start a morning, but the fresh May air and the beauty of the woods was a tonic that brought back their usual irrepressible flow of spirits. Basking in the sun in a little clearing, drowsily watching the birds and squirrels, one could acquire, as Nick put it, "the what-of-it complex."

Jeff, his big chest flattened on the warm grass, remarked: "Strange, meeting Judge Leigh down here, though he says his folks have owned Leigh Manor for generations."

"Our big season with the Bruins was

the only one he was up there. His brother died, and he came home to assume the estate. He was some fan, wasn't he? Nothin' high-hat about him."

"He liked you, Nick, because you could fan away about books with him."

"And he took to you because you could outtalk him on dogs and trout."

"Where was his tennis-playing daughter, Sally, that year?"

"Europe. Isn't she a pooka?"

Jeff assented: "A regular magazine-cover in person. When he introduced us the other day, I actually was bashful."

Nick drew thoughtfully on his pipe. "Most pretty wenches are a headache, but she seemed to be a good fella. I wanted to go out and show her a no-hit game right there, but instead—"

"Speaking of heavenly hosts," grunted Jeff in surprise, "here comes the damsel herself, looking like the complete answer to what the young sports lady should wear on a morning stroll."

Nick wondered why his legs gave a sudden quiver as he recognized the girl who had come into the clearing as none other than the same Sally Leigh. Rising, his mind clicked off: "Medium height, smooth build, sock a tennis-ball aplenty, brown—no, hazel—eyes, bright, nice bob, fair hair, real friendly smile—oh, boy!" Aloud he said: "All hail!"

"And a couple of echoing hails," added Jeff. "Thrice welcome to this gladsome glade."

She knew them at once, of course. She felt as if she had known them a long, long time. Memories of the summer she had "done" Europe with her mother were somehow interwoven with hazy scraps and half-remembered passages of her father's letters concerning the prowess of a Western Thunderbolt and a mighty man who was his catcher. Then when she had seen that pair, at last, had watched them "standing to their guns" in a barren little bush-league ball-park, the sight had been saddening beyond belief. There had been something so gallant in the pitcher's bearing in the face of his past power and present futility; and when he walked slowly from the box to right field, something so pathetically stanch in the figure of Jeff Connelly, standing mask in hand as he gazed sorrowfully after his departing friend, that Sally had found herself near to tears.

Looking at them now, however, there seemed nothing tragic in the rugged visage

of the big catcher nor in the clean-cut features and smiling eyes of Nick Cutler. So she answered: "All hail yourself! I'm barging through the brushwood and climbing these slopes in search of vim and vigor."

Nick cast his eye at the woods rising above. "You must be getting ready for Forest Hills."

She smiled: "You knew I played tennis?"

"Miss Sally Leigh," said Nick, "beautiful member of the younger set, smashing a return—"

"At the Chester Club Courts," continued Jeff. "Miss Leigh will devote a good deal of the holidays to tennis as—"

"She is one of the best players in intercollegiate ranks."

"Miss Leigh," concluded Jeff, "is also an accomplished horsewoman."

SALLY, mystified for a moment, cried accusingly: "You have been looking at the pictures in the rotogravure! I meant to write for that picture, it was such a good one."

"It was," agreed Nick. "One that combined, as Grantland Rice would say, rhythm, timing, flexing and coördination."

"And," said Jeff, "as Mr. Ziegfeld would remark, perfect alignment."

They both smiled in such friendly fashion that she could not have been offended even if she had felt so inclined. "You two," she said, "talk like Happy Hooligan's nephews. How do you get along without each other?"

"We don't," Nick told her. "That's why we are both single."

"Companionate proposals," remarked Jeff, "are so awkward."

"So," continued Nick, "may we two squire you cross the meads and pick you posies gay?"

"You may, young man, you may," she laughed. "At least to the Hilltop Road where I left the car. But make your little friend promise he wont pluck any saplings for the bouquet."

As they swung along winding paths her escorts kept up their flow of entertaining nonsense. They told her confidentially that they were mole-hunters on the spoor of a male mole, that ten male moles more, and four female moles more, and they would have enough pelts for a pair of earmuffs; and when she dropped a remark to the effect that it must take a lot of nerve to be a molar, they stopped in their tracks and declared that she was a member.

When the car was reached she offered to drive them back to town and they piled in with a will. She left them by the ballpark, and as the maroon roadster swept away one hand waved back at them.

It did not surprise Jeff, or Nick or Sally when they met again the next morning; and she drove them back to town again. Nor did it seem at all strange to any of them that this procedure was repeated on each morning that followed until the Deacons' long home stay of three weeks came to an end. The big battery could see no reason that they should discontinue their strolls owing to the fact that a pretty girl was there to make it a threesome. Neither did it occur to Sally that she should take her road work in another direction because two friendly giants happened to be on hand to turn what might have been an arduous task into a very pleasant one.

Jeff reasoned it out one night as he shaved. "That lovely-limbed young lady," he told himself, "likes one of us birds more than a trifle, more than she figures herself yet." He paused and gazed at himself intently. "And it don't seem possible that the one is me. But if there wasn't two of us, I bet she wouldn't be there to brighten up the morning. With the pair of us and our conversation ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous but never slipping into the sentimental, it seems quite natural. So I think I'll string along for a while."

Twice during the home stay Judge Leigh, renewing their old acquaintance, had them to Leigh Manor for dinner. Thus three weeks sped past, and at times Nick discovered that he was supremely happy. But always the afternoon with its glaring sun beating down on the wooden stands and meager crowds, and the two bush-league ball teams going through their paces, brought him back to reality with a deadening jerk. Twice during that stretch of games he essayed to pitch. Once, in a relief rôle, he was pounded steadily and was not credited with the loss only because the game had been tossed away before he went in. On the other occasion he started but was once more hammered from the box. As a pitcher he was a hopeless has-been, but Jeff—steady old Jeff—catching every day and hitting over the four hundred mark, would not yet admit it.

THE express rattled through the night, and the Downsview Deacons began to climb into their berths, though a waning

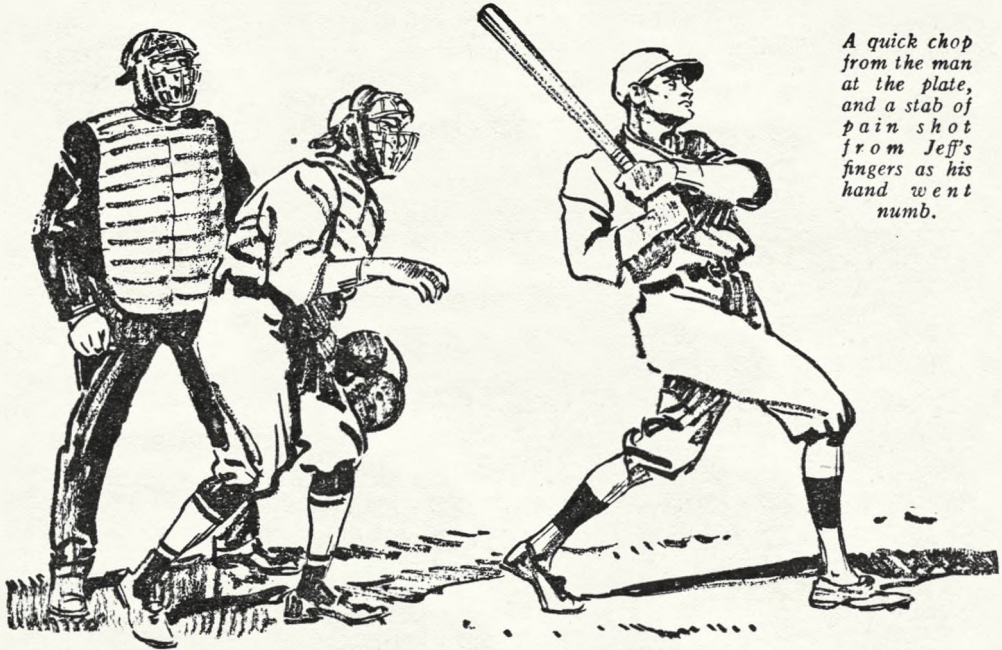
fanning bee was still in progress in the washroom. The Deacs for the next three weeks would be jumping all over the league's limited circuit. Jeff Connelly said: "Heads! Tails—you win the lower. Say, young Robbie's been traded all right."

"That means," said Nick, "I doze in

like that. Not now that the old gray mare seems to have laid down and died."

Jeff spread his great hand over his friend's face and pushed him playfully down into his pillows. "I know you wouldn't, nutsy," he said. "You're that kind of a damn' fool."

Nick curled his legs, pressed his heels



A quick chop from the man at the plate, and a stab of pain shot from Jeff's fingers as his hand went numb.

right field the rest of the year, especially after that last lacin'. Big boy, the Western Thunderbolt has heard his last clap."

Jeff sought to change the subject: "Hope Sally wins that tennis tournament."

Nick tried to answer that casually, but failed somehow, and suddenly blurted: "Hell, Jeff, maybe—maybe we wont see Sally again this summer." And when he looked up, he found Jeff's gray eyes scanning him intently.

"Nick, is it that bad?"

Even to Jeff, sidekick Jeff, it was hard to frame an answer to that question, but from the folds of his shirt as he pulled it over his head he replied: "Yes, that bad, Jeff." Emerging, he went on: "But what does it mean? Nothing! Not one thing. She's a big-leaguer, guy, and I'm—I'm a busher."

"I think she might be for you even if you are a busher," Jeff said quietly. But Nick, squatting in the center of the berth, grinned sadly. "And if she was, by some miracle, what of it? I wouldn't ask a girl

firmly against the catcher's ribs and shot him out into the corridor, and then went with him as the departing giant caught his ankles and yanked. They scuffled like a couple of bears until Jeff heaved him back into the berth and stuffed a pillow in his mouth. The rib-crushing horseplay made them feel better, somehow; yet when the wide-shouldered receiver wandered to the washroom to join the other stay-ups, he slumped silently into a corner and gave himself up to reflection, very far from his usual happy-go-lucky self. Many matters crossed his mind, but the picture that haunted him was that of his friend, Nick Cutler, but for a kink in his arm the greatest pitcher in the world, pitching his heart out as the bats sent his deliveries crashing back to all corners of the field.

His thoughts were broken in on by the voice of Bill Appleton, manager of the Deacons, dubbed by Nick as the "American Reminiscing Champ." They liked Bill, an old-timer with baseball history at

his finger-ends. "Freak deliveries," Bill was saying to an audience of players and traveling salesmen behind a cloud of smoke, "I've seen some queer ones. I was in the same league as Rus Ford before he discovered the emery ball. They say he was working out with Sweeney one day when the ball bounced against a concrete stand and was roughened, and he suddenly found himself heavin' the most ungodly hooks. And they figured it out that it was the rough surface of that ball that was catching the air. He was a wise guy. He sewed a piece of emery in his glove, roughened the balls to order, and when he gets control of the new fandangle up he goes to the big leagues, where he was a sensation. And that stunt was a help to heavens until so many got wise it was worked to death."

Bill went on, telling them learnedly about "shine balls," "gasoline balls" and the rest of that assortment, and pointing out how they had certainly made it softer for Babe Ruth and the rest of the fence-busters when they jumped on all freak deliveries and barred the old spitter. Jeff's attention was beginning to wander when Appleton said: "The best stunt I ever seen pulled with a baseball, though, was done by a Polack miner up in Pennsylvania, who had never played a game in his life. But he was a terribly strong guy, and he could take a ball and twist it in his hands so hard that the cover would come loose. He'd do it for a bet."

"You mean he tore the cover off?" asked one of his listeners.

"No, no," said Bill. "To look at the pill, you couldn't tell no difference. But for all that, the cover was worked loose. The stitches would be all in place nice and smooth on the cover, but would be torn away from the inside of the ball. And when you threw that apple, you should have seen the hops it would take. Nearest thing to an upshoot I ever lamped. You see, the inside and the outside traveled different revolutions, somehow."

"One game between two mine teams, Frank Casey got that Polack to sit on their bench and loosen covers for his pitcher so the kid could put a rise on it, but it worked so good the lad couldn't control it, and they were beat aplenty. I often thought it was too bad that hunky wasn't a ball-player. The thing could have been developed, but it would only be the odd guy with a grip like a gorilla that could do it."

"Speakin' of powerful guys," started

some one, but the rest of that story was lost on Jeff Connelly. The catcher was staring down at his own huge hands. Abruptly he rose and went back to his berth. "Old Bill talks a lot, but he's not given to fairy stories," he muttered. He felt about in his club-bag and fished out a baseball. Humbly, he had always known that nature had endowed him with the strength of two men, and he was praying that the Polack miner and his trick was not a myth. Enveloping the ball in his great fingers he bent his power to it fiercely. For a time nothing happened. He changed his grip, once, twice, three times; and then, suddenly, something gave way. Outwardly the ball looked the same, but his experienced touch told him a different story. That cover was loose. It had been far simpler than he had imagined. Now he could scarcely restrain himself from hurling the ball down the dim train corridor to see what might take place in its flight. Instead he sat staring at it a long while and then climbed into his blankets, his heart beating high. That night was a week long to Jeff.

MORNING found the Deacons on their way to the Penguins' ball-park bright and early. Bill Appleton was a driver despite his jovial ways. Jeff was first on the field, and on his person he had four baseballs. He twisted two of them until he felt the covers giving way, and as Nick strolled out, he yelled: "Let's have a warm-up before they start you shagging flies."

He tossed his friend one of the balls that he had not fixed, and for some minutes they threw it back and forth until he saw that Nick had loosened up. Thereupon he worked in a ball which he had twisted, and waited anxiously for the result.

Nick, with the long, easy sweeping motion that was still his despite the loss of his stuff, hurled the ball. It came at Jeff, low, fairly fast; and then, just before it reached him, it took a sudden startling upward shoot, or skid, and thudded on his chest as he misjudged its flight completely. Retrieving it, Jeff crouched for the next pitch, and for him time, space and sound were suspended on the morning air. Again came the ball, straight and hard, and again the most peculiar hop or rise as it shot toward him caused him to miss it.

"Tony, wat's-a-matt'?" cried Nick, but Jeff was too excited to answer, and, when he dropped two out of the next three pitches, he could feel the cold chills run-

ning up his sides despite the sweat that was making his shirt cling to him. The ball was doing the weirdest tricks! He replaced it with a third, one that he had not tampered with. Straightaway the deliveries came back to normal; and then he worked in the fourth pellet, the other he had loosened. Nick's first pitch took such a rise that the catcher just warded it off as it shot for his face.

"Glory be!" Jeff muttered. "It works, it works! A rise ball!"

For ten minutes more, as the Deacons' scant roster trailed out and got going, Jeff kept Nick pegging them in with the twisted horsehides. He even took one of the "good" balls, worked it around in his fingers as a pitcher or catcher will in a game when trying to dry it off thoroughly for gripping, and then it too began to take strange spins. Often he was able to time the jump so that he caught it perfectly, but on other occasions he either misjudged it or the ball shot out of his reach altogether.

"Say, Jeffrey," cried Nick as the pellet sailed past the catcher again, "I'm even losing my control."

"Nicholas," the big man replied and his voice sounded far off to himself, "you are gettin' the old hop on them, or something like it."

"Don't joke about that," said Nick.

"I'm not joking. Watch them."

"You haven't been drinking? You're acting queer."

"So is the ball," growled Jeff. "Throw some and watch 'em."

Twenty times, then, Nick Cutler threw into the mitt of his big receiver, and then dropped his glove and walked up to him, and Jeff saw he was trembling. "Big boy," he said, "that ball is sure doing some funny things, and I can't seem to control it."

"How you holdin' it?"

"Like that. I began to put my big finger farther around about a week ago, figuring it might give more leverage. I've tried everything else. Maybe this new grip is doing it."

Eagerly Jeff grasped at this explanation: "That's it; and listen—the stuff is sure there. All kinds of it. We got to hammer away at this till you get the control. Let's get into the batting practice now, and when the gang is through we can throw a few more."

They did that and stayed so long that

they almost missed the last call for lunch. That afternoon Nick played right field, and Jeff was catching as usual; but the next morning, the next and the next found them at their task again. "It seems to come better if you keep it perfectly dry," said Jeff as he twisted another horsehide in his tremendous hands until the stitches groaned, and Nick labored on and on to master control of this new-found hop that had come to replace his old lost stuff. Both men were going around as in a dream.

ON the fourth day of the road trip Nick took another turn in the box, with all the anxiety of a rookie in his first professional contest. The Deacons won five to four in a game that was marked by alternate bursts of very bad and very good pitching by their moundsmen. Nick was in trouble in every inning, for he walked eight, hit two and had two wild pitches; but the Penguins' hits were scattered, and eight of them struck out. Three of those victims demanded that the umpire take a look at the ball to see if the pitcher was doctoring it, but each time the minutest scrutiny found not a sign of "roughing" or other ill usage. For Jeff Connelly it was at once the most nerve-racking and heart-warming afternoon of his career.

Four more morning workouts, and Nick took another assignment; and this time, against the league's leading team, he went down to defeat. But it was not a hopeless beating—one to three was the score; and he cut the walks down to six and struck out seven. Bill Appleton decided that Nick was ready for more firing-line duty, and after another road jump and two games in right field, he was started again. The result was his best effort since donning a Deacon uniform. He won his game three-two, and while the bases were cluttered with opponents throughout the fray, he pulled through in the pinches. In his next start Nick was victorious, seven-five, in a loose contest in which errors had much to do with the scoring; but three days later he was beaten by two runs when the opposing pitcher turned in a shutout.

Each game Nick's control grew a little better. Each day his confidence became firmer and hope beat higher. And Jeff Connelly, behind the plate or walking up to the box every now and then with words of advice and working the ball between his iron digits, found the trick of the Polish miner growing simpler to perfect. Great

days those were, anxiety, doubt, hope, eagerness and excitement speeding them past.

One setback came the day after the shut-out defeat. The game was jerking along between showers until the sixth, when Appleton sent in Nick to relieve a weakening pitcher. As he warmed up, Jeff ground his fingers into the ball and prepared to work it loose, but the rain was falling steadily and he could not get a firm grip of any kind. During the two innings that followed before a deluge struck them, Nick was pounded for five runs and another loss was chalked up against him.

That brought his record for the season to the unflattering total of four wins and nine losses as June came to a close, but he had won three and lost three since taking the road, and on the Deacons' first day at home the baseball dispatches from Downsview read: "The Deacons flashed their best form of the year to win today's fame behind the excellent pitching of the greatly improved Cutler. They defeated the second place Wolves 3-1 in eleven innings, during which Cutler allowed only six hits and three walks and struck out twelve."

ON the third afternoon of their home stay the Deacons had no game. That same day Sally Leigh arrived home from her cup-winning efforts at the State Tourney, and a note from her brought Nick and Jeff rolling up the Hilltop Road in holiday mood and Bill Appleton's car.

"Fella," said Jeff as they sped along, "be flattered! Tomorrow Sally leaves for another tennis get-together. Her one day at home she squanders on us instead of headin' for the country club and some of her own crowd. Weehoops!"

"And whoopee," added Nick as he pressed harder on the gas.

Upon that same matter Sally was pondering as she awaited her company. In her own set and at college she had naturally never lacked for male society. Why were these two soldiers of athletic fortune different from the others? Heat shimmered on the highways and the fields, but Leigh Manor lay cool and gray amid its stone walls and old trees, solid serenity and perfectly blended beauty setting it apart from its more pretentious neighbors. The sunken garden, pride of the Judge's heart, was asplashed with color on that July afternoon, but not the least decorative note in the harmony of the picture was Sally, the

flowers she had clipped lying haphazard on her arm and the seat beside her as she day-dreamed there in her ideal surroundings.

A voice said: "Don't cry, little goil."

Then another: "I'll buy your purty violets."

Nick loomed up on her right and Jeff on her left, tremendously fit and bronze in their sweaters and open-necked sport-shirts, and gloriously happy. She found herself thinking how unreasonably glad she was to see them again. They presented her with their "tribute to the champ," which proved to be that wonderful action picture of herself of which they had spoken on that first meeting in the woods. They had written to Joe Enderbrook, who had secured the original for them; enlarged and mounted it was a striking example of the photographic art. On the back they had engrossed:

*"It was the point that meant the set
She drove the ball across the net."*

Service. Music by Connelly, illustrations by Cutler.

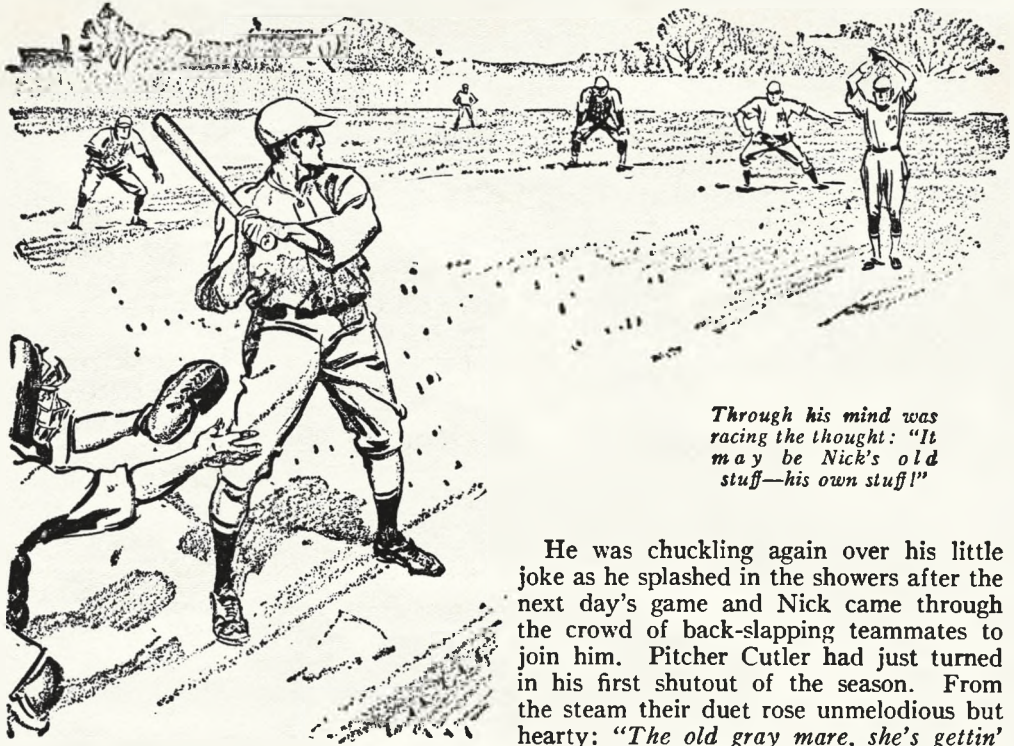
That was a long, wonderful afternoon. They clock-golfed on the lawn, voyaged in a punt out onto the duck pond and sported in the swimming-pool. Then when Nick and Jeff changed again, they found Sally, her tanned beauty enhanced by the whiteness and lightness of her dress, waiting to serve them tea beneath the myrtles on the terrace.

She smiled across at the rugged Jeff, basking luxuriantly as a great cat, and then as her eyes lingered on the black hair of Nick Cutler, Nick's large friend came to his feet with the suddenness of a cat and mumbling something of a lighter he had left by the pool, excused himself.

Nick and she were alone! The wind stirred a soft rustle in the myrtles; the westering sun caused long clear shadows across the grass, a peaceful stillness hung over the Manor. Then she was in his arms.

There was no one to see—no one, that is, but Jeff Connelly, who had gone for an article that was in his pocket. He looked back down the path and sighed: "I felt it coming. And companionate proposals are—are awkward, I guess, even for people as much in love as those two. Tired music, please."

He took a long circuit of the grounds. The dogs were drowsing in the kennels, some colored water-fowl were floating on the pond as though part of a painting; a whistled tune from the stable hung on the



Through his mind was racing the thought: "It may be Nick's old stuff—his own stuff!"

air. Jeff's bulking reflection lay slanting on the shimmering water before him. "Me and my shadow," he hummed, "no one else to tell my troubles to." But when he returned to them, he was his old careless unruffled self, and when, still arm in arm, they told him all about it as though he were a father confessor, he felt, in a way, much better.

"And Jeff Connelly," Sally told him, "whether Nick's arm comes back as he hopes or whether it never comes back at all, I'm with him all the way. You believe that?"

Jeff gazed at her steadily: "Busher, big leaguer or boilermaker, you are for him?"

"I am," she replied. "I know he'll always have you for his best friend, and I hope I will too."

He answered softly: "That's a terrible easy—easy request."

That night as the once famous battery lay in their beds and talked over that great afternoon, Nick remarked: "You musta been reading lately."

"How come?"

"When Sally asked you what was your favorite book, you said 'Oliver Twist,' and I never knew you'd read that."

Jeff chuckled, "'Oliver Twist.' Oh, that was just my little joke."

He was chuckling again over his little joke as he splashed in the showers after the next day's game and Nick came through the crowd of back-slapping teammates to join him. Pitcher Cutler had just turned in his first shutout of the season. From the steam their duet rose unmelodious but hearty: "*The old gray mare, she's gettin' like she used to be, gettin' like—*"

All through the early September morning, the lines outside the Bruins Park had stretched for blocks, and now the turnstiles were clicking until the huge concrete stands were overflowing and the sun-baked bleachers were packed so tight that one could not turn upon their wooden tiers. The pennant race was surging into the stretch; the Giants had come to town one scant game-length atop the Bruins. Here was the home team's chance to take the lead; and—Cutler and Connelly had come back to the club.

Cutler and Connelly!

Down in the rival dugouts and up in the press-box those names were on every tongue. Through the serried ranks of the reserved seats, out across the tossing bleachers, among the squatting overflow lines roped off in left field and along the apartment-house roofs, neighboring perches for hundreds, the words ran, recrossed, rumbled and spattered back and forth:

"Cutler and Connelly—back in the big league after four years—the Thunderbolt is going in against the Giants today. All his old stuff. Aw, they never come back . . . the kink's out of his arm—won twelve straight in the Valley League—last four shutouts. Cutler and Connelly—remember how they used to mow 'em down? But they never come back. There's the big

fellow—and there's Connelly. Powerful guy—sure have stuck together. . . . He says Nick has more stuff than ever, and he should know. If he comes back, the Bruins are in. But can he? Can he?"

That question, over and over again. Sixty thousand people waiting for the answer. A band blared a swinging march. Baseballs whipped around the infield with incredible swiftness. Towering flies were gathered in by fleet fielders. A squad of pitchers warmed up with the rhythm of so many machines. Excitement quivered on the air.

Nick took one long look around him as he and Jeff walked to the center of the diamond. The big league again, and that morning Ab Ryan, the trainer, had said that he had never seen his arm in better shape. Nick told Jeff that. Jeff ground his hands into the ball and twisted the cover as quickly as a man cracking a walnut. Whatever Ab Ryan had happened to say about Nick's arm, the hands of Connelly were ready for their task.

"No news to me, Nick," he said. "I could have told you that."

Four warm-up throws with the catcher taking all kinds of time to wipe off the ball by working it in his powerful clutch. Then he crouched as the Giant lead-off man stepped aggressively to the plate, and a mighty roar came up from the crowd as it tensed for the play.

JEFF signaled for a wide one. "Ball one!" cried the umpire, but the maskman had found out what he had wanted to know. The ball had gone into a breath-taking hop as it sped into his mitt. He called for one across the shoulders. Strike One! Another—the batter took a vicious cut, but his thrust was three inches low. Strike Two! Again it came—waist-high; that sudden skid, and it thumped into his decker as a torrent of sound broke from the stands. The first man had struck out!

Another batter. Two balls, two strikes and a high foul under which the third baseman circled until it dropped into his glove. Two out. The next Giant let one go and then leaned on the second pitch, and for a sickening moment Jeff thought it was heading for the bleachers. But the hop had been working. The impact had not been solid, and the sailing horsehide came down peacefully into the waiting hands of the right fielder.

One inning over. Then the second, the

third and the fourth, and still the Giants were held in check. "Come on, you Thunderbolt! Who said they never come back? Look at him sweep them down! And Connelly like a rock—working each fresh ball around in his hands—steadying his pitcher. Cutler and Connelly, making a real come-back—you said it!"

INTO the fifth and no score for either team. One out, two Giants out, and only one on base. Jeff grinned through his mask at his comrade. One strike on the batter. Make this one low. It came, knee high. A quick chop from the man at the plate, a click, and a stab of fiendish pain shot from the tips of Jeff's fingers as his hand went numb. The foul tip had sliced off too fast for even his eye, and he gazed down at two swelling middle fingers with the blood oozing from under the nails, and wondered how badly they were smashed. Seizing the ball in the first and fourth fingers, he lobbed it back to Nick, who had rushed up, and told him to go ahead. On the next pitch the hitter grounded out, and they walked back to the bench amid another wave of hand-clapping for Nick and shouts of joyful encouragement.

Jeff's face was spread with a sickly pallor beneath the tan as Ab Ryan taped his injured digits, but it was not from their pain. "I'm O. K.," he told the manager, and sank down at the far end of the dugout. He picked up a ball lying there and tried to twist. It was as he had feared. There was no power in the injured hand. Pain shot up to his shoulder as he pressed. He cared not for that as he worked frantically for a grip. It was useless. The smashed fingers had no strength in them. He dropped the ball and groaned: "Beat—beat by a lousy foul tip! Poor old Nick will go out there, and the stuff—the stuff will be gone. He'll blow up, and he won't know why. And Sally—" Those minutes that followed as the Bruins' fifth inning passed scorelessly by were the darkest that had ever entered into the life of Jeff Connelly. He pulled the peak of his cap far down on his forehead, for his eyes were unashamedly wet.

He found himself crouching behind the plate. The umpire tossed in another new ball. Desperately Jeff tried again to wrench the stitches loose, twisting until his hand screamed with pain, but the broken fingers would not grip. Miserably he threw the ball to Nick and awaited the débâcle.

THE first throw came, straight and swift, and Jeff winced in anticipation of the impending crash as the batter swung back for his cut. But a sharp-breaking curve curled under the flailing wagon-tongue. Jeff swore perplexedly. Again Nick threw, and again that ball took a sharp break in its flight, and the swinging bat just reached it to send a trickler rolling toward the box. Nick, rushing in, scooped up the pellet and tossed the runner out at first. The next batter struck, and unless Jeff was dreaming, perfect, corner-cutting curves were zipping into his mitt with great speed behind them. The last man rolled out to first base unassisted when another bender hit the handle of his bat; and Joe Enderbrook, up in the press-box, wrote down on his pad that the Giants were still bewildered by Nick Cutler's hooks. By far the most bewildered person in that park at that time, however, was Nick Cutler's catcher.

The Bruins did not score in their half, but twice long fouls sailed into the stands, and it was a perfectly new ball that the umpire gave to Nick to start the Giants' seventh. Jeff did not attempt to twist this one. He squatted behind his protector and awaited developments. Through his mind was racing the thought: "It may be Nick's old stuff, his own old stuff," and the remarks of Trainer Ryan about the pitcher's arm recurred to him as the batter let the first pitch go and it thudded into his glove. But his reflections were rudely broken when Nick's next delivery was crashed to center field for a two-base hit. Jeff's heart sank like lead. But the next Giant, in an attempt to sacrifice, popped out to third, and the one that followed was retired from shortstop to first. And now—there could be no doubt of it—the ball was coming, yes, coming with a great break on every pitch. The most dangerous clouter of the opposition ended the frame by striking out. Jeff tore off his mask, but instead of giving a bellow of joy which had been his first reaction of relief, he went blindly, quietly to the dugout and sat down, for the moment as weak as a child. It all ran into place now in his head.

"It is his old stuff," he told himself, "all back again. Ryan was right about his arm. Sometime, somehow, during the last two months when Nick was pitching so much, hot-weather pitching, and feeling like a million dollars all around, that kink has ironed out. And because I was putting my own 'jockey' on the ball with those twists,

I was too dumb to see it. No matter what he threw, the loose cover got in its work, though it seemed, at that, for the last month that he was getting more and more speed. But it's all back now, and that's how it happened. That must be so!"

As the shadows from the vast stands lengthened across the diamond, as the blank spaces on the gigantic score-board were gradually filled in until a flurry of hits in the eleventh in which he supplied a single, sent the Bruins tearing off the field ahead of an exuberant mob, winners by 1-0, Jeff came to see that it was so, for certain. Nick Cutler, his Nick, was again the hurler of thunderbolts.

A month later, or for the once more famous battery of Cutler and Connelly, five league victories and two world-series wins later, and that celebrated pair took a rousing leave of Bruins Park by squeezing their long limbs into a roadster at the wheel of which sat Miss Sally Leigh. Across the city resounding with the tumult of a baseball triumph merrily sped the three friends, a hundred things to talk about; but as they reached the country roads and the peace of the October evening descended upon them, they fell silent. There were too many things to be said. At length, Jeff remarked: "Here is the inn where I dismount. The old crowd are all coming out here tonight, but as I have a wedding as well as a world-series win to celebrate, I think I'm entitled to an early start."

A PARTING handshake with Nick, that needed no words, a long kiss from Sally, and then with his hand and lips still thrilling, Jeff stared after them down the road, and his old habit came upon him as he hummed the melody of the song:

*There she goes, my old gal;
There he goes, my old pal,
And here am I, broken-hearted.*

He grinned ruefully. "Broken-hearted, maybe, but broken-fingered no longer." His great paw he held out before him, and though gnarled as ever, the fingers were knitting and strong again. He took a ball from his pocket, a ball that he had caught for the last put-out of the world series. He applied his old twist, and the cover and inside of the pellet parted company.

"Nicodemus," he addressed the spot in the distance, "your arm may go again and your stuff with it, as it went before, but fear not. In case of accident, the future of yourself and Sally is in good hands."

The Ward of the Strangler



By ROY NORTON

The gifted author of "The Unknown Mr. Kent," "Drowned Gold" and other noted novels is at his best in this fascinating story of an American's adventure in Naples.

Illustrated by William Molt

THERE was nothing whatever about Bill Smith to suggest the heroic, yet to one person he became a hero. There was nothing of the romantic in Bill Smith, yet he was plunged into romance. There was not much sentiment in Bill Smith, yet he became involved in a sentimental whirlpool such as only Naples can brew; for Bill Smith was a steam-fitter, and Naples—to the casual eye—is like a languorous, beautiful woman, incapable of any emotion, asleep in unsurpassable surroundings.

Outwardly Bill Smith was a prosaic, broad-shouldered, clean-faced, red-headed

The woman leaped forward with the certainty of a tigress and the blade in her hand inflicted that frightful disfigurement—the Sfregio!

young workman such as may be seen anywhere in America where a job of expert steam-fitting is being done; but he had three accomplishments that recommended him to a great American manufacturing firm which needed a man to demonstrate its installation in Naples: efficiency, a smile that was like sunshine, and a thorough knowledge of the Neapolitan *dialetto* picked up from playmates in the "Little Italy" section of the city where he was reared.

"Naples is lovely—but nothing ever happens there, so we always go straight through to Rome," he heard a lady tourist say when the port came into view. "The people are too lazy ever to do anything but laugh, sing and play, and they don't struggle either to live or keep clean. It's as if all their fires burned out centuries ago."

And Smith, staring up at Mount Vesu-

vius, at the sleeping gulf of waveless blue waters, wondered. For him it might have proven true, for that friendly grin and his amazing fluency in the Neapolitan tongue made friends of those he met, and his expert skill and handling of the workmen under him made him popular with his employers.

He passed two industrious, tranquil years before he awoke to the knowledge that Naples the Beautiful is more like a somnolent tiger than a sleeping lady. In a single day, almost without warning, the secret communist plots ripened and the city ran wild. A mob surged upon the plant where Bill was employed and demanded its surrender. The American manager was absent, and to Smith's vast indignation the other directors cowered in the office, discussing a parley. He listened for a moment, then left the office with determined steps. A few minutes later he appeared with a spanner at the huge closed gates of the yard, cursed the trembling watchman into opening them for egress, heard them hurriedly clanged shut behind him and stood confronting the crowd. The grin on his face was not that of friendliness when, to the amazement of the enemy, he charged wildly, recklessly, fearlessly upon them. Inasmuch as Italian Reds have never stomached anything in the way of a fight, from war times downward, they decided, *en masse*, to leave that place. Bill did not inflict much damage on them as he pursued, bellowing and striking, for the simple reason that they outran him. As a fight he didn't think much of it. He had been in many hotter corners during his days of soldiering in France with the Expeditionary force.

He grinned when praised by his superiors for his victory.

BUT one of those who witnessed the battle which went into local history as Homeric was a girl. She was merely one who had gone along to see the excitement; for the women of Naples have ever followed turbulent events, and, if partisan, have this virtue, that they usually fight beside their men. Out of fashion, of course, in some other countries where although the women fight, it is always for themselves. And this girl, who had no interest in the issue, strangely discovered something heroic in this red-headed flame of fury, fighting with a grin and a spanner, and in her modest way she treasured his

memory as god-like. One never can tell; the pretty legend of King Cophetua and the beggar maid may have been founded upon nothing more than a man in greasy overalls who, to the maiden's eyes, assumed the greatness of a king and thereby won her admiration. . . .

This girl, whose eyes were suddenly blinded by glory, sold flowers here, there, anywhere—sometimes on the old Toledo, oftentimes near the headquarters of two great tourist agencies, because there were found the *forestieri* who could be induced, by a plaintive smile, to buy. Her name was Maria Porsetto—a common, ordinary name. She lived in the recesses of the Via Imbrecciatta, a street fourteen feet broad and six stories high, where the sun seldom shone because cut off by the clouds of laundry, where the perpetually moist cobbles were the nurseries for naked infants, and where if a man had one grimy hovel for workroom, domicile and the rearing of an enormous family he was considered well-to-do.

The girl was a virgin. Everyone knew it, from the *padrone* who rented her one tiny room up under the tiles, to the milkman who delivered his milk, on the hoof, at her door by making the goat climb five flights of narrow stairs to yield a morning supply. She was not a virgin through lack of proffer, for despite her semi-starved existence there was something attractive and clean in her face, in her gentle eyes, in the way she fumbled her sole earthly ornament, a tiny silver cross left her by her mother who had been somehow endowed with gentle blood and had been beaten to the dregs by adversity. All Maria Porsetto's life men had whispered things to her. Now it would be a comely youth of the Mercato with his "*Ah, carina! Ve vuoglie bé!*"—now an Italian gentleman who regarded his approaches as a compliment to the woman, and sometimes a foul-minded tourist who had heard there was no one in Naples who couldn't be bought and in this mistaken belief was trying adventures which he would have been afraid to risk in his native town. That she was not yielding made them all the more importunate, and to her disillusioned ideas of romance, more detestable. She had other knowledge too, to convince her that most men were beasts and many women worse, for sometimes when her day had been too barren to dispose of her fragrant, dying wares, she ventured through the Via Nercano and there

found purchasers. Often she had fled before her basket was empty; always she fled when it was. . . .

Maria Porsetto mistrusted all men save one, Giovanni Martino, who was a strangler. Yet he, gnarled, old, ferocious, so deadly that those who knew him or knew of him shunned him, was her sole protector. He had been a bandit in Calabria, in prison three or four times, a *camorrista*, and now in his old age subsisted by portering, fishing, or by an occasional day's work on the wharves and an occasional theft. But somewhere in the heart of that terrible wolf who hated mankind there burned something like paternal love for this brave waif who had none other to love or protect her, and his edict had gone through the dark alleyways that his knife or his hands would find the life of any who wronged her. Once one of these Neapolitan outlaws—those who live by women—had caught her alone at night and she had escaped from his clutch with difficulty. The next day that man was found dead with the marks of spatulate thumbs bluey printed on the flesh covering his broken neck. It served as a sinister warning—and from the worst dangers of the night Maria was thereafter immune.

UNTIL that day of riot, Maria Porsetto had discovered nothing to admire in any man; then a vision of valor burst upon her in the person of a clean-limbed, unafraid young giant, confronting a mob, armed with a spanner and clad in greasy overalls. She saw in him a hero; and such one does not forget.

There was never a moment in the life of Bill Smith when he regarded himself as a hero. He was not so much given to introspection as outward observation. He was almost inclined to think of Naples as some Italian poet had said: "Naples is all a song."

Not that Bill sang. He merely worked, skillfully and good-humoredly, and saved, thriftily though not stingily. He had but one persistent ambition, to save enough to go into business for himself in a certain place he had in mind "back home." His salary was paid by a neat American check from his firm each month, and he benefited by difference in exchange, discovered many means of tidy speculation with his savings, regarded his capital's increase complacently, and went his way, making friends of his employers and the workmen

under him with equal facility. After the riot he was given an unexpected increase in already liberal wages. He celebrated it by changing boarding-houses.

ANGELICA MAGGIO was the niece of the *padrona* of the Penzione Umberto, but her given name was a misnomer, for she had none of that wishy-washy etherealness ascribed to angels; on the contrary, she was strong, vigorous, and at times vociferous. In some moods her eyes were like soft, slumbering, twilight pools—eyes that would make many men crave to see them in warmer light. Her masses of heavy, straight hair, blue-black as a nightbird's wings, were always cleanly parted and drawn down barely covering the tips of exquisite ears, and she had features that would have evoked a sculptor's ecstasies. Angelica Maggio was not unaware of her beauty. She had been told of it from childhood, and later men had so frequently complimented her that she had accepted their adulation as a matter of course, and would have been piqued had it been withheld. So she had a shock coming when Bill Smith arrived, saw, but wasn't conquered.

The failure of this American to fall immediately into her train vexed her. His continued indifference to her overtures acted like a challenge. Finally she, who all her life had with peculiar cruelty lured men to love, then sent them on their way with a scornful jest, fell in love. The love of such a Neapolitan woman is not without the merit of fervor. It may sometimes be flame. There is fire in the very heart beneath Naples, and perhaps it has exercised its influence upon many of those who dwell on that smoldering crust.

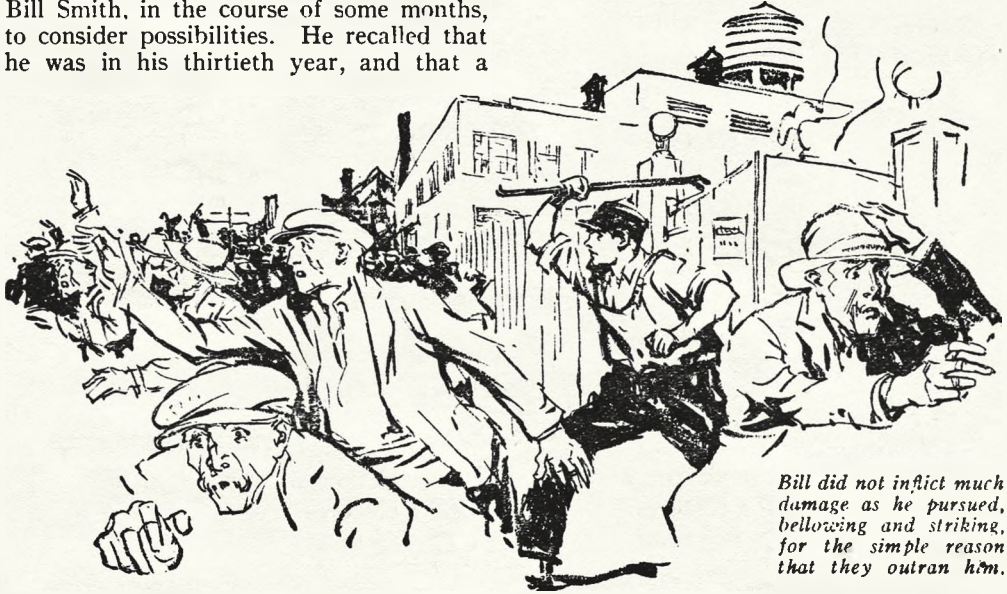
Angelica exercised all her experienced arts and skilled accomplishments; cast coy, reproachful, or inviting glances upon Bill; sang languishing songs in a rich throaty voice to the accompaniment of a mandolin; derided him for his backwardness, and finally invited him to a cinema where in the darkness she clutched his hand. She induced him to talk of himself and of America, and learning that he had an ambition to go into business, casually told him that her aunt was a woman of property, owning her own house, thriftily investing regular profits, and that in time she might therefore become an heiress.

"The one great hope of my life has been to go to that land of America," she said to

him on several occasions, sometimes concluding, with a sigh: "But I suppose I shall never be able to. One couldn't go alone and—*per Baccol*—I shall never marry an Italian! I know their fickleness too well."

Angelica may never have heard that fine old adage about "Constant dripping wearing away a stone," but gradually she began to prove its worth, for she did cause Bill Smith, in the course of some months, to consider possibilities. He recalled that he was in his thirtieth year, and that a

acquire capital, he had loaned a persuasive Italian, who found steam-fitting hard work, two hundred dollars to go into the flower business. Evidently the flower business also proved too energetic for the persuasive one, who failed in his enterprise, and one nice day Bill Smith received an envelope and the key of the kiosk which thus became his property. What Bill said need



Bill did not inflict much damage as he pursued, bellowing and striking, for the simple reason that they outran him.

beautiful wife with rich prospects might prove of great assistance in a career. But he was not in love, and his habit of caution made him defer taking any irrevocable step.

He went so far as to thrill Angelica with hopeful assurance when, in a marionette show, he repaid with interest that long-deferred answer to the clutch of her hand by holding hers for an entire evening. Her responsive clutch was fervent; so fervent that after a while it conveyed something of fierce rapacity. He found himself furtively glancing sideways to study her face, and saw that it might be capable of cruelty, and selfishness. It made him hesitate.

Hesitation is perhaps a warning whisper of Fate. If it is prolonged many diversions may occur, and some of them may decisively alter one's perspective. Also, as had been tritely said, a thing of seeming insignificance may be the most important in one's life. It was, as a matter of fact, an octagonal kiosk, gaudy and garish, that decided the fate of Bill Smith. In his business transactions, which though small had become extended through his desire to

not be mentioned. What he did was to go grumpily to his unwanted possession and stick a sign reading, "For sale or rent," in the window. But day after day went by without results; evidently Bill was due to make an entry in his "Loss acc't."

One day, when ducking and dodging through the narrow, crowded, dangerous and yet important shopping street, the Via Chiaia, he slipped on the lather of greasy mud and narrowly escaped being run down by an unruly cab-horse. The driver jerked the horse violently to one side. Bill swore, the cabman yelled, and above it all arose a shriek. From the edge of the curb, which at that point was about twenty inches wide, Bill saw a flower-girl lifting herself from the mud, clutching one arm, while the horse, his feet entangled in the remains of a basket, danced and plunged wildly over a splotch of spring violets.

The steam-fitter jumped into the traffic and lifted her free of danger, then berated the driver in fluent argot.

"You are hurt, poor little girl," said Bill pityingly.

"I cry not for a bruised arm," she answered, plaintively, "but it is disaster for me! All my flowers, a basketful—expensive they are too—are gone!"

MARIA stared at him, recognized him, and started away abashed, still holding her wrenched arm; but something he had seen in her eyes made Bill follow and overtake her.

"See here," he said, "don't think I'm just chasing you—and run away from me! I never thought of it until now. Why, you're the very girl I wanted to find!"

At first she frowned at him and her eyes, a deeper blue than the lost violets, blazed with not only inquiry, but offense; then slowly they widened and softened. She had stared into the eyes of the world too long not to differentiate between decency and impudence. Besides, this was the man whose bravery she had treasured in her memory ever since that day of riot. A strange sensation, embarrassment and shyness, overtook her. She was so accustomed to wearing armor of defense that to converse with even a hero without it was difficult. He interpreted the struggle, the waning fear, the shyness, as he stood there gravely probing her eyes, while the traffic roared and struggled past them, and pedestrians elbowed them. Then he grinned in that ingratiating way of his, and Maria smiled back faintly.

"I mean it," he said. "I'm not the kind of a man who bothers girls. If you will walk down as far as the little park with me, where the mud isn't spattering our faces all the time, and where we can hear ourselves think, I'll explain. Then if you don't see anything in it—well, it'll be good-by."

Even while he uttered the last word he felt a sharp twinge. He knew that he wouldn't like to say good-by to this girl, though he couldn't have given any explanation for this peculiar feeling.

Silently they walked the short distance to the Piazza dei Martiri—the "place of the Martyrs"—and there, standing beneath one of the grave old lions under the high marble column of "Victory over Death" he told her he had a flower kiosk for sale or rent.

"That is," he stammered, "I had intended to sell it, but I couldn't get what it's worth at this time of the season—pay better if it could be kept open until at least next fall—it ought to be kept running—live, go-

ing business is better than a dead one—and I haven't found anybody to take it on."

A bitter laugh stopped him. Maria lifted both hands and threw them outward in that eloquent and significant gesture of Naples which means, "Impossible! It is finished!" Then she said: "Such a thing as a kiosk, signore, is as far from my reach as the moon! It will take all I have saved to buy a basket; a very little basket of very cheap flowers. A grand kiosk like that is— Why, signore—that is to have a great business like—like those!" And she gestured toward the big coral and tortoise-shell bazaars across the way.

"That—that's just what I've been telling you," he insisted. "It would pay me to let you have it for nothing, and put stock in to start, rather than let it stand there empty and lose all its customers."

SUCH a thought had never entered his head until that moment, yet it now occurred as a happy idea. Again she regarded him with that peculiar stare, as if questioning his motives, but his frank, clear eyes and that friendly grin, once more reassured her. She looked away from him; watching her, he knew from the rise and fall of her breast, the faint smile through parted lips and the dream that had come into her eyes, that to her this was like opening the gates of a paradise to one who had longed but never hoped for such wonders.

"If—if you would let me pay you back as I could for the stock—" she stammered in her turn, and Bill knew he had won.

"There goes a tram that will take us there," he cried, seizing her arm and hustling her to a crowded platform on which he deftly shielded her from a Neapolitan masher by interposing his big body and nearly crowding the objectionable one overboard. She had the strange sensation of being protected by a beneficent giant in whose shadow she felt utter safety. She still felt it, when after a speechless journey they descended.

It is a wonderful kiosk, that one on the Mergallina, gay with huge windows in its octagonal sides, brilliant with red, purple and gold paint and by night luminous with profuse and many-colored electric lights. He unlocked the door, threw it open and gestured her to enter. It was faintly scented with the ghosts of many martyred flowers. Maria Porsetto stood spellbound by a high, armed stool with a little iron stove near its slender legs, and

a business-like wooden desk in the corner seemed with its inkspots and abandoned inkstand to suggest great affairs. Bill Smith tore down his "For sale or rent" notice pasted inside the window.

"Here's the key," he said. "Tomorrow I expect you to go to the flower market and get enough to fill the shelves and the racks. You know what to get; only I want them to be plenty; lots of them—must make a show so folks will know there's a new proprietor who intends to make things hum. And about paying for the first lot—I think I ought to put that in myself; because you see you are to make this business worth while. Make it go. Get a move on it."

She protested against this, telling him that to make a real display would mean the expenditure of an enormous fortune—twenty dollars at least, he estimated from what she said.

"Make it twice that much!" he exclaimed, carried away now with his intent to do the thing right. And he pulled from his inside hip pocket a worn wallet and gave her fifty dollars in Italian money. "Spend at least all that, and make things look right. I got to get back to the plant now; got no time to talk about paying back and all that. See you about this time tomorrow. G'by!"

He ran and caught a tram. While she was left standing there enwrapped in amazement, overpowered by unexpected generosity and kindness in a world that heretofore had been so hard. She climbed into the high stool, then suddenly overcome with realization, buried her face in her arms on the dusty counter and, surrounded by the vague fragrance, wept with joy.

DILL SMITH, still unregretful over his unaccustomed expenditure, dropped off the tram and critically surveyed this new enterprise in which he had so strangely become interested.

"She got flowers, all right," he muttered, "but a lot of them stands needs paint! Yaller might be best. It's all right, but it don't look like Fifth Avenue. She orter have more growin' stuff in pots. People with sense buy things in pots because when the bloom is dead they can hope to get some more flowers sometime. And she looks awfully nice and sweet—them girls I seen on Fifth Avenue used to look mighty cute in their pretty white caps and white aprons with a sort of strap over their chests

and tied behind with a couple of T-joints! Nickel fittin's always pay and—"

He was acutely amazed at the change in her appearance when she looked up from a sale and saw him. Taken unawares, she flushed prettily. He puzzled over her altered appearance for a moment and then realized that now there was hope in her eyes; but he did not know that for almost the first time in her life she felt secure, placed above the quarry in a chase that had pursued her through the drab of gray streets of her native town since she was old enough to remember. Naples, incomparable in beauty, incomparable also in vileness!

"It looks good, but not good enough," Bill Smith said, with businesslike gravity. "I want you to go in for more blooming things in pots, and I want you to get some other clothes. If you wont take them as a present, you can pay for them when this kiosk begins to make money." He went on to explain how the young Fifth Avenue ladies and their shops looked.

"By the way," he asked, in that same gruff voice, "what's your name?"

She told him, and with a scarcely concealed quiver of the lips said, "The signore is displeased with me because—"

"Nonsense! I want this place to become so fine we can sell it sometime, or—maybe if it pays good enough—keep it," he said, and then relenting at sight of her distress, bestowed on her that grin that made forgiveness of him so easy.

The next day a painter came to paint the stands and touch up the kiosk. Then a day or two later a cart left stacks of folded boxes such as Naples florists seldom knew. When Maria read on the covers in brave bronze, "*Sna. Maria Porsetto, Kiosk di Fiori di Mergallina,*" and saw the packets of tissue and gilt and colored papers, the printed ribbons and gay spools of twine, once more she knew fear. Other men had tried to buy her. Perhaps that was the way men bought women in that Eldorado across the sea! Her dreams and happiness, the joy of unexpected sales to astonished but pleased patrons were tarnished and she thought with a sigh of the basket, and of the streets into which she must again plunge, if this was the great man's intent. For the first time in her life something leering, malicious, insidious whispered to her, "Why not?" and she cried, fumbling her little crucifix, "Oh, Mother of Pity! Spare me this, that I

may not again be driven like the unsouled and homeless dogs that roam the hungry alleyways!"

There may be something in such a prayer. There must be. If not, who is it that heeds and helps? Why are such prayers answered? Everyone with the great vision knows that they are, and that he who denies it lies!

And so when Bill Smith came again on Saturday night, the flower-girl fearfully sought his eyes, and read the answer to her prayer; for she looked upon and knew cleanliness and kindness.

"Them boxes and gewgaws I sent—Oh, I forgot! You don't get my lingo!" And then he said in that harsh *dialetto* of that city by the bay, "Those things I sent ought to help to make this into a real business. I'm glad you got the dress and cap. Make you look neat and smart and a smart shop gets smart customers. I see you bought some things in pots. But—humph!—I didn't think how heavy they are for you to bring out mornings and put back nights!"

"Oh," she laughed, "I have a man who does that for me—Giovanni—who is very strong. He is very—"

A customer interrupted and when she looked up he had disappeared. Mitigating her disappointment was the exultant thought that a man with ulterior ambitions would have remained with obnoxious persistence.

Bill had turned into the short street leading to the Caracciolo and the sea-front and was trudging thoughtfully along, when a man halted him.

"'Scusa, signore! I am Giovanni, the friend of Maria Porsetto, who has the joy of being serviceable."

Bill Smith noticed the broad, high shoulders, the long swinging arms, the graying hair, and the scars on the heavy chin; he had a queer feeling that the sharp, glittering eyes were appraising him.

"You are one of the *forestieri*. That I know. I would ask you a question," the cold voice went on. "What are your reasons for being kind to a girl who has never known kindness, but is clean? I—who am nothing—ask the truth, signore!"

FOR a moment the portent of the question did not enter the young steam-fitter's mind. Then he flamed, his fists closed, and he bent toward the unflinching, waiting inquisitor.

"Damn you!" he cried. "If you think I mean to soil that child, and that you can cut in on it in any way, you are not only mistaken, but—I'll break you into pieces for thinking such a thing!"

"*Forse! Forse!*" Giovanni said with a shrug of disbelief. "Others bigger than you have tried it and—are dead! But I believe you are honest and I believe this, signore, that it is well for you. *Buona notte!*"

He turned away, but Bill halted him.

"I'm slow," he said. "Takes time for me to get things, but—" And he held out his hand.

UNDER an arc-light he saw a changed, smiling face. A hand came out to meet his, clutching it with a strength that made him wince.

"We understand each other, signore," said Giovanni.

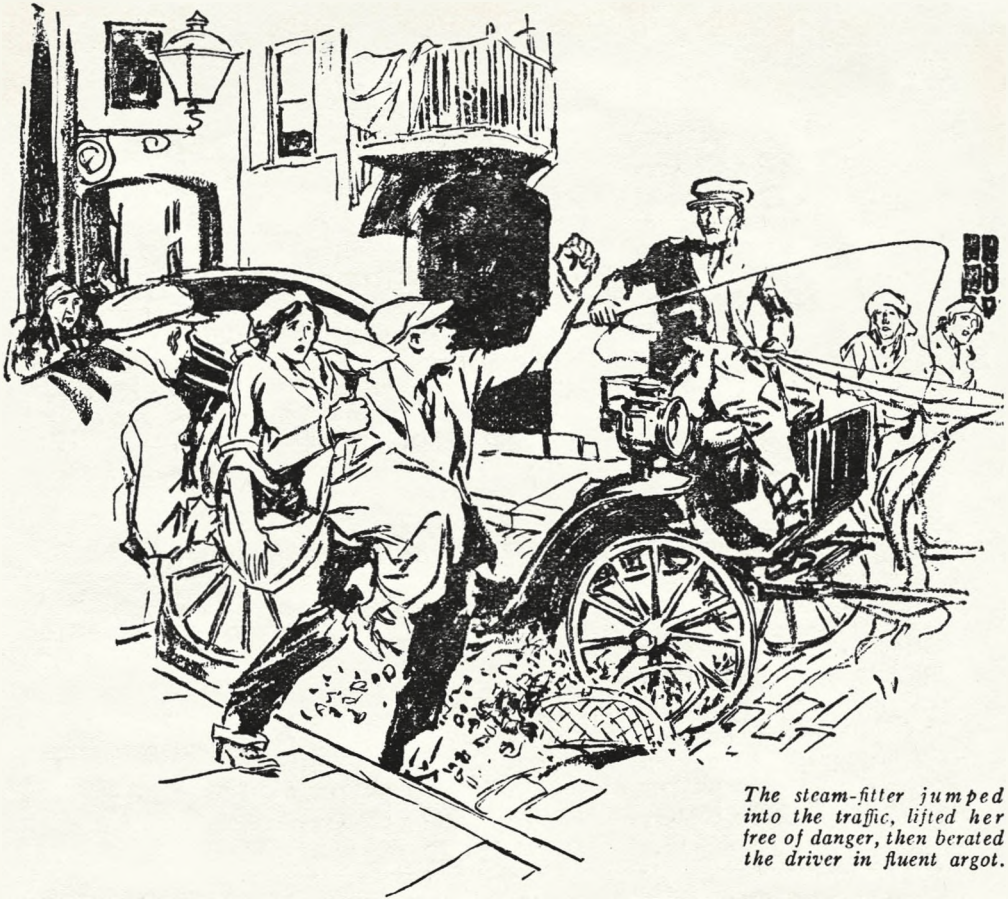
"If you'll help her, and look after her somewhat, I'd like to pay for it," the steam-fitter said. Then, as a gracious after-thought, he added, "If you will let me."

"There are many things for which I never take pay," Giovanni said. "Your offer is payment enough. *Ecco. Basta.*" And he vanished.

"*Ecco. Basta.*" has a double significance in Neapolitan usage. "Finished. Enough," is used when one has decisively terminated a dispute, or when, on the contrary, one is satisfied. It may signify that all is done save violent action, or that peace has been formally declared. Between Giovanni and the American, the latter seemed true; for although they met but seldom in that interval between winter and spring, they learned to esteem each other. Meanwhile the slopes of Posillipo grew gay with flowers, the kiosk prospered, and as if her half-starved body and half-smothered soul had burgeoned with the season, Maria Porsetto's face lost its sadness, her wistful mouth learned to smile, her voice to laugh.

Bill Smith found many cogent reasons why he should go more frequently to the kiosk. To give wise counsel; to see that she wanted nothing for the business; to teach her crude bookkeeping. He liked the latter, for then she stood near him puckering her brows over the new intricacies, penitent for her mistakes. He hadn't the remotest idea that to her he was still a god of beneficence, wisdom, and valor.

Bill was also unaware that he was the object of redoubled attentions and strivings



The steam-fitter jumped into the traffic, lifted her free of danger, then berated the driver in fluent argot.

in the Penzione Umberto. He had told Angelica of the kiosk, of its director, of her success, as a matter of mere friendly interest. But when gradually it absorbed him until nearly all his evenings were occupied, Angelica's manner changed to apparent indifference. Somehow this pleased Bill Smith, whose mind was now fixed upon more absorbing matters. . . .

No one who has ever seen the early summer moon of Naples, shining on the great bay and the ill-tempered Vesuvius, on the great waterfront backed by the shaded reaches of the park Villa Nazionale, can ever forget it. It is then that lovers stroll with soft song or laughter along the Via Caracciolo, or lean absorbedly over the long, gray old walls and stare out upon the sleeping sea. It is then that Naples seems truly "all a song."

On such a night when all but the places of amusement, restaurants and cafes of the Strada di Mergallina had closed and the streets were almost deserted, Maria began preparations to shut the kiosk. Assisted by Giovanni, and humming softly to herself, she carried in the pots and vases from the

outside display. Her day had been prosperous, and Maria was happy. God was good!

A woman veiled and clad in the somber garments affected by the bereaved came up the side-street and halted. Observing the signs of mourning, the flower-girl felt a pang of sympathy and in a more than usually soft voice said, "Buona sera, signora. What do you wish?"

"This!" said the woman, leaping forward with the grace and certainty of a tigress, and the kiosk lights reflected a flashing gleam of steel as the thin blade in her hand inflicted that most brutal of all Neapolitan misdeeds, "the *Sfregio*"—that mutilation known and practiced almost exclusively in Naples; that frightful disfigurement which in Naples scores of times each year is the knife-play of revenge or jealousy. The *Sfregio* is usually aimed to start from the left brow, slice downward across the eye, the cheek, the mouth, and the chin, then with a swirling upward stroke sweep over the right cheek—possibly to blind and certainly to disfigure the victim for life. It almost invariably leaves a hideous scar.

The pitiful scream of the flower-girl and the angry rush and oaths of Giovanni blended, startling the hearers in the street and bringing an agile policeman on the run. These were followed by a crash as she fell backward unconscious, wrecking an entire tier of her innocent wares.

Giovanni sprang forward and tried to seize the woman but missed his hold and tore the veil from her face. Quickly she whirled and slashed his wrist, and when he clutched it to stem the spurting blood, she escaped. Fleeing wraithlike through the shadows, she turned a corner, and was gone like an evil spirit of the night.

For a brief time there was a turmoil in the Mergallina, the gathering of a crowd, the clanging of an ambulance, voluble, excited cries and conversations; then the Carabinieri, with the help of volunteers who in such times forget even their habitual habit of theft, put Maria's stock into the shelter of the gaudy kiosk, and locked the door. Again all was peaceful. Out on the front but a short distance away the moon still shone, the lovers resumed their songs, and forgot an incident of such frequency in that beautiful, deadly city that seems itself to shrug its shoulders at violence, loss of life, or a Vesuvian catastrophe. Only the flowers in the little kiosk seemed to droop and pine with compassion, and mourn the gentle hands of Maria.

BILL SMITH sat at the long table in the pension reading his morning paper, as was his habit, while absently drinking heavy black coffee and eating gray rolls. Across from him, calm, placid, cheerful, but watchful, sat Angelica. She saw him lift in his seat, scowl, turn white, then red, and suddenly start. His chair toppled behind him, unheeded, as he ran toward the hallway, seized his hat and departed. Angelica continued her breakfast. Life seemed reasonably sweet to her; but to Bill Smith, cursing a taxi-driver to haste, and shouting a name of a hospital in the same sentence, it was bitter.

Through the already crowded streets they swerved and swayed and bumped. He jumped from the door, threw a note to the driver and charged up to the entrance, taking the broad steps in threes at each stride. His haste had been useless. They would not admit him, but on observing his great distress, ushered him to the surgeon, a busy, brusque Swiss who spoke English.

"No, fier eyes were not injured. Serious,

yes! I could say more in a week's time. The wound seemed clean. Disfigured? Of course! That is, unless a special and expensive treatment—something recently discovered—is applied."

"Then apply it! I don't care what it costs. I want her to have the best of everything this hospital or you can do!" cried the American.

The surgeon, deciding that this was a client who belied his appearance, said more politely: "Very well. She shall have special treatment. Call again in one week."

"Thank you," said Bill Smith and like a man beaten, yet with a sense of relief, he trudged out.

He went directly to the kiosk and with a strangely surreptitious air, as if ashamed of sentiment, he watered the flowers, muttering, "You miss her! So do I. I do this for her!"

Afterward he returned to the shop and when the proprietor suggested he could find a good woman to look after the business of the kiosk temporarily, Bill Smith thriftily made the bargain. Though he made inquiries, he could find no trace of Giovanni, who, like his kind of stray wolf, had slunk away to cure or lick his wounds.

For the next few days Angelica was especially attentive to the steam-fitter. He told her of the tragedy of the kiosk and found her particularly sympathetic. She expressed her horror. In his estimation this new rôle was worthy and he began to esteem her more highly than he had hitherto. He became more friendly, and the hopes of Angelica rose in proportion. Not until the end of the week could he bear making the trip to the kiosk, and then he did so merely to see that Maria's interests were being looked after. He was turning away when a man appeared with a bandage on his arm.

"Giovanni!" Smith cried, springing to the meeting.

"I heard that you inquired for me, signore. I thank you," Giovanni said, and then with a burst of objurgations: "I was there—I did not save her—but I tried! I did not suspect that one like her could have an enemy. I should have known that all but one now and then are enemies!"

He told the story, cursing the unknown. "And by all the saints!" he ended, "I would know her again if I saw her, and if ever I did—" He made that sinister motion indicating a knife-thrust.

Bill Smith asked him many questions as



"You!" she said. "You have done all this!" And she sprang toward him, infuriated. Giovanni saw the flash of a blade.

to the appearance of Maria's assailant, and a puzzled frown twisted his brow, for that description would cover twenty thousand of the younger women of Naples!

He tried to give Giovanni a reward—nearly losing a friend thereby—then went his way, for he had an appointment with Angelica, who, adroitly scheming for romance, developed a slight headache and said she preferred a walk on the waterfront rather than the joys of a cinema.

Bill Smith agreed, and after a short tram-ride, they joined those others who seek romance under the moonlight on the Via Caracciolo. She even asked to see his kiosk and commented on its neatness and artistry and made solicitous inquiries concerning Maria. Would she be horribly disfigured? Had she lost the sight of an eye?

"They wouldn't let me see her," he said, "but I have been there twice and—"

He stopped, aware that some one had jostled them; but when he turned the culprit had lost himself in the crowd of strollers without apology. Smith was not quite as entertaining on the way home and seemed silent and preoccupied, although Angelica clung invitingly close. He did not tell her that the object of her solicitude would be permitted to see him on the following day. He could not at the moment understand his reluctance to make her his confidante, nor could he have told why, when he left her in the hallway of the

pension, a subtle distaste seized him as she attempted to invite a caress.

THE head nurse at the hospital was loquacious when she admitted him and conducted him upward.

"The doctors made a special test case of your friend," she said, "and never has there been such a cure. Never! They say that in the course of a year the scar should be scarcely visible. Thank God, her pretty eyes were uninjured! You must not be noisy, for she is in the convalescent veranda, where there are others whom it would not do to excite or disturb."

And so Bill Smith, with hat in hand, tiptoed awkwardly toward the wicker chair in which the flower-girl rested. Her eyes filled with mysterious warmth and when he clung to her hand she was incapable of words. And he, never voluble, was silent until she began to question him regarding Giovanni and the kiosk. At least this topic gave him something of which to speak; but in his heart were other things he wished to utter, for now, at last, he knew. He was restrained by the thought that in such declaration he might be taking unfair advantage of her weakness, and for a long time he sat scowling at the blue tiles of the floor, at the mottled doves that circled over the ancient red roofs, and at a single white cloud that floated lazily in the evening sky.

"They tell me I shall be discharged on Saturday," she said. "Only four more days. It is too bad it could not be today because the smoke from Vesuvius has been blowing landward and— Flowers do not come to the market in the *scirocco*. Please tell the signora to buy an extra large lot to carry the kiosk through several days."

"I'll tell her," he said, rising.

But the kiosk was not much in his thoughts during the succeeding two days. His mind had suddenly become filled with thoughts of the girl in the hospital.

ON the evening of the second day the blast of the *scirocco* reminded him of his negligence and he plunged through the hot wind to the kiosk. Its wares were inside and tiny particles of gravel and dust were battering the octagon of windows. He entered, made a few casual inquiries and then passed out, pulling the door shut behind him. Through the dust and murk a man plucked at his arm, and he was dragged into a lee shelter by Giovanni.

"Signore," he said, "I have discovered the woman who *sfregiata* our little Maria."

"What? Are you certain?" the steam-fitter cried, staring at him.

"Positive. But—I wish her to confess. There are certain ways of doing things, signore. I think if she could be confronted—say at the right moment—by another woman—"

"I'll not have Maria put through any such an ordeal as that, eager as I am to see that this wretch gets what's coming to her!"

"I saw you with a young lady, passing the kiosk the other night. Now couldn't you—"

"Angelica Maggio. The niece of my *pension padrona*. No, she wouldn't do."

The stranger made a single clicking noise with his tongue.

"Oh, well, then, we will see what we can do alone to wring a confession from this enemy of Maria's. So all I ask you to do is to meet me on the Via Caracciolo tomorrow night at eleven o'clock. By then, signore, the *scirocco* will have spent itself. Aye, it will have spent itself, and I think, the saints willing, I can point out to you this person. But in case something prevents— Let me think! Ah! I might send you a note and spare you a useless trip. What is the address of your *pension*, signore?"

Smith gave it to him, and in his usual quick, yet furtive way, seeking to avoid the circular pools of wavering, shivering light beneath the arc-lamps, Giovanni disappeared.

Smith watched for a moment, and then with a shrug of his shoulders turned toward the long stretch of park that on such a night was deserted. The wind-blown scent of tormented flowers reminded him of Maria and her cruel and unmerited affliction. He stopped for a moment in the shelter of the statue of "The Dying Gladiator," catching his breath and locked in profound meditation. He stared upward at that symbol of futile barbarism and abruptly felt himself a foreigner.

Why stay in a land like this, so given to hideous inhumanities, so beautiful and yet so sinister, so laughingly gay at one moment and so red with murder the next, now that he had accumulated means to live in a country where life had certain defined securities and definite kindness? He remembered a place where once in a rest from wandering he had worked—a quiet little city in the Middle West where there were shaded streets, schools, churches, homes; now it seemed to Bill like a goal. The thought of it brought a peculiar homesick yearning for his distant native land.

"Damn it!" he cried aloud, staring at the twisted stone face above him, "I've stood for this country long enough. I'm going!" And then, disturbed by his own voice, he muttered, "I'll go loony if I stick this much longer!" And he resumed his homeward trudge.

Smith was a man slow to resolve, but firm therein and when daylight came again had made his decision. He would begin his arrangements for departure that very morning. He recalled his appointment with Giovanni for that night, but sometimes during the day, when wearied with thought, questioned if it were worth while.

THE wind of the *scirocco* died down after sunset and the sky began to clear in spaces between great fleets of flying clouds, silver-bordered by a wan moon; but as he made his way along the Via Caracciolo the sea, as if rebelling against long agony, still charged the extended walls with thunderous waves. Now and then one leaped higher, broke loose as if released, and seemed seeking the stars. The long, wide avenue, bordered on one side by sea and the other by park looked wholly de-

serted, gray and bleak as Smith slowly and thoughtfully walked for nearly a mile, saw the lights of the Grand Hotel, then turned and retraced his steps. He came abreast the huge white Acquario that squatted in the midst of the dark trees like a monster lying in wait. Suddenly a figure detached itself from the shadow of the sea wall, gave a low call and intercepted him. In a momentary obscuration of the moon he peered with lowered head, and on the defensive, until he saw that it was a woman.

"Signorina, you have a rendezvous, but you are mistaken in the man," he said. Then she threw back a veil and gave the low-throated, familiar laugh of Angelica.

"What? You didn't recognize me? You are a sharp-eyed lover, then, after sending me word to keep such a curious, yes, romantic appointment; but I liked it and so came, doing as you bade me, letting none know; slipping out without being seen—and all that! And, *carissimo*, here I am."

He was so stupefied by surprise and annoyance that he was for a moment motionless and speechless. Then he blurted, "I sent for you? Made an appointment with you? Why, you must be mad, or—"

They had been joined by another shadow that had appeared so silently as not to be heard above the beating of the sea, and it now spoke: "No, signore, she came by appointment. Pardon me for using your name and influence to secure the meeting. It was I, Giovanni, who sent for her. She, this unspeakable daughter of *il diavolo!*—this rag of Naples—this she-wolf—is the woman who put the *sfregio* on our little Maria!"

ANGELICA had retreated a step when Giovanni began to speak, but now as he made his astonishing charge, and Smith recoiled with revulsion, she stepped forward and faced Giovanni with gesticulating fists. The moon came out from behind the clouds and lighted her face, showing the snarling lips, the scowl of fury.

"You lie!" she cried. "You say you got me to come here— Who are you, anyway? What dog of the street—"

"I, signorina, am the man who tore the veil from your face on that night, tried to hold you, and got this from your pretty knife," he said, and thrust his scarred wrist beneath her eyes. "To deny is useless. We have you, now, to do with as the signore wishes."

"Angelica—Angelica, why did you do it?

What have you to say for yourself?" the American demanded. By his hard voice, his hard scrutiny, she knew that he did not question the word of her accuser and that regardless of what she might say, he was irrevocably lost to her—and she broke into vituperation.

"Any man I love is mine!" she screamed. "And if ever you speak to that whitefaced guttersnipe of a flower-girl again, I'll kill not only her, but you!"

Then she broke into tears, and stood twisting her hands.

"I will not only speak to her, but if she'll have me, I will marry her," Smith said quietly, unmoved alike by her threats and tears. "But for Maria—and I'm not certain even then—you might have got me thinking enough of you to— No, I think not! But the *sfregio* finished it, and now I know you for what you are! If I have my way, I'll never see or speak to you again! Giovanni, come to the kiosk tomorrow at noon. If Maria will marry me I'm going to leave Naples. I've got enough of it! I'll give you the kiosk and everything in it for your kindness to her."

And without a backward glance, Smith crossed the street, and strode hastily away through the park.

SULLENLY the woman stood and watched him, still twisting her hands, as if his denunciation had battered her to speechlessness; but when the last sight of him was gone she turned, abruptly aware that Giovanni was still there, leaning back against the sea wall.

"You!" she said. "You have done all this!" And as the virago in her came uppermost again, she called him the foul names and cursed him with the foul curses of the Neapolitan streets. He did not answer, but to show his indifference put his hands behind him, and laughed as he started to lift himself to a seat on the wall.

She sprang toward him, infuriated. Quick as he was he had not time to raise his arms in defense when he saw the flash of a blade; but he found time to seize her in his formidable hands, clutch her by both arms, and lift her as he mounted to the top of the wall. Her screams and the crash of waves blended into one sound, infinitely small and insignificant in that turmoil, as he sprang into the sea. And so tightly had he clung to her that his hold was unbroken when their bodies were found the following day, her stiletto still imbedded in his breast.

The Forest Legion

By

ARTHUR H. CARHART

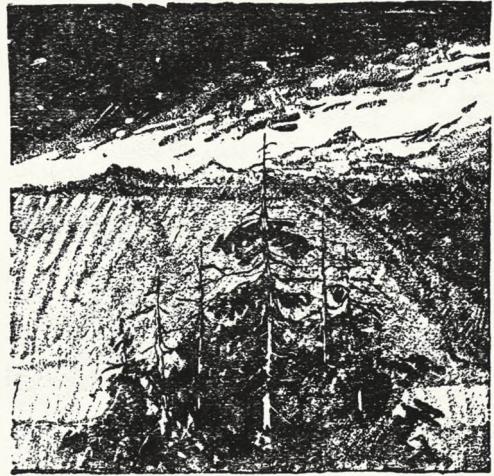
A thrill-filled story of present-day Colorado, by the gifted one-time Forest Ranger who wrote "Bridges Over Purgatory."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

The Story So Far:

THE battle was on—between Bradley Ogden, supervisor of the Pinos Altos National Forest, and the old-guard ranchmen who were bitterly fighting the necessary restrictions placed upon their grazing privileges by the Forest Service. The first shot was fired from ambush—as Ogden was talking with Ranger Tillamook Thompson and the girl who was his clerk, Ted Hathaway. The bullet missed him but killed his favorite horse Silver; and he knew that at the meeting of the cattlemen's association called for the next evening hostilities would be resumed. He was quite correct in this, and gun-play was about to follow the rough-and-tumble effort of the tougher element—Jasper Banks and his two sons, Lucius Moon and others—to “get” the supervisor, when the lamp was knocked over. Afterward older and cooler heads prevailed, but Ogden knew they were now planning some other more effective attack.

And there were complications to his problem: Caverley, his bureaucratic superior, was inclined to give in to the encroaching ranchmen; and he was worried over two other matters: over the possibility of trouble caused by his entrusting a look-out station to Della Gordon, daughter of one of the ranchmen who opposed him; and over the interest shown in Hurley Moon by Ted Hathaway, whom Brad more than liked, though he treated her on a man-to-man basis, and knew that Hurley, like many of



the younger generation, was his friend and on his side in this fight.

At the local Fourth of July rodeo, Ogden distinguished himself by riding a bad horse and won the regard of many; but this intensified the enmity of Ken Banks, whom he defeated in the riding contest and on another occasion when Ken had attempted to make Della Gordon leave her look-out.

The elder Moon called at Ogden's office to protest against Ogden's denial of his claim to certain forest lands; and Ogden had to draw a gun to defend himself. Moon left, promising to shoot Ogden if he ever set foot on the Moon ranch. . . . From Ogden's office Moon went to his son's ranch and demanded Hurley's help in fighting Ogden with a dread weapon—fire. Hurley refused; but—Moon knew of others who would help. (*The story continues in detail:*)

NEXT morning the jangle of the telephone cut into the workaday quiet of Ogden's office, and Della Gordon's excited voice came over the wire.

“Column of smoke in the deep cañon of Cañon Creek,” she reported. “Right in thick timber. Growing bigger every minute.”

“Which way from the Ranger Station?”

“About two miles up the cañon.”

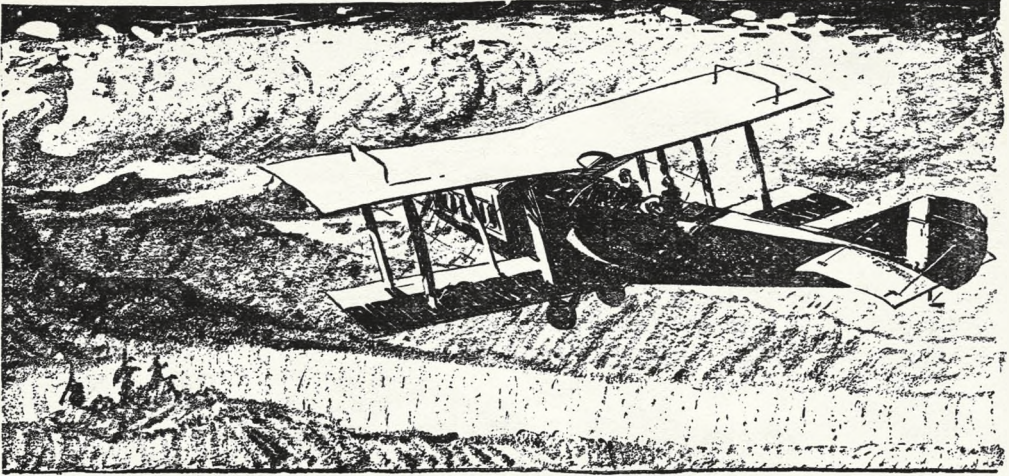
The threat of Lucius Moon leaped into Brad's mind.

“Anything else showing?” he demanded.

“Not a thing,” replied the girl.

“Keep reports coming in,” commanded Brad. “Don't overlook anything in the whole district. If I'm not here, report to Ted.” And he slammed up the receiver.

Then he cranked the telephone, snapped out some numbers. Tillamook answered.



"Got a fire, Tillamook," called Brad.

"That's no news," burst out the ranger. "Been trying to call you. I'm goin' right for it."

"That's the stuff. Need men?"

"Need a whole army if the wind gets blowin' hard out of the hills any more than it is," said Tillamook. "Need some grub, Brad. You comin' out?"

"I'm coming, Tillamook," he assured the ranger. "Looks funny to me that there was no fire last night and a big one this morning," he added.

"There's enough wind this mornin' to make an early mornin' dude camp-fire a big fire by now," replied Tillamook.

"I'll be out right away with the truck and some men and some grub," promised Ogden as he slammed up the receiver.

He hurried to the outer office. Ted had just arrived.

"Call the store, Ted. Tell them to put up the grub for a ten-man crew."

"Fire?" she inquired.

"In Cañon Creek," replied Ogden. "Maybe Moon's struck at us."

Ogden hurried out of the door. The wheels of the well-organized fire-protective system had begun to function.

At the pool-hall Brad found Hal Roberts.

"Fire, Hal," he said briefly. "Can you round up a crew?"

"Reckon," replied the short, heavy-set man, reaching for his coat. "Big one?"

"Maybe," replied Brad. "In a bad place—Cañon Creek."

Hal Roberts trotted away to get fire-fighters. He was what is known as a "key man." Where good fire plans are developed, these key men, who are ranchers, storekeepers, workmen, are located on all

sides of the forest. They are so efficient that they have sighted fires, made up crews, got to the fires and put them out before the forest office knew one was burning.

Ten minutes later Ogden drove the forest truck up to the office building.

"How are things clicking, Ted?" he asked.

"Store said it would have things ready for you in five minutes."

"Anything more from the lookout?"

"Just called in. Reported some one riding up the trail. She says the fire is flogging up stronger than ever. Great column of smoke climbing into the sky."

"Yes, saw that as I came up the street."

Ogden hurried to the back room, loaded his arms with fire-fighting equipment, piled it into the truck. He paused as he picked up the canvas case in which the field forms for a fire crew are always packed ready.

"Don't let anyone carry off the rest of the Pinos Altos while I'm on the fire-line," he said lightly. "Nor steal the office either."

Ted laughed. It was Ogden's usual warning when he left to fight fire. At the moment the old comradeship was strong between them.

"Old office'll be here," she made answer.

"Old forest will be all tacked around the corners and safe when you come back. And—oh, Brad, don't take any chances!"

SOME moments after Ogden disappeared, Ted Hathaway was called to the telephone, by Hurley Moon.

"Brad's gone," she said in answer to his question. "I don't believe I can get him before he leaves town. Big fire in Cañon Creek cañon."

"Where can I head him off?" came Hurley's question.

"What's the matter, Hurley—what's up?"

"It's the Cañon Creek bunch," he called back. "This one fire's just the start. May be twenty more by night. Where can I find Brad?" he demanded again.

"If you can get to the Ranger Station in time, you can catch him," she replied.

Ted heard the telephone receiver click before she could ask any more questions.

CHAPTER XVI

BRAD OGDEN had skidded the rear wheels when he stopped in front of the Hooperville grocery store. He leaped out, hurried in, came out with bundles. Clerks followed, with food enough for ten men for several days.

Into the truck again, down to the Dutchman's restaurant, and another quick stop.

Hal Roberts came hurrying. Others followed.

"These are all I could get, Brad," said Hal. "Old man Ellis cooks, and the kid can help him. Left word with the Dutchman to send on any others he can get."

"*Bueno*. Pile in," commanded Brad.

The men threw their scant bundles into the truck. The Forest Service would supply tents, blankets and other field equipment.

Over the joggling grade-crossing of the rusty railroad, then racing as fast as the laboring truck could travel over the pebbly road, they hurried to meet the red enemy. Like a great yellow-gray plume the smoke-column lifted from Cañon Creek. Ogden knew, as soon as he got a clear view, that he was hurrying to a big fire.

Billowing in great cauliflower-like heads, the life resin of the forest was floating up from where fire gnawed at green timber. Wind currents caught the smoke and swayed it down-cañon, toward Leetsdale.

Fences streaked by. Wind was in Brad's ears. The landscape on the side of the road was blurred. For miles the rattle and roar of the car made it impossible to talk. They passed the road to Leetsdale. The truck swerved into the Cañon Creek road.

A mile above the Ranger Station, Ogden yanked the truck from the main road, followed a woods road that dodged over hummocks and through brushy timber, then came out on the barren shoulder of a ridge sloping sharply to the cañon's depths. He

stopped the truck and leaped out, followed by Roberts and the men.

"There's Tillamook with his gang," cried Roberts, pointing.

Through the gray smoke tendrils, Brad could see men working. Tillamook's big figure moved among them.

"Got any slant on how big this is?" he asked as he reached the side of the ranger.

"Too darned big for this gang," boomed Tillamook. "Maybe thirty acres right now. Growin' like tarnation."

"You trying to get a fire-line down-cañon when the wind's blowing in that direction?"

"Yeh. Not so good. But if we don't hold it, it'll run right into the timber at the edge of the village and then there wont be no more Leetsdale. I couldn't see anything else to do under the circumstances."

Ogden thought a moment. Usual practice is to flank fires—to pinch them in on the sides and not try to stand in their path and hold them. But here was a necessity for putting up a face-to-face fight.

"Go to it," he commanded Tillamook. "And get Hal Roberts here strung out. I'm going back to the Ranger Station for more men."

"We need more—but where kin you get 'em?"

"Maybe from Denver," answered Ogden. "Hannum'll get 'em."

Tillamook looked at the fire through squinting eyes.

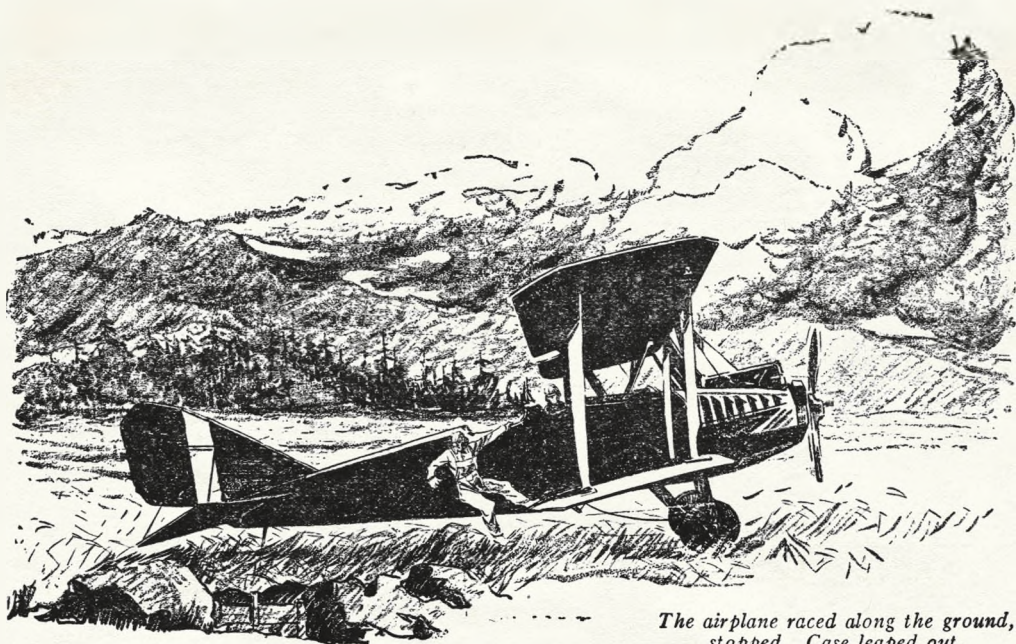
"We're not goin' to be able to hold her, Brad. Get 'em quick."

THE two stood peering at the fire, watching its livid tongues lick into the green timber. The sighing, billowing, *whoo-oo-sh* of the fire in a little spruce as flames whirled up through the dried needles filled their ears. Suddenly Tillamook whirled.

"Say, Brad!" he exclaimed. "Is there a chance to get that new thing they've got in the district office—that portable pump thing?"

"We can't stop this fire with that one portable pump throwing a stream through a two-inch hose."

"No, sure not. But if this danged fire gets away from us that would be mighty effective to have at Leetsdale to save the town. I think maybe it could save the buildings. Get water from Cañon Creek or one of the irrigation ditches. You can just bet that this fire is goin' to get out of our hands if the wind does whip down-cañon any harder."



The airplane raced along the ground, stopped. Case leaped out.

"But how in Sam Hill can I get that pump here from Denver in time to do any good?" demanded Ogden.

"Heck," exploded Tillamook. "Maybe I thought the darned thing had wings! Cain't get it by train afore tomorrow—nor by auto before early afternoon. Too late then!"

"Wings!" cried Brad. "Wings, you old son-of-a-gun! Get that line down there as tight as you can. Get set to hold this fire for another hour and a half. Then let the fire bust across the line. By gosh, we'll save Leetsdale!"

Ogden ran up the hill, clambered into the truck, raced it in low gear as it clawed up into the faint road.

Tillamook, half comprehending what Brad had in his mind, hurried back to the fire, stopped to take a chew of tobacco, then headed a driving attack on the fire-line.

Bounding, bumping, skidding on the turns, Ogden raced the truck until he swung it sharply into the yard of the Ranger Station. As he crossed the bridge, he saw two horsemen at the station—Hurley Moon and his ranch-hand.

"Hi, Brad," yelled Hurley, coming forward on a dog trot. "Lookin' for you!"

"What's up, Hurley?"

"Fire."

"We've got a crew on it," replied Ogden.

"No, you don't get me," said Hurley. "Listen here to what my old man said yesterday."

Hurley poured out to Brad Ogden the threats that Lucius Moon had made at the T. K. ranch both against Hurley and against the Forest Service. The forester's eyes closed tighter and tighter and his lips pulled back more and more from his teeth.

"I think that the stunt is to get this one fire going, pull you to that, then burn up that whole country while your hands are full with this," concluded Hurley.

Ogden nodded.

"One thing more, Brad," said Hurley as he was about to leap into the saddle. "Don't set foot on the old man's ranch. He'll kill you."

"So he said."

"Honest," exclaimed Hurley. "He means it. No fooling. If you love your life, don't get on his place—he'll shoot!"

Ogden nodded. Hurley paused, then jumped into the saddle.

"Wish I could help," said Hurley. "But I can't. I've got to shove my whitefaces over into the Grape Creek country before that fire pops."

"Fly at it, Hurley. I suppose I could commandeer you, but I wont; not under the circumstances." Brad Ogden grinned a little as he referred to his right to draft men into fire-fighting.

A MOMENT later Brad spun the crank on the station telephone. Central answered.

"Give me the forest office at Denver. Step on it," he commanded.

He could hear the whirring of the telephone ringing, the calling of numbers by the operators. A girl in the district office in Denver answered.

"Give me anyone in Operation," commanded Brad. "Quick!"

A second passed.

"Yes?" called a voice over the wire that Ogden recognized.

"This is Brad Ogden, Hannum," said Brad. "Got a whoppin' fire in Cañon Creek. Got to have a hundred men. Cañon Creekers are planning to set fire to the whole forest."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Hannum. "Where are you now, Brad?"

"Cañon Creek Ranger Station. Can you send those men today?"

"You bet. Anything more?" asked Hannum.

"Yeh. Send that portable fire pump and about a thousand feet of hose. Fire's threatenin' Leetsdale. We can save the town with that pump."

"I'll send it express."

"Express! Not by a darned sight. Send that by airplane!"

"What? Say, Brad, what's—"

"Don't argue, Hannum. Express wont get here before too late. You call Case at the Mile High Airport. Tell him to get out his big passenger plane. You get that pump out to him. Tell him what we're up against. Case knew me in France. Tell him to step on it."

"Can he land there?"

"Yes, a meadow below Leetsdale about a mile. I'll be there waiting for him with a truck. Tell him to fly to Hooperville, following the railway. Then head almost straight west."

"*Bueno*," came Hannum's reply over the wire. "If he's got room, I'm coming too."

"Fine," called Brad.

HE slammed up the receiver, whirred the telephone again, calling the forest office in Hooperville. Ted answered.

"Has the lookout called in again, Ted?" he asked.

"I've been trying to get her," said Ted anxiously. "No answer at all."

"That's bad," replied Brad. He thought a moment. Then he spoke in quick sharp sentences:

"Big fight's started, Ted. Hurley's warned me. Those renegade cowmen have started this fire to keep us busy. Plan to fire the whole lodgepole. Got to block 'em.

Got to have a lookout. Got to! I've phoned Hannum for a hundred men. I've got to meet Case, the airplane man. He's bringing the portable pump outfit down in his ship. I can't run up to the lookout now. It's up to you, Ted. *See that some one's on that lookout.* If you can't get an answer from Della, get some one up there quick. Will you?"

"Yes. But where can I get anyone that we can put up there?"

"Listen, old scout—that's up to you! Get some one; anyone that we can trust. Try Duran—or maybe Rankin."

"All right, old-timer," came Ted's voice over the wire.

"That's the girl!" called Ogden. "That's the old spirit."

"Don't worry, Brad," she said, her voice with a touch of banter in it. "I'll shoot when I see the whites of their eyes. You can fire when ready, Gridley. Give me liberty or give me—"

"Stop joking," cut in Ogden. "Moon's starting to burn up the whole forest. Can't you savvy that?"

"Say, who's joking?" snapped back Ted sharply. "Now get back to that fire."

The receiver clicked in the forest office and Ogden hurried out of the Ranger Station. He knew Ted would carry out orders against all odds.

GLANCING at his watch, Ogden headed the truck back toward the fire. He had forty minutes before Case would come swooping in. More flames were licking through the smoke shroud as he pulled the truck up sharply. Old man Ellis, the cook, had rigged up a tiny field-kitchen with the portable stove and the coffee was already simmering.

Down the side of the hill through the first curtains of the gray smoke, Ogden ran. He almost bumped into a stocky figure coming from the opposite direction.

"You better get on the job," boomed a familiar voice.

"Tim Tadlock, you darned old smoke-chaser, how did you get here?" exclaimed Ogden as he paused in his hurried trot.

"Heard there was something big foggin' up here," said Tim grinning. "Dirty fire. They say it was set by them cattlemen that we tangled with at the rodeo. Couldn't keep me out of it after I learned that.

"I've been trying to locate that big ranger fellow to find where I could fit in best—"

"Tim," Ogden broke in, "I've got a job for you. Not so much work as fighting fire. It may be more excitement."

"Tell me what," replied the old cow-puncher.

"Our lookout's not answered the forest office for most of an hour. Maybe something crooked. She's the daughter of one of these Cañon Creekers."

"You mean she—"

"I mean nothing. I don't know. She may have quit. May not. I don't care a damn. Moon's trying to burn up the whole country. We're goin' to whip him! How you come here, Tim?"

"Flivver."

"Get to it. Go up the road. Turn off in the open meadow about two miles above the Moon ranch, get to the lookout. Call in to the forest office as soon as you can get there. Tell Ted that you are on the job. Then keep her posted so I can get back to the Ranger Station occasionally and know what is going on. Now beat it. Savvy what's up?"

Tim nodded as he hurried away up the slope. Brad saw him hitching his gun-belt around as he disappeared.

Tillamook came out of the foggy smoke coughing.

"What's moving, Tillamook?" inquired Brad.

"We seem to be gettin' some'eres," replied the ranger. "Wind aint suckin' so hard down in the bottom of the cañon. We may be able to hold her."

"Don't need the pump now?"

"Not to save Leetsdale."

Quickly Ogden told of his meeting with Hurley Moon. The big ranger was talking to himself as Brad finished, big whole-hearted curses pouring out from his wide tobacco-stained lips.

"We'll lick 'em, by Jupiter!" exploded Tillamook. "Tell me what to do here, Brad. I want to finish here and get up there to head 'em off."

"Hold this fire-line. Drive these boys into it. I'm going down to meet Case."

Ogden scrambled back up the hill, stopped a moment to talk to old man Ellis, jumped into the truck. A short time later he turned the truck into an alfalfa meadow where the second cutting of the hay had just been stacked. It was not an ideal landing-field, but it could serve.

In his excitement and hurry, Ogden neglected to stop at the Ranger Station and tell Ted that Tim Tadlock was on his way

to the lookout. He figured Tim would be calling in to Ted soon anyway.

Minutes dragged. With all of the gigantic plot to burn up a whole ranger district, Brad had to wait for the reinforcements winging out of the sky. The gigantic plume of the gray-buff smoke was not now stretching out as a canopy over Leetsdale. The wind had quieted. Tillamook might be able to pinch the fire in the cañon almost where it stood.

A puff of wind hit Ogden in the face, then a long sighing breeze hurried by. He turned his face eastward.

The wind had changed and was starting to blow up-cañon!

CHAPTER XVII

IN the forest office Ted Hathaway started calling help for the fire lookout immediately after her talk with Brad.

"I wish I could," Rankin had said. "But I can't. The doctor wont even let me come downtown."

Duran was away from town.

Ted slammed up the receiver, tried to call directly to the fire lookout. No answer came. The line ran heavy and dead.

Ted tried to call the ranger station at Cañon Creek. Brad Ogden had already left.

She tried again to get through to the lookout, then called old Steve Benson, a retired ranger living in Hooperville on a meager Forest Service pension. Briefly Ted outlined the situation to the old ranger: a big fire popping, a fight with renegade cattlemen; the forest was threatened!

"I'll be right down," he said. "I can't get on the fire-line. Old body'll not stand it. But I'll help where I can, Miss Ted."

Steve arrived at the office puffing and wheezing, and dropped into a chair. Five years before, he had injured his old heart by fighting a fire with a tiny crew for forty-eight hours, taking the brunt of the flame's attack, killing the fire and then collapsing. If Steve Benson tried to go to the fire lookout, he faced prolonged sickness or perhaps death.

Ted talked rapidly; Steve, his hand trembling and his eyes blinking, sat nodding agreement. He had worked several winters in the office on detail.

"Try the lookout every few minutes," advised Ted. "Keep trying. I'm going up there to find out what's happened to

Della, and run that lookout until this trouble's over."

Ted was hurrying from the door as she finished. She ran to Bashford's boarding-house, dashed upstairs and threw clothes helter-skelter as she changed into her hill outfit. Then she trotted to the garage, looked at the gasoline and climbed into the seat of the Trail-blazer. A few seconds later the car roared out of the Bashford yard.

The flaunting challenge of smoke-banners caught her eye as she cleared town. All the fighting blood in her tingled as she hurried to do her part.

THE road climbed; the old Trail-blazer labored. Ted passed the point where the fire was lifting almost straight into the air in the gray-buff hell-fog of flame-splashed smoke. Open ground bordered the road at first. Then it passed through a mile of timber that reached solidly down into the cañon. If the wind should change, this timber would be caught in the talons of the fire. She kept on all of the speed the old car could muster and went churning up over the dry ridge beyond. After the climb, the car swooped down into the valley where Moon's ranch lay at the edge of the meadow above the Keyhole.

The road whipped in between thick timber as it left the ranch meadow. That timber extended solidly to the ranch buildings, then frayed out on the rocky ridge above the Keyhole. Ted came to a grade, threw in second gear, topped the ridge. The car plunged downward.

The next instant shrilling, squealing brakes gripped the plunging roadster. In front of the car, appearing suddenly as though by magic, were two horsemen. The horses plunged in wild hurtling leaps. The men yelled.

Ted tugged with all the strength of her strong young arms at the emergency-brake; her rigid legs threw all her power into the foot-brake. The car slewed forward. A collision seemed inevitable.

Ted yanked the wheel; the Trail-blazer left the road, crashed into a rotten log, plowed through willow brush for a rod, then stopped.

One of the horsemen came running—Hurley Moon.

"Ted!" he exclaimed. "What you doing up here?"

"Going to that fire lookout," she replied a bit weakly.

"Why the big rush?"

"Lookout hasn't answered for an hour," replied Ted. "Something's gone wrong. Some one *must* be up there."

"No place for you, Ted, with this fight breaking."

"I can't get anyone else we can depend on. It's critical, Hurley."

Hurley had a quick vision of the whole Lodgepole section, a sea of hell, with Ted caught on the island rock of Noddle Head.

"Ted, you can't go," he cried.

"What'll stop me?"

"Why, Ted, they're going to fire this whole section. Noddle Head will be in the center of a ring of fire. You'll be a prisoner there—maybe suffocate or burn. You mustn't go!"

Fear for her showed plainly on Hurley's face. Ted visioned those leaping flames, eating the heart out of the big timber in the cañon. In that instant, the girl fully realized the test which might lie before her.

"But I promised Brad there'd be some one on the job, Hurley."

"I can go!"

"Where were you going now? To get your cattle out of the Lodgepole range?"

"I can let the cattle go."

"And lose them?"

"Yes."

"Nothing doing!"

She stepped on the starter; the car backed out of the brush.

"Ted!" pleaded Hurley. "Come, *amiga*, let me take the risk!"

There was a catch in her throat as she replied:

"Sorry, Hurley. I'm part of the Forest force. This is my job."

The car roared. Hurley ran a few steps, shouted, then stood watching the car fog away in a dust-cloud.

He hurried back to his horse.

"You go on, Bud," he commanded the cow-hand. "Grab any of the boys at the cow-camp. Get those whitefaces of mine out of the country. Shove 'em—shove 'em hard. If you can't make it before hell pops, I'm a goner. I'm going over the short-cut trail to the fire lookout."

CHAPTER XVIII

AT the end of the twisting road Ted stopped the Trail-blazer abruptly. She leaped out, raced by a battered flivver



Through the gray tendrils of smoke Brad could see men working, Tillamook's big figure moving among them.

standing near the corral, gave it a quick glance, wondered with swift apprehension if it belonged to some of the Cañon Creek people, then trotted to the cabin at the foot of the cliffs; it was orderly and empty.

Ted hurried up the crude steps to the fire lookout, and looked back to the cañon. New smoke was surging up. The wind was coming up-cañon. The fire whipped toward the Keyhole.

Ted went inside the lookout house; Della was absent. Then she tried the telephone. It was dead.

She picked up the glasses, looked at Moon's ranch. There was a light haze of forest smoke around the Keyhole. She swept the forest with the glasses. No tell-tale plume of smoke showed at any new point.

Ted rang the phone again; still dead! She hurried out, trotted down the rickety stairs, dug under the car seat, pulled out a pair of pliers and a screwdriver. Ted knew enough about forest telephones to be able to make field repairs.

Up in the lookout again, she started tinkering at the telephone. Connections there seemed all right. She gave the dead phone a final whirl, then raced down the stairway and started along the telephone line in search of breaks.

For a hundred rods the trail followed the

line. She was soon breathless, and slowed to a walk.

A sudden twang, the quick rattle of vibrating wire, and then voices ahead made her stop, seek shelter behind rocks, and then work forward cautiously.

BRAD OGDEN, waiting impatiently for Case and his plane, filled his pipe and struck a match. The wind blew it out.

Ogden glanced toward the smoke-column. It was climbing into the heavens away from Leetsdale. Tillamook would have to change his campaign, get up-cañon and start to pinch in.

Again the wind came hammering by, riding on quick wings. Brad gazed at the smoke column, the rushing wind in his ears; and finally he gave way to that urgent fire-call. He climbed into the truck, put his foot on the starter.

Then came a new sound. Ogden looked toward the north and east. The airplane was swooping toward Leetsdale.

Brad leaped from the truck as the plane dipped, swished by not a hundred feet up, ripped along toward Leetsdale, then turned and came swinging back, heading into the wind.

Daintily it raced along the ground, bumped over some tiny hidden irrigation ditches, stopped.

Case leaped out, followed by the helmeted figure of Hannum.

Case, boyish, browned, encased in helmet and with emergency parachute strapped on, stuck out his hand as Ogden ran forward.

"Hello," he cried. "What's this wild-goose chase?"

"Hello, Brad," greeted Hannum, wriggling out of his parachute straps. "There's your portable pump!"—indicating a compact crate strapped beside the body of the plane. "We're ready to make a dash to the fire and save the town."

"Don't need to save the town now," said Ogden. "Wind's changed. When I talked to you, it looked as if Leetsdale was sure to be wiped out. Now the fire is heading the opposite direction."

"What you going to do now, Case?" asked Hannum, turning to the aviator.

"Any excitement at the fire?"

"You want excitement?" asked Ogden, his eyes squinting humorously.

"You know it," countered Case. "I've never seen a real forest fire."

"Come on, then."

WITH Hannum and Case holding with all their might to the truck, Ogden drove it back to the fire. He ran it into the opening near the fire-line, stopped. Brad had been thinking of his method of attack on the fire all the time he had been waiting for Case. He was ready to throw such forces as he had into the most strategic point.

And that point was the Keyhole at Moon's.

With the fire sucking up the cañon, through the thick resinous timber, with barren benches on either side, with the barren ridges flanking the Keyhole, Ogden knew that here was one point where he could pocket this fire. Only the strip of timber in the bottom of the Keyhole could carry the fire through this rock gateway into the pines beyond.

That he must go directly over Moon's ranch to get to the Keyhole, that Lucius Moon might be there, did not enter his mind at the moment.

"Hey, Tillamook," he yelled as he hurried down the slope. "Bring five or six men. Leave Hal Roberts in charge. We're goin' up to the Keyhole."

Tillamook loped away to get his men. A few moments later, grimed by their battle with the fire, sweaty, tired, but ready for

more battle, the men came, piled into the truck. Ogden put the truck in low gear and let it grind back to the road.

For a mile the road skirted the upper benches of the cañon. There was no timber within a hundred rods of this part of the road.

The wind was stronger now, and was blowing smoke up the side of the cañon so thick there were points at which Ogden could not see ahead more than a hundred yards. Timber grew closer to the road. They were entering the stretch of solid timber that crossed the road.

A hot breath whipped over the truck.

"That feels like fire," commented Hannum.

"I'm going to investigate," said Ogden as he stopped the car. "This timber extends all the way down into the cañon."

With Tillamook, he hurried up the road. Case, followed by Hannum, came trotting after them. All were coughing from the biting smoke.

"Better take some other way around, Brad," admonished Hannum.

"No other way around," said Brad shortly. "There's a road, but it's forty miles. If we can't get through here, we're sunk."

They plunged ahead a few rods farther. An angry red flame showed between the trees down the slope. It was leaping as its own draft fanned it.

Ogden stopped. Hannum came to his side.

"You can't risk those men, Brad," he said. "That fire'll be over the road before we can get back to the truck."

Ogden hesitated, took a step forward.

"Come out of it, Brad," commanded Hannum. "It's got you blocked."

He took Ogden roughly by the shoulder, whirled him until he faced down-cañon, then urged him back toward the truck.

A quick sighing roar came to their ears. A hot breath sifted through the timber. Stooping, coughing, running as much as they could, they were driven back along the road. Hot sparks showered them. Thick bewildering smoke billowed around until suddenly the dim form of the truck appeared.

Ogden stopped, looked back. To his ears came the angry sighing breath of the fire as it engulfed the young timber bordering the road.

He was thankful he had not tried to take his men into that maw of fire. There is

one big command to the forest-fighter that stands supreme above his orders to break the fire. And that is not to lose his men.

"That was a bit close," remarked Case as he wiped a grimy sweaty brow.

"Hell's no strange country for us," remarked Tillamook sourly.

FOR a moment, Brad Ogden tasted defeat. The turn of that fire now blocked the road over which he could get in supplies and more men to fight fire in the upper country. He turned on Tillamook.

"We'll go on foot over this ridge. Get to the Keyhole that way."

"Never in time, Brad," replied Tillamook soberly. "We'd have to fly if we got there in time now. It's three miles—"

"Hey, Case!" broke in Brad; —"here, Tillamook," he continued. "You take these men. Take tools. Get up there as quick as you can. Hannum, you go along if you want to stand that punishment."

Ogden hurried to the truck and threw tools on the ground.

"Pile into the truck, Case. I'm goin' to jump on that fire by myself! Parachutes—one on me, one on that pump. With the pump I can hold the Keyhole until Tillamook gets there. Come on, there, snap out of it!" He sprang to the seat of the truck.

"You're crazy, Brad!" exclaimed Tillamook.

"Crazy as a cow," yelled Ogden. "You get going!"

Twelve minutes later he stopped the steaming truck beside the big airplane.

"Got my idea, haven't you, Case?" he inquired.

"Yes. Could I land?"

"Eight thousand feet. Wind," replied Ogden.

"No chance!"

"It'll have to be chutes," said Ogden.

"Ever jumped in one?" asked Case.

Ogden shook his head.

"Nothing to it," said Case, matter of fact. "Jump clear of the plane, count five religiously, pull the rip-cord, and then you're sailin' down. Here, get into this harness. Any good place to land a chute?"

"Big meadow."

As they talked, Case helped Brad into the harness that would hold the chute above his body.

The aviator was lashing the parachute to the pump crate before Brad had finished. They worked quickly. The parachute on the crate was arranged so

that Brad could pull a rope almost before the crate left the plane and open the big umbrella. The hose, a thousand feet of it, was stored where Brad could throw it out without any parachute.

"Let's go," commanded Ogden.

A bumping, leaping run into the face of the wind, and then the great plane was headed for the rimrock cliffs that encircled the valley on the east. Case banked, headed back toward the fire, climbed. The Forest man looked, trying to see Tillamook and the men. He knew that it would take at least an hour for Tillamook to come over the dry ridge to Keyhole.

Suddenly there was quiet as Case cut off the motor.

"Got to get more height," yelled Case. Then the roar of the motor cut in again. They headed back into the wind.

Case pointed to the meadow at Moon's. Ogden nodded. The plane straightened out, sailed easily over the meadow. Brad held up the end of the hose, and Case gave the signal.

Writhing like a giant angle-worm, the hose slithered from the plane, looped in the sky, twisted and turned, made queer designs in the air, then curled up near the lower end of the meadow.

Brad reached for the cord that held the crate around the pump, and jerked the knot loose. The crate slid off. Brad held the pull-cord a moment, and almost as he let go, he saw the billowing cloud of the parachute leap out and float away from the plane.

Case threw the plane into a bank, climbed a little, came ripping back through the wind. Ogden climbed out on the wing. The plane circled over the lower end of Moon's meadow. Ogden looked at Case. His friend was grinning and nodding.

Ogden glanced at the green carpet of grass and trees below. He knew that there were pinnacles and stubs of old fire-killed timber which would impale a man if he alighted on them. And there was the chance of the parachute not opening. All this flashed instantly through his mind. Then he saw the fire charging up the cañon in great battalions of flame and smoke.

Ogden waved his hand. The plane tilted a little more. With hand gripping the rip-cord, he leaped.

Wind rushed in his ears. The roar of the plane seemed to fall away.

"One — two — three — four!" Brad counted.

His hand gripped the cord desperately. In half panic he almost pulled. It was hard to get that last number out.

"Five!" he yelled as he pulled, and suddenly heard himself. He felt the harness leap taut as the great umbrella of white fabric caught the air.

He seemed floating still, with a slight rocking motion. The earth was rising toward him. He saw the eighty-pound pump-outfit settle daintily as a bird in a little thicket of lodgepole, and knew that that piece of equipment was safe. Then—

A jarring thud as he struck the ground himself. The next instant he was pawing his way out from under the enveloping folds of the parachute.

CHAPTER XIX

THE instant tingle of fear that had touched Ted Hathaway as she crouched in hiding passed. Again the telephone line twanged and rattled.

She crept ahead, rather expecting to see some of the Cañon Creek cattlemen. But instead, there in the trail, her hair tousled, a livid scratch on her face, with shirt torn partly from her shoulder, stood Della Gordon. Tim Tadlock, with a pair of climbers strapped to his feet, perched on one of the tree-poles, mending a break.

"Ken Banks cut the wire," explained Della briefly. "He rode up after I talked to you this morning, threatened me again. He cut this on the way out—seven places!"

"He sure did a job of it," rumbled Tim. "This lady had all but three of 'em fixed afore I arrived. This is the last one."

"So that's where you were," observed Ted, a little touch of approval in her voice.

Della glanced at her curiously.

"You thought I'd deserted when you couldn't telephone, didn't you?" she asked.

"Why, I thought—"

"I can't blame you for thinkin' that," said the other girl a little bitterly. "It's been talked about times enough."

"No one will ever say that again," Ted assured her. "They're trying to ruin Brad Ogden. Anyone who fights on his side is my friend."

Hesitating at first, then with a quick smile, Della slipped her arm around Ted's slim waist.

Tim came scrambling down.

"Let's hurry back," he growled. "That ought to put the line in shape."

BEFORE they reached the crow's-nest, they could hear the furious ringing of the telephone, and they ran up the steps.

"I wonder what's the best move now," said Ted to Tim as Della answered Steve Benson's call. "There's no need of all of us staying here."

Before Tim could answer, there was the sound of racing hoofs and Sox, carrying Hurley Moon, loped into the yard. Hurley leaped off and rapidly climbed up the stairs.

"Ted," he called anxiously. "Oh, Ted!"

"Why aren't you out trying to drive those cattle of yours out of danger?" demanded Ted. "Why did you come here?"

"You know," he said impulsively. "You can't stay here. You better get out too, Della. There's danger."

"Yes, I know, Hurley," replied Della. "Ken was up here early this morning threatening all Forest people."

"You stayed on the job knowing what was up?"

She nodded.

"Bully girl!" he said briefly. "But now let's get you both out of this upper Lodgepole basin."

"Look," cried Tim, pointing. A thin puff of smoke had started piling into the sky near a spur of the main Lodgepole ridge beyond the Moon ranch.

Ted rang the telephone hurriedly.

"Fire on the old woods road about a mile west of Moon's, Steve," she said. "Get Carmody. Tell him to come right over the ridge. Tell him to wear his gun."

"It's no use," exploded Hurley as she hung up the receiver. "No force of men can stop those fires if they set all they plan on. The flames will whip through here like wind. You two girls have got to get to safety."

Tim started to add his protest.

Ted whirled on him quickly. "You go back to the fire, Tim Tadlock," she ordered. "Hurley, you go out after your cattle. Della Gordon and I are both members of the Forest Service. We're not going to quit!"

She took up the glasses and looked at the new fire. Her exclamation caused the others to peer at the point where the glasses were trained.

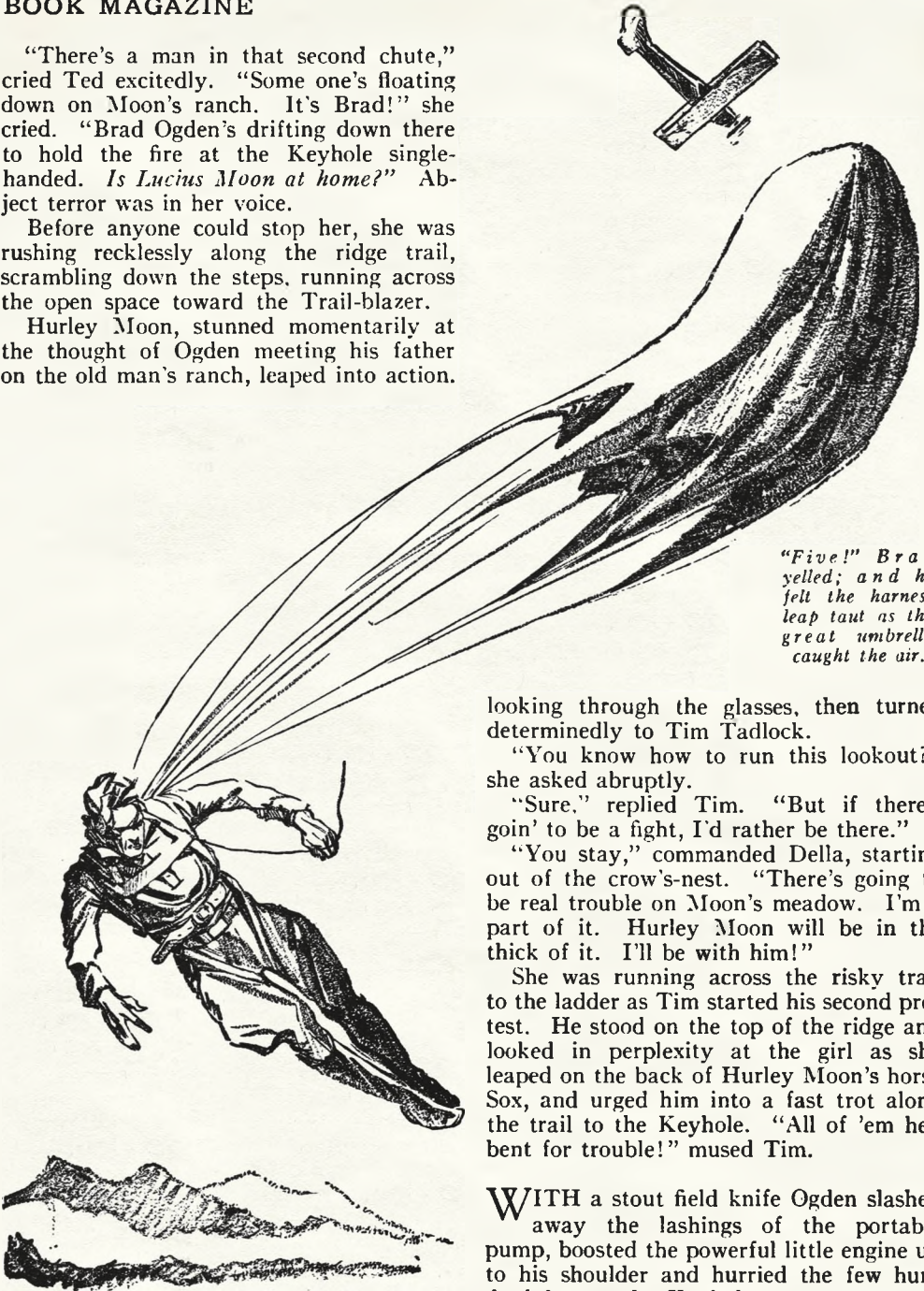
They all saw the plane carrying Ogden and the portable pump hovering over Moon's meadows. As they caught sight of it, the first parachute swelled out in the sky, swayed, sailed down. The other, carrying Ogden, followed.

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"There's a man in that second chute," cried Ted excitedly. "Some one's floating down on Moon's ranch. It's Brad!" she cried. "Brad Ogden's drifting down there to hold the fire at the Keyhole single-handed. *Is Lucius Moon at home?*" Abject terror was in her voice.

Before anyone could stop her, she was rushing recklessly along the ridge trail, scrambling down the steps, running across the open space toward the Trail-blazer.

Hurley Moon, stunned momentarily at the thought of Ogden meeting his father on the old man's ranch, leaped into action.



"Five!" Brad yelled; and he felt the harness leap taut as the great umbrella caught the air.

looking through the glasses, then turned determinedly to Tim Tadlock.

"You know how to run this lookout?" she asked abruptly.

"Sure," replied Tim. "But if there's goin' to be a fight, I'd rather be there."

"You stay," commanded Della, starting out of the crow's-nest. "There's going to be real trouble on Moon's meadow. I'm a part of it. Hurley Moon will be in the thick of it. I'll be with him!"

She was running across the risky trail to the ladder as Tim started his second protest. He stood on the top of the ridge and looked in perplexity at the girl as she leaped on the back of Hurley Moon's horse Sox, and urged him into a fast trot along the trail to the Keyhole. "All of 'em hell bent for trouble!" mused Tim.

WITH a stout field knife Ogden slashed away the lashings of the portable pump, boosted the powerful little engine up to his shoulder and hurried the few hundred feet to the Keyhole.

Picking out a pool where he could drop the intake, he swiftly undid the fastenings, then hurried over to the hose. He hauled it through the long grass, attached it. The pump outfit was ready. He straightened, cast a critical eye at the forest in the Keyhole, then started on a run for Moon's ranch-house.

Ted alone could not stop old Moon from killing Ogden. As the Trail-blazer roared out of the clearing, careened down the first pitch, spun around a turn, scraping a giant boulder in its hurtling course, Hurley held on breathlessly and hoped that they would get there, and in time!

In the fire lookout, Della Gordon stood

For Ogden knew that even with such a potent fire-killer as the pump he could not hold the line unless there was a cleared space. Thick timber would prevent even a powerful stream of water from penetrating far.

He stumbled as he hit an old beaver-channel hidden in meadow grass. He came to grayed corrals, hurried through a pole gate, ran toward a shed.

The door was open. He sprang inside, grabbed a shovel and an old ax, and started around the corner of the shed.

Only a quick stop saved him from crashing into Lucius Moon.

"You!" Moon roared. "You whelp of a forester! Yo're on my ranch! I'll knock the living daylights out of you!"

With hands clenched the old man charged.

"Get back there, Moon," said Ogden, brandishing the ax. "I'm here to fight fire, not to quarrel."

"I told you not to set foot on this ranch!" screamed Moon.

Cursing, threatening, the old man followed Ogden as he dashed toward the corral, back to where the fire sent long shoots of hot smoke through the Keyhole.

They passed the corral, came to the gate. Ogden leaped through, slammed the gate in Moon's face. Then he glanced back. Lucius Moon was running to the house!

Ogden knew that he would come back armed. He himself had his automatic in his belt, but Moon would have his high-powered rifle, and could shoot from a distance.

Ducking, hurrying, back toward where the fire flickered and sang its song of death, he ran on.

A door slammed. A woman screamed. Then Ogden heard only the sucking of the draft and chortling flames below the Keyhole.

Except for that horrible sound, sudden deathly stillness fell on the meadows. Again there was a woman's voice crying frantically. Ogden knew that it was Hurley's mother begging old Moon not to shoot.

He dived ahead, swerved, dodged.

Whining, the bullet came. The galloping report of a high-powered rifle slapped through the air.

Brad Ogden threw up his arms, pitched face downward in the long grass of the meadow.

In new ecstasy, the flame chorus howled in the cañon below the Keyhole.

A GROUP of riders in range clothes, on horses that were sweat-flecked, came trotting along a woods road into a clearing a mile northwest of Moon's ranch, Eli Gordon in the lead. Back of them waved the thin smoke-plume of the new fire.

They had crossed but a part of the tiny open space when two riders came spurring up beside him, halted—Jap Banks and his son Ken.

"Whoa up, Eli!" commanded Jap.

"What's wrong?" demanded Gordon.

"We're not goin' no further," swore Jap Banks. "Moon'll have to find us. We're not goin' to his ranch."

"Why not?"

"I'm not so damned sure old Moon aint deserted," growled Banks.

"But wasn't it his idea to start that fire in the cañon?" demanded Eli Gordon.

"Maybe," admitted Banks. "Maybe so. But I think Moon's damned near half converted to this Forest drivel. Why aint he here? Why didn't he meet us at the sawmill? What's holdin' him?"

"How should I know?" snapped Gordon.

"Maybe yo're partly converted yoreself," sneered Banks, showing his teeth. "Yore gal's on the lookout, wont listen to reason. You don't seem so darned anxious to get goin'. You gettin' cold feet?"

"Hold your tongue. Shut yore damned yappin'!" exclaimed Gordon angrily. "You've done nothin' but try to pick trouble ever since we started. I'm goin' on over to Moon's. Yo're goin' too, all of you!"

"The hell you say," flamed Ken Banks. "We're goin' to set fire to this damned forest and clear it off. We're goin'—"

HE stopped suddenly. All eyes focused on Gordon. His face was pasty, his eyes narrow; sweat stood on his forehead. In his slightly trembling hand was his old-fashioned six-gun slowly swinging from one to the other. Not one of the group doubted his readiness to shoot.

"Get in that trail," he commanded. "Head toward Moon's. I'm goin' to see that my little girl aint in danger afore another fire is set. I don't care a damn about the forest. I'm ready to throw in and help you clean off the whole country, but I aint goin' to take no chances injurin' my kid."

"You've thrown us over," howled Ken Banks. "Yo're slippin', turnin' to the enemy. Della had her chance. When the

fire gets goin', she'll get down to the plains. She wont stay up there. Come on."

"I know different," snapped Eli Gordon. "That kid of mine wont quit anything that she sets out to do. I aint takin' no chances, I tell you. Soon as I know she's safe, I'll go. But not until then. Now get in the trail ahead, all of you. Git!"

Slowly the group ranged in pairs, following the tracks of the overgrown road, with Gordon in the rear, they started at a trot for Moon's ranch.

PEERING fearfully into the grass where he had seen Brad Ogden drop, Lucius Moon edged forward. He reached the spot—yes, there was the place where Brad's falling body had broken down the grasses; there were the ax and shovel. But he did not see that ghastly thing which would have made of Lucius Moon a murderer!

He took a pace, slowly, cautiously, driven on by irresistible forces, yet fearing he might find his victim. He took another hesitant step, holding his rifle ready, knowing not what might rise out of the meadow before him. And then—

A sharp commanding voice seemed to spring out of the ground behind him.

"Drop that gun, Moon," ordered Ogden as he leaped forward. "Quick. Quick, blast you! Drop it!"

Moon's palsied fingers released the gun as he slowly, wonderingly turned.

The forester was striding toward him, apparently unscathed, his automatic covering Moon.

"Didn't expect me to leap out of the grave all in one piece, did you?" said Ogden, grinning grimly. "Well, I fell in the grass to bluff you, then crawled back and got the drop.

"And now—I'm going to make you work for the Forest Service!"

Brad was grinning, his teeth flashed.

"I've preached. I've tried argument. I've tried to be reasonable. But there's been no reason in you. Now I'm going to hammer some coöperation into you, Moon, so help me!"

Ogden reached the older man's side, picked up the rifle, glanced to see that he was unarmed otherwise, then threw the rifle into the creek.

"Pick up that shovel and ax," Ogden commanded.

Moon reached down, growling, picked up the tools.

"Now get in front of me. March," directed Ogden.

"You'll have a hell of a time makin' me!"

Ogden leaped.

He faced Moon toward the fire. He sank his fingers into the ranchman's shoulders and shoved him toward the fire.

Moon twisted, tried to break the grip, as Ogden propelled him in a stumbling run. In desperation, Moon threw down the tools. Ogden stopped.

"Pick those up," he ordered.

"Make me," challenged Moon.

Suddenly Moon was caught in a grip that was stupefying in its intensity. His head rocked backward and forward. Ogden's voice was in his ear.

"You old sinner! You old renegade! I've stood your foolin' long enough. Now—now—you're goin' to—get a lesson that you'll—carry to your grave!"

Moon slipped loose, rushed at Ogden; but the forester's open hand caught his chin, shoved him back. Ogden did not strike him, but he was roughing old Lucius Moon until the rancher was bewildered by the vehemence of the attack.

"Now—" panted Ogden, "you—pick up those—tools. I'll use—fists—next—time. Quick—pick them up, darn you, Moon!"

Moon, stubborn, but nonplused, cowed by Ogden's ferocity, stooped over, picked up the shovel and ax.

"Over there. To the right," commanded Ogden.

They started off in a quick walk, Moon reeling a little. They reached the edge of the thick young timber at a point where Ogden had planned to drive a fire-line from the meadow's edge to the barren rocky ridge beyond.

"Cut through this," directed Ogden. "I'll make a good fire-fighter out of you if I don't kill you first, Moon," he promised.

THE older man snarled, raised the ax, attacked the young pine.

Ogden leaped into the work, scraping, digging, working a pathway through the duff of the forest floor until he struck gravel. Sweat dripped from their faces. The hot breeze from the cañon fanned their cheeks; they could hear the fearsome sounds of the fire.

Moon straightened up to relieve the ache in his old muscles—then suddenly threw down the ax.

"I'm not goin' to do this," he roared.

"You can't make me. You've no authority. You've no right. This is on my property. You get off. You get off my place or I'll have the law on you!"

Ogden took one long jump to where Moon stood, and caught Moon's wrists in a crushing grip.

"If you want law, Moon, I'll just give it to you," he barked. "You're drafted to fight fire. Now get that ax and get busy!"

He pushed Moon away from him. Moon stumbled, stopped, turned, came snarling back.

Brad Ogden stood still, grinning.

Moon stopped, held by the intense fighting expression on the other man's face.

Ogden's fist doubled; he crouched, took a slow half step toward Moon. Moon backed away. Brad followed him slowly.

Suddenly Moon whirled, took quick steps toward the ax. The next instant he was working again, puffing, grubbing.

THE last of the trees fell between the meadow and the cliff. There was a four-foot pathway, cleared of all inflammable material.

"Over on the other side," commanded Ogden.

They started across the open space. Ogden glanced down the cañon. He could see the first flame in the opening of the Keyhole. On the opposite side from the first fire-line, they started ripping out the other line which would dam the flood of fire. The timber was thicker here, the distance from meadow to cliff greater.

Brad looked toward the Keyhole. Flame got into the crown of a spruce in the cañon beyond and it went up like a flash of powder. A group of pines sizzled.

"Moon, you've got to finish that," he cried and ran toward the pump.

He started the engine turning over. With a whirl, the little engine settled into a steady drum that made echoes scatter in quick tattoo through the timber around the meadow.

Brad picked up the nozzle and lugged the hose over to where the red face of the fire enemy leered through the Keyhole. The first jet of water hit against a burning stub. Flame died; steam spurted.

Suddenly the pump stopped. Brad glanced back.

Lucius Moon was stooping over it.

Brad Ogden seemed to come flying down on the rancher. He yanked him to his feet, and swung Moon to face the Keyhole.

"Look," commanded Ogden as he shook the old man. "Look at that, Moon! Flame coming through. You and I alone to hold it. It's going to burn right through your country, Moon! Your ranch will go—your stock, everything. This'll be a blackened meadow. Those hills'll be barren."

Moon paled; his eyes stared.

"I've got to get the old woman to safety," he panted, turning toward the ranch-house. "Let me go!"

Ogden held him tight.

"You're right! That fire'll get in the timber near the house. My woman'll not leave without me, Ogden. I've got to go."

"Go, nothing," stormed the forester. "You can't get out."

"I can go down the road," cried Moon. "Take her to Leetsdale. I'll hitch up my team. They're fast travelers. I can outrun any fire! Let me go!"

Ogden shook him roughly.

"Listen, Moon. The fire's over the road between here and the Ranger Station. You'll drive right into hell if you try to go there. And before you can get that team harnessed and away from here, this fire will be eating at your home. If you want to save your place, save your stock, protect your wife, then for God's sake drop this fight you've been having against the Forest Service and help me fight fire! Get back quick and finish that line. Hurry, Moon! You've got to be on the side of the forest or lose now—lose everything! Get in there, man! Fight! Fight hard!"

With a quick push, Ogden sent Moon running toward the partly finished fire-line, and the old ranchman tore at the young timber desperately.

"I'll make a believer of you, Moon," said Brad between locked teeth, and then stooping, started the pump in its steady drum again and went lunging back toward the fire.

If Ogden could hold back the flame until that fire-line was done, then he could hold the main fire from streaming over the fire-lines while Lucius Moon kept his attention on the spot fires that would come from the showering sparks which, carried high in the air, would sail over and start scores of little fires farther on.

At least they could hold it until Tillamook came.

Ogden suddenly chuckled grimly as he looked to where Moon was working and then plunged into the face of the fire, nozzle in hand.

The cañon was a caldron of hell. Sparks were tossed high, smoke boiled through the maw of the Keyhole, bellied down and came flooding along the ground, filling Ogden's lungs. Momentarily the whole meadow was blotted out. He gave ground. Back of the fire there was new wind, new force, greater threat and danger. It was only a matter of a few moments now before Ogden and Moon would be at close grips with the forefront of the main fire, fighting desperately against odds, to hold it until Tillamook could come.

Ogden straightened, looked back toward

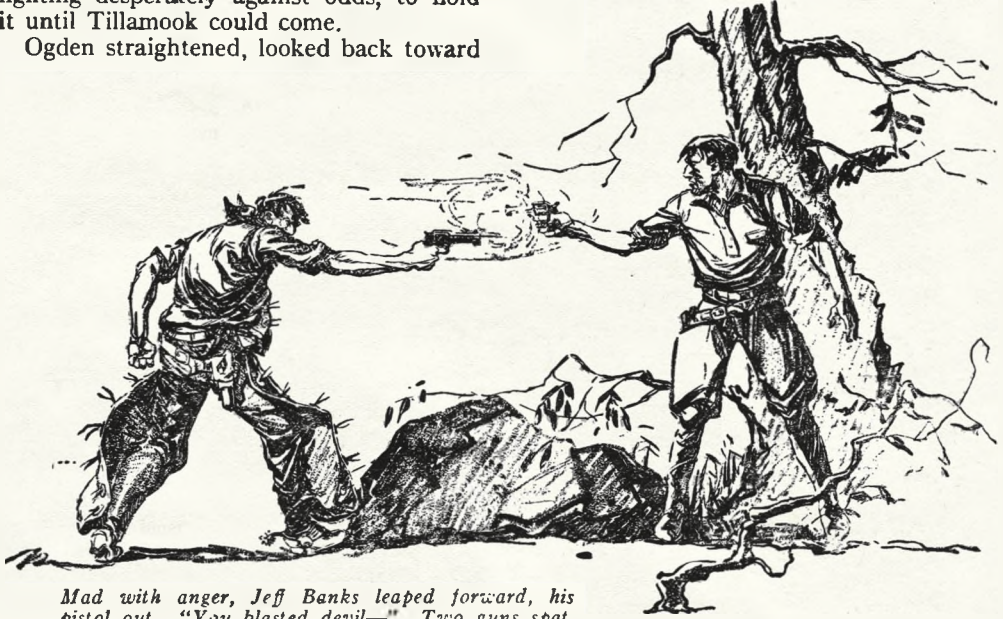
whole damned section of timber," bawled Jeff Banks. "That's what we want. You're a hell of a guy!"

"You can't blame Moon for protectin' his own place," countered Gordon.

"You've thrown us over, haven't you?" sneered Ken Banks. "I knew it back there on the trail. That stubborn kid girl of yourn has turned you, too."

He turned as Brad came up.

"Oh, you're here, air you!" he snarled.



Mad with anger, Jeff Banks leaped forward, his pistol out. "You blasted devil—" Two guns spat.

the pump—then turned quickly, dropped the hose and started hurrying across the meadow, hand on his automatic.

A group of horsemen were riding pell-mell down the meadow, Gordon and the three Banks men among them. Lucius Moon turned just before they reached him, took several steps toward them. They met in the open meadow. Gordon was tumbling off his horse as they stopped. Banks leaped to the ground, came striding toward old Moon.

Ogden covered the last few rods toward the group at a fast trot. He could hear the sound of angry talk before he reached the tight knot of men and horses.

"You've turned traitor too," howled Jap Banks, as he stood in front of old Moon, white with anger. "You've followed that son of yours, have you?"

"I'm protectin' my home! It'll be wiped out if I don't," Moon defended.

"Let that fire get away. It'll strip this

Then he whipped back on old Moon. "You workin' for this pup Ogden! I suppose he's helpin' you protect the old homestead, just out of love for you!"

"Come on," cried Ken, swinging on the group. "Let's start settin' fires right here. Right here and now. Wipe old Moon out first. He's turned again' us. Let's clean him!"

"For God's sake!" breathed Moon huskily, his face white. "Don't do that. My old woman's over there in the house. She might not agree to leave it. If we can't stop this fire here, it'll whip over in that timber that runs up toward the house and just blot the whole place out. No, no, Ken! Be reasonable! Be decent! I can't let this fire burn my old place!"

Ken Banks laughed.

"One more chance," he cried. "You comin' with us?"

"No! No!" Moon's voice was suddenly cracking, frantic, shrill.

"Then," snarled Jap Banks, stepping forward, "we'll fix you right now, you rebel!"

"Now, Jap," protested Gordon, stepping in between old Moon and Jap Banks. "You can't blame—"

"Confound you, Eli," snarled Ken Banks. "If you just keep on—"

Ogden had let the cow-men wrangle just to get an indication of how matters stood. He had not been sure that Moon would not turn back to his original plans. He knew now that Moon's love for his old home, the familiar surroundings, the wife in the ranch-house, had for the time at least made an ally of Hurley's father.

Ogden moved into the group; curious glances greeted him.

"Shut up," he ordered Ken. "You might as well all dry up with your wrangling, for you're all goin' to fight fire."

"The hell we are!" Jap Banks whirled on Ogden threateningly.

"You are," thundered Ogden, facing Banks determinedly.

"Not so you could notice it!" exclaimed Jeff Banks threateningly.

"You will—every damned one of you!" snapped Ogden. "Unsaddle—take those saddle-blankets—wet 'em," he commanded.

FOR a moment no one moved. Moon looked at Ogden; Eli Gordon licked his lips, glanced from Jap Banks to Ogden and then back.

"Snap it up," commanded Ogden angrily. "Make it fast, or—"

Mad with anger, cursing, Jeff Banks, face livid, leaped forward. His pistol was out. He was not four paces from Ogden.

"You blasted devil—"

Two guns spat.

The group swayed and milled. Jeff Banks fell, gripping his shoulder.

Ogden, white, calm, his lips smiling, his eyes hard, surveyed the others.

"Now, you, all of you, you're drafted to fight this fire. Get busy."

"I'm shot!" blubbered Jeff Banks. "I'm bleeding!"

"Some one put a bandage on that puppy," ordered Ogden. "You, Jap Banks, tie him up. He's not bad hurt."

"Where do you want me, Ogden?" asked Moon.

"Take those men to that new line. Make 'em work!"

"Do you know where my girl is?" demanded the white-faced Eli Gordon as he

confronted Ogden. "Is she up there on the peak?"

"I don't know," replied Ogden. "Last word I had there was no answer from the lookout. If she's up there, this fire will catch her—if it gets by that Keyhole."

"Where can I help?" demanded Gordon quickly.

IN another moment saddle-blankets were off the horses, saddles were stacked well out in the meadow. One of Gordon's cow-hands led the snorting horses up the meadow.

"Stack all guns with the saddles," commanded Ogden, and gun in hand, watched to make sure orders were obeyed.

Eli Gordon, with two of the cow-hands, Ken Banks and another rancher, soon were driving another temporary line toward the cliff. It was a place to hold the fire until the line could be widened or another built.

Ogden hurried to the elder Moon, who showed signs of panic, anxiously looking to where the fires were starting to creep out of the cañon.

"Here, Moon, you hike to the house," commanded Ogden. "Tell your wife we're going to hold the fire. Get more tools. Savvy?"

Moon was hurrying away before he finished.

The little pump was chattering its fighting song as the water swished from the nozzle. Ogden dived with it into the smoke hovering around the Keyhole. He had to risk leaving the cattlemen, for he could not fight fire and stand guard, too; but he knew that shooting Jeff Banks, even in the shoulder, had had its effect in disciplining the others.

Hot smoke came sifting around the forester, and he heard the death "*who—o—ooosh*" of a tree as the fire engulfed it. Again came that swaying, enveloping charge of smoke, and he plunged out, coughing, wiping his stinging eyes. He looked to the fire-line; to all appearances, the men were all working earnestly. Then he glanced up the meadow. Lucius Moon was hurrying back to the fire. He saw two other figures beyond, running from the Moon ranch yard. They caught up with old Lucius, stopped, talked an instant, then hurried forward.

A moment later Hurley Moon and Ted Hathaway faced the surprised forester.

"Brad!" exclaimed Ted. "You're all right! Not hurt?"

"Sure, I'm all right," he said a little grimly. "Where did you two come from?"

They told him quickly.

"All right," commented Ogden. "Hurley, you take this hose. See if you can get in there and wet down any of the timber between the fire and the lines. Ted, you stay here—keep an eye on that pump. I'm goin' to take part of this crew and widen those lines."

Lucius Moon, coming up, threw shovels and axes on the ground. A moment later, Ogden was in the thick of the fight working shoulder to shoulder with old Moon.

The fire voices were rising in an angry continuous chorus. The advance flames were in the Keyhole.

The big body of the fire was near. The heat within its center was that of a blast furnace. It was climbing from the ground into the crowns, but it was not flying from crown to crown. If it had been a crown fire, it would have flashed through the Keyhole, over the lines and a mile into the heart of the lodgepole stands in a few moments.

This fire raged in the dry material of the forest floor. Flames there heated trees above, and as needles became dry, the fire zipped up through the branches and twigs, wiping off needles in a blanket of flame, throwing tiny glowing limbs in the air, scattering sparks high in the wind. Moving at the rate of a brisk walk, this main fire killed everything it touched.

Moments passed in hurrying, driving work. Sparks fell near Ogden. It would be only a few minutes until there would be spot fires to fight. With them the pump would be invaluable. The main body of men would have to stay on the line, and Ogden knew if he could hold this band of ranchers to the task a short time longer, he had the fire stopped.

Through the din, Brad heard Ted's voice, calling him frantically. Men shouted.

Across the narrow stretch of meadow, men were scuffling on the fire-line. A high-powered rifle roared.

Ogden ran toward Ted. "You safe?" he panted.

"Yes," she replied excitedly. "But Banks knocked old Moon down. Then he ran into the timber. Jeff's shot one of Gordon's cow-hands."

Ogden plunged over the meadow toward the fire-line where Banks had been working. He looked for Jeff Banks, sighted him near the saddles.

Ken Banks was running away from the saddles; in his hand was a rifle. The Banks faction had rebelled. They would let the fire get away, hold the others at bay until the fire was beyond control.

Ken Banks fired, and the bullet whizzed by Ogden.

Banks stopped, crouched in the thick young timber that bordered the meadow, and brought up his rifle deliberately. Ted screamed. Hurley Moon ran forward, yelling for Ogden to stop.

But the anger suppressed for months had boiled over; Ogden plunged forward recklessly.

Banks' gun roared. Ogden felt a sudden quick sickening touch in his shoulder. It swayed him a moment, but he plunged on.

The men of the Banks faction were rallying to Ken, and he took aim again.

The gun spoke once more.

But even as Banks fired, a hurtling figure jumped from the tree thickets and bowled him over, spoiling his aim.

The next instant Tillamook Thompson, his face black with anger, came floundering into the meadow, his big hand twisted in the neckband of Ken Banks' shirt. He dragged the struggling rancher as though he had been a child.

"You skunk!" he was saying as he jerked young Banks forward.

Ken tried to twist, to use his gun. Tillamook yanked him off his feet.

"Stop that," he commanded, and shook him again.

"He tried to shoot you, Brad," exploded Tillamook as he came charging up.

ALMOST as he spoke there was another explosion. Tillamook ducked as a bullet sung by his head. They glanced toward the point from which the shot had come. Jeff Banks, sheltered behind a saddle, was shooting. And Jap Banks was running toward the stack of saddles and the guns. Others followed. They were hurrying along the side of the meadow almost at a point where Tillamook came out. If they could get arms, they would control the situation.

As Jap Banks and his men ran, there came from the edge of the timber into their path, another band, armed with shovels and picks. Hannum, scratched, dirty, sweaty, was in the lead.

It was the fire-fighting crew that had climbed over the barren ridge.

Jap Banks and his followers stopped. If Ogden had not forced them to discard and leave their guns with the saddles, or if they had been a few seconds earlier and had reached their guns, they would easily have shot their way through Hannum's men. Without guns, the shovels and picks in the hands of these men gave Hannum the advantage.

Another wild shot ripped from the gun in Jeff's hands as Hurley, dodging and running, crashed down on him, tearing the gun away. For a moment there was tense waiting. Hannum gave a quick command to the men with him. They cast aside their coats and stood with fire-tools in hand, confronting Jap Banks and his followers. Near Brad stood Gordon, old Moon, the men who had not followed Banks, Ted, Tillamook, and his struggling prisoner Ken Banks.

Hannum started forward. The men with him followed.

Suddenly Jap Banks, frothing with anger, hurried from Hannum to Ogden, spitting oaths, pouring out all of the invectives he could command.

"You've been a trouble-maker, you pup!" he snarled. "You kept Ken from bein' supervisor here. You blocked him. He's entitled to it. I'm goin' to make you pay fer that now."

He came lunging at Brad

In that instant, Brad Ogden realized why, for months, Banks and his sons had so bitterly opposed him. They had hoped through political pull, to get control of the forest, and his coming had thwarted them.

Jap Banks struck Ogden a glancing blow. Gordon leaped and pinioned Jap's hands.

Hannum, followed by his men and those that had been with Banks, came hurrying to the knot surging around the central figures.

"Corral Banks and his outfit," commanded Ogden. "Tie 'em up. We'll tend to them after while."

Ken Banks jerked away from Tillamook, and before anyone could prevent, struck at Ogden.

"I didn't get you at the Pass," he snarled. "I got yore horse instead. But I'll kill you now!"

He came plunging at Ogden again, but Hannum and one of the men grabbed him.

Excitedly Tillamook broke open Ken Banks' rifle. He picked up the ejected

cartridge and looked intently at the hammer pattern on the shell.

"This's it," yelled Tillamook. "This is the gun that killed Silver! So help me!"

"You sure?" demanded Ogden, his eyes glinting.

"God, yes," bawled Tillamook.

OGDEN moved a pace forward; his hands slipped down and unbuckled the belt that held his gun and ammunition. He wanted only to get hands on Ken Banks—meet him on even footing and thrash him.

Then to his ears came the rising roar of the fire. He straightened.

"Tie 'em all up," he commanded. "Tight. Hurry. I'll pay off Ken Banks afterward!"

Tillamook dragged Ken Banks to where Hurley had already used lariat rope to truss up Jeff. Hannum ordered his men to help, and Eli Gordon lent a hand. In a few moments the small group of renegades were tied hand and foot.

"Ted, there's a job you can do," said Ogden, turning to the girl. "Want to help?"

"Of course, I'll help," emphatically declared Ted.

"All right, find out if Lucius Moon has any gasoline up there at the ranch, learn where it is, and then bring some here. The pump maybe will need a new supply soon. Trot along. Tell Hurley's mother not to worry."

"All right," answered Ted.

"Let's go," commanded Ogden as he led the augmented force of fighters back to the lines where there was prodigious work ahead. Even Tillamook's suggestion that a guard be put over the Banks gang was vetoed by Brad, who wanted every man possible fighting fire.

THE several squads hurried into the suffocating smoke-clouds, ripped with all their might clearing timber, scooped out forest duff until the mineral base of the soil was reached, widened the lines by slashing the trees. No group of fighters could see the other groups now. The smoke was blotting out everything except close at hand or in rifts of clearer air where winds lifted smoke-veils.

But Ogden knew that with the streaming water of the portable pump outfit, and the widening lines, he could hold this fire from going into the upper country, even



They struggled in a whirling, changing, grim battle. Then Ogden caught Ken's neck, and down they went in the cool grass.

with a fairly strong breeze blowing. He was exultant as he hurried back from his inspection to where Tillamook had crept right up toward the very vortex of the flame in the Keyhole, and with his face close to the ground, was shooting water into the fire, staying it a little to give the men on the lines more time.

"Better give ground," advised Brad. "I think we can hold it on the lines, now, Tillamook."

The ranger shook his head. "I'll stay until I'm drove out," he replied. "That'll be pretty gosh awful soon. Have you taken a peek at our prisoners, Brad?"

SECURE in the knowledge that defenses and defenders were now adequate, Ogden acted on the ranger's suggestion and started back.

The sun was hazy with smoke. The roar of the fire drowned other noises in the region of the Keyhole. He passed the little pump; it was chugging manfully, had never let up since the start of the fight. He skirted the creek-banks and rounded a small thicket of willows, back of which they had placed the prisoners. In the filmy smoke that was spread over this part of the

meadow, he saw a figure struggle, jerk, then suddenly rise.

Ken Banks was free! He had soaked the thongs binding his wrists in the creek, and worked at them until they slipped.

Ogden reached for his gun, but it was not there—he had left his belt, holster and automatic at the pump outfit after the Banks faction had been bound.

Banks stood swaying a moment, then came charging at Ogden. A yell went up from the other prisoners, but the cry of the men was smothered in the sound of the fire.

"I'll bust you now," squealed Ken. "I'll finish you this time!"

Ogden waited, dodged, then threw his weight against the rancher.

Brad struck. Ken grunted.

A counter-blow from Ken rocked Brad's head. He staggered.

Again Ken struck. Ogden caught the blow, and it sickened him. He swayed away, then, stung to greater fury, leaped at his antagonist. They clinched. For a moment they struggled in a whirling, changing, grim dance of battle.

Ogden caught Ken's neck under his arm. Down they went in the cool grass.

The head-lock broke. Hair tousled, blood on his lips, eyes flashing deadly anger, Ken Banks struggled to his feet.

"I'll kill you," he hissed at Ogden.

"Try it," commanded Brad. "You've tried times enough and not had any luck."

Taunted, Ken plunged. His foot slipped, and he fell. He scrambled and grasped Ogden's legs. The forester fell.

They rolled in the grass, panting, struggling. Ogden saw an opening; his arm plunged up like a piston as he struck Ken's neck. Banks swore and twisted away from the next blow.

Blood started to trickle into Brad's eyes from a cut on his forehead. The slight bullet-wound began to bleed profusely.

They struggled to their feet, arms locked. They swayed, every muscle straining. Ogden's heart-beat hammered in his ears. Great gasping, sighing breaths burst from the lungs of both as the high altitude of the meadow with its light air cut into their wind.

"Go it, Ken, go to it," yelled one of the men near Jap Banks. "You got him goin'."

Jap was cursing a steady stream and pulling at the rope binding him.

Ogden glanced toward the fire, but he had his worst enemy in his hands.

"You yellow cur," snarled Ken, his bloody lips wrinkling back from his teeth. "I got yore horse; I'll get you!"

Some great barrier of control gave way inside of Bradley Ogden. The mention of Silver seemed to release all of the pent anger that he had held in check for months, and he ripped into Ken with new frenzy.

A blow over the eye sent Brad stumbling. He leaped clear as Ken rushed after him, doubled, plunged, struck, and threw his weight into the driving blows. Down they went. Up again. They were coming toward the edge of Cañon Creek, where it found its way through the grassy meadow.

Brad glanced out of swelling eyes toward the fire, then to the timber back of the fire lines. And a great fear leaped through him: A new spot fire was over the fire lines, was fogging up in a new plume of smoke.

That new fire had to be killed! If it got away with wind behind it, it would run right into the middle of the pine stands. He whirled away from Ken, started to run for help on the fire.

"No, you don't," snarled young Banks,

diving after him. He too had seen that new danger, had seen that it was hidden from the men on the lines, knew if it was not killed within a few moments, it would be away and through the timber, whipping everything inflammable in its path.

OGDEN ran on. Banks leaped, clawed, struggled, dragged Ogden down.

They staggered up. Ogden struck with all his might, and Banks staggered away cursing. Ogden leaped clear and started for help, yelling for Tillamook, but Banks caught his foot, tripped him, was on him before he could recover his footing.

"Gouge him, Ken," yelled Jeff Banks excitedly. "Punch his eyes out!"

Banks reached for Ogden's face.

The forester swung from his hip. Banks sagged, went down, but grappled as he fell, dragging Ogden with him.

Ogden felt Banks' fingers groping again for his eyes, threw back his head—and glimpsed the edge of the creek.

With a quick twist he threw Banks on top. Then he squirmed from under, twisted, threw his strength into the turn, writhed and rolled.

Sparks showered around them. For a moment they poised on the brink of the meadowy bank, struggled, rolled, strained. Then they dropped into chill, rushing waters swirling in a deep pool.

Down under the water, up, gasping, down again.

Ogden reached for Banks' head and doused him under. Banks struggled, came up with water spurting from his mouth.

Up, down, chilled, staggering, and straining, they fought. Then Banks floundered, fell prone in the water; Ogden threw his weight to hold him under. Banks writhed, tried to get his feet on solid ground, slipped on the pebbly bottom, sank deeper in the pool. The three feet of water was strangling him as effectively as if it had been a great river. And suddenly he was limp. . . .

For an instant Brad Ogden could hardly realize that the fight was over. He leaped groggily to the bank, turned to look back at the spot fire, then with fear in his heart, whirled to start for the hose nozzle. If he could not reach the new fire in the next few moments, it would be beyond control, racing through the timber, fanned by the million hands of the breezes. The whole fight at the Keyhole would be lost.

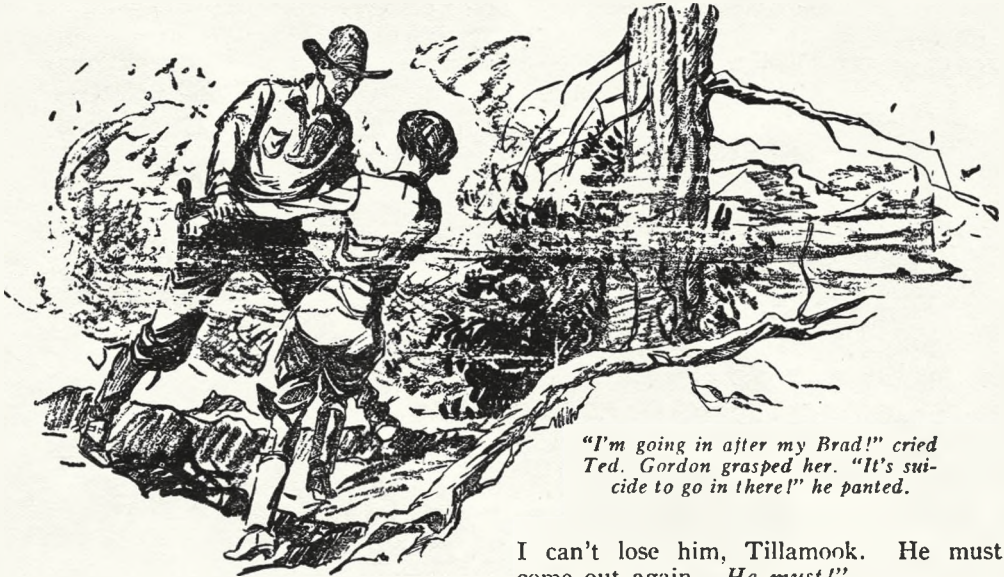
Then came the thought of the man in the pool. Ken Banks was under the water, drowning.

Brad plunged back into the cold water, staggered, groped, hurriedly felt for the body of the rancher. He did not find it, and into his heart whipped a torturing terror.

Ted Hathaway was momentarily non-plused. But she understood the threat that rolled and flamed in that new fire.

Suddenly she cried out in terror. She ran to Tillamook, pulled at him, as he worked over Banks.

"He's gone in to that fire, Tillamook," she wailed. "Brad has. Right into it!"



"I'm going in after my Brad!" cried Ted. Gordon grasped her. "It's suicide to go in there!" he panted.

Then—his hands touched cold flesh. He pulled, lifted. Banks' limp body came to view, and in one great effort Ogden tossed the form on the bank. He turned Ken on his face, shook him roughly. The water started draining from the young ranchman's mouth.

Then Ogden turned and started in a staggering run toward Tillamook.

CHAPTER XX

"**H**ELP Ken," Ogden croaked as he reached the ranger. "I've maybe drowned him. There's a bad spot fire beyond the line. I've got to lick it."

He started to run desperately for the spot fire. Near the pump he nearly stumbled over Ted.

"Spot fire over the line," gasped Ogden and plunged on.

Before she could grasp his meaning, smoke caught him, enveloped him. He drove himself ahead, coughing. The long line of hose held him back. He threw his weight against it, tugging.

I can't lose him, Tillamook. He must come out again. *He must!*"

"Well, I—" Tillamook looked down hesitatingly at the figure on the ground.

Out of the smoke came Hurley Moon. He was coughing as he ran up to Ted.

"You screamed," he said.

"Yes. Brad!" she gasped.

"What?"

"He's gone into the fire there. Right into the fire, Hurley. He's groggy, out of his head, maybe. He was staggering when I saw him. He may never come back!"

For an instant Hurley Moon looked out of queerly squinting eyes at Ted Hathaway. She started in a quick stumbling run toward the point where the snaky line of hose reached into the smoke.

Hurley stood dazed a moment, crushed by a gigantic revelation that had come to him in the agonized voice of Ted. For months he had hoped that he stood at least even with Ogden in her regard. He knew now that he never had!

"Stop!" cried Hurley. "You stay here. I'll get him. If I don't come out soon, send some one after us."

He leaped away, diving into the smoke, his sleeve covering his eyes, as he felt his way along the hose line.

Gigantic, agonizing seconds passed like years marching with slow clumsy feet. Ted Hathaway gazed into the ghastly turmoil of smoke and flame, watching, waiting.

Then almost at her side appeared Della Gordon; Hurley's horse stood a few rods back. "Where's Hurley?" panted Della.

"In there," gasped Ted. "In there after my Brad!"

Della flashed her a glance.

Ted hurried forward. She was almost brushed aside by Della. The girl lookout was running into the face of the fire, seeking Hurley.

In another instant Eli Gordon had reached Ted.

"That was my girl?" he panted.

"Yes," cried Ted. "She's gone in after Hurley Moon. And I'm going in after my man, Brad!"

Gordon grasped her.

"It's suicide to go in there," he panted.

But she wrenched free, and ran forward—almost crashing into a looming form as it came out of an engulfing smoke-cloud.

Hurley Moon strode as though out of the dusk of doom, carrying in his arms the exhausted body of Brad Ogden.

SLOWLY, swaying just a little, he walked to Ted. Stooping, he laid Ogden at her feet.

Instantly Ted was on her knees, brushing back the sooty hair where it had been singed, stroking Ogden's grimy face.

"Della's in there!" burst out Eli Gordon. "My girl went in there trying to find you!"

"To find me?" Hurley was incredulous.

"Didn't you see her?" demanded Eli.

"She went after *me*?" Hurley still could not understand. "Why *me*?" He whirled and ran into the smoke, Eli Gordon hurrying after him.

Ted bent over Ogden. Tillamook came up and threw a hatful of water on his face.

Ogden moaned, spoke Ted's name, turned and blinked hazily as he saw in filmy outline her face close above. Then his eyes closed again, and he heard Ted's quick happy words in his ears.

"Do you mean it?" he asked huskily as he looked up a moment later. "Do you really mean that, Ted?"

"With all my heart," she cried. "I thought I'd lost the world when you didn't come out of that fire!"

At the edge of the fire, Eli Gordon came stumbling into view. Behind him strode Hurley Moon, Della cradled in his arms.

Della moved, looked into Hurley Moon's deep-set eyes. Then her fire-reddened face dropped against his, her head rested on his shoulder, while quick sobs raced through her. . . .

A half-hour later Ogden, new purpose in his movements, walked a little shakily to where Lucius Moon was working beside three of the cow-hands and cursing them for their slowness.

Moon straightened, looked at Ogden with smoke-reddened eyes, brushed the sooty ashes from his face.

"Well, Moon," said Brad, "I guess we're where I always wanted to be ever since I came to this forest—working shoulder to shoulder for our forest. That right?"

Moon frowned a little. Then slowly he nodded.

"Yes, yes, I guess maybe that's so. I never thought I would. But I've been thinkin' a lot the past few months. Then when I realized that if this fire got loose it actually would rip right through my old home over there—it made a difference. It sure did. Nope, the place wouldn't be the same, neither, if them hills didn't have that green pine on 'em. Wouldn't be the same."

He sighed prodigiously.

"Maybe you and my kid are partly right. Maybe so. Times have changed."

Ogden stuck out his hand. Moon, his old eyes blinking, met his grasp.

"We've got this about licked here," said Moon as he quickly broke away with a gesture of embarrassment. "Where do we hit next?"

"Guess you better shift over there with Eli Gordon," said Ogden, pointing to where Gordon was working with several men on a fire-line that was running the threatening spot fire into barren rocks. Near by, Tillamook was patrolling the edge of the timber, squirting water on every flame that started up. "You can work pretty well with Gordon, I guess. You two seem to be still lined up on the same side, anyway."

AS night settled, the tang of burning green timber filled the valley where Moon's ranch lay. Fitful bits of flame pierced through the darkness. The continuous chugging of the portable pump and the silhouette of men as they worked along the edge of the fire, slowly crushing it, showed where the fight was still going on. Brad's desperate attack on the spot fire had not killed it, but it had held it

back until it could be choked. The fire was beaten now, though not entirely dead.

LATE in the evening Ogden and Ted were sitting on the plank step of the front porch. Hurley Moon had taken Della in the Trail-blazer back to Noddle Head.

Hannum came out on the porch, peered into the dusk and spoke.

"That you, Brad?" he asked.

"There are both of us here," said Ogden, a happy note in his voice. "Come on out; you're welcome, Hannum."

"I wanted to tell you about Caverley. Didn't have a chance in all the fuss today. He's out of the District Office."

"No!" exclaimed Brad.

"Sure is," continued Hannum. "Just the way it always happens. He got so hard to live with, pulled so many bull-headed boners, was so stiff-necked and bureaucratic—well, you'd never guess. He's moved to District Ten and made head of forest management! Promoted! Wouldn't that sour you?"

"I'm not surprised," said Ogden slowly. "Caverley is a typical bureaucrat. He lives on the bureau and for it."

Silence fell for a few moments. Then Hannum took up the conversation again.

"I guess your work is about done here, Brad. I'll swear out warrants on this Banks outfit tomorrow, and we'll soak them for what they've done. Maybe they'll land in the pen. Get stiff fines at least. Seems they were responsible for this cañon fire, too. Moon didn't set it as we thought; Ken Banks did as he rode to the lookout this morning. . . . What would you like to do now that you've made believers out of this bunch?"

"Work with 'em awhile," said Brad briefly. "We're just in a position to do something constructive here. With Moon and Gordon with us, we can make this forest the top one in the district. For the love of Mike, Hannum, don't try to move me away from here now."

Hannum laughed.

A rattling auto came churning up to the ranch-house, throwing the group on the porch in white light.

"That's Hurley, maybe," said Ogden, shading his eyes.

But a stocky figure that rolled as it walked, came striding forward.

"Hey, where's Brad Ogden?" called Tim Tadlock as he came up to the steps. "Oh,

here you air, you old pickle! Say, you never would've got back to the low country if I hadn't've left my flivver bug up there and drove this Trail-blazer down."

"Why?"

"Well, them two up there seem to have found a lot to talk about all of a sudden after livin' in the same neck of the woods all of their lives. They seemed mighty glad fer me to drive that old wagon down here fer you."

"What you going to do, Tim?" asked Ogden. "Can we take you back with us tonight?"

"No, I guess not," drawled the stocky cow-man. "I got shet out of the excitement today. Had to stay up there and get it all by lookin'. Guess I'll stick around fer part of tomorrow. Got to find some place to bed down right now. Is there a hay barn around here?"

"Yes—there," said Brad, pointing.

"See you tomorrow," called Tim as he started toward the barn after turning off the lights on the Trail-blazer.

"Guess I'd better follow him," remarked Hannum, getting up and stretching. "You'll be here again sometime tomorrow, Brad, or I'll come down. Tillamook can handle things here. Good night!"

He strode away in the dusk.

THERE was silence for several moments. Then Brad spoke.

"Shall we hit the trail over the Pass and back to home? It's a long way. Maybe we better get goin'."

Ted's answer was low.

"There's no big hurry, *amigo*," she said. "There's another trail ahead of us, Brad, old son. A long one, too. Maybe some unexpected grades and corners. Can we make it—you and I?"

"You bet," replied Brad emphatically.

Tillamook Thompson, some minutes later, coming noiselessly around the corner of the Moon ranch-house, seeking his chief to report that new fire-lines were completed ready for any fight that might break with rising wind in the morning, caught an outline against the faint night light of two figures as they sat very close together.

He edged back quietly, then stopped, looking up to where the stars were winking in the blue-black vault of infinity.

"It's a whale of a night," he murmured to himself a bit huskily. "Gosh, it's damned near perfect!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By CLARENCE
HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by William Molt

International intrigue is now complicated by a new dimension—the air; so this latest exploit of the Free Lances deals dramatically with novel problems.



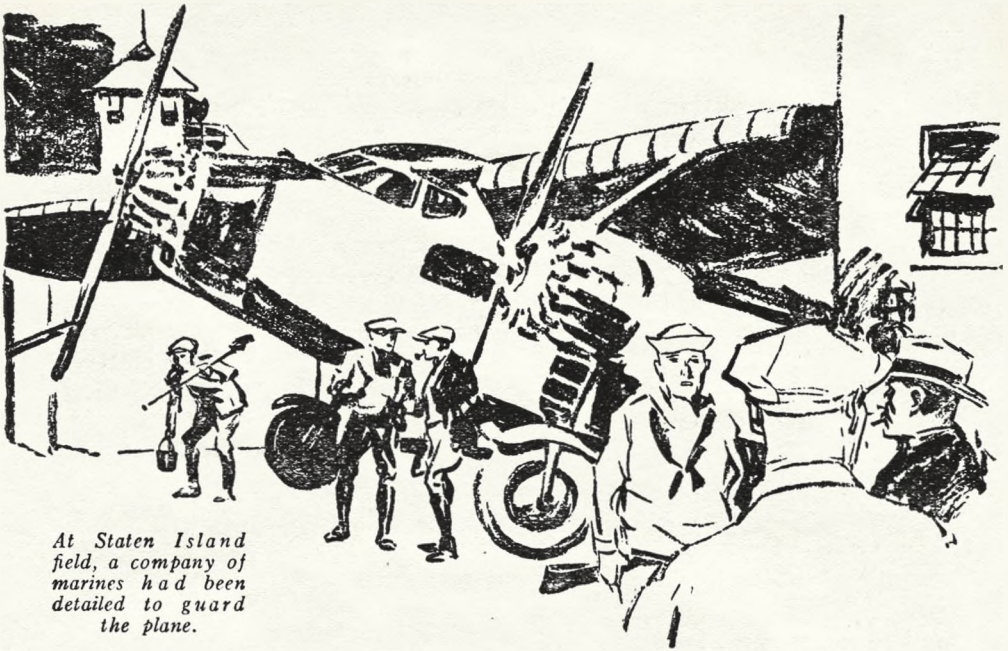
ON the sixth day after the *Bremen* came down at Greenly Island, three men were riding through the woods on the big Trevor estate in South Devon from the laboratories, machine-shops and hangars in the heart of the forest, to the old Norman-Tudor castle, Trevor Hall, on the brink of the three-hundred-foot Scabbacombe Cliffs. At the entrance they dismounted, and turning their horses over to a groom, the three went in through the great hall to the library and workroom of the Earl's private suite at the rear, overlooking the Channel.

Trevor himself was still as straight as a lance in spite of his increasing years, and a superb horseman. Harry Archer—the Earl's master mechanic and chief electrician for twenty-five years—was slightly shorter and stockier, but of athletic build. Boyd Lambert, the aeronautic expert and chief designer, was built upon the lines of a flamingo or sand-hill crane, with more altitude than beam—deep-set eyes and long spectaclad nose over a short mustache. One always wondered where he found room for his deep bass voice. All three were booted and spurred and wore olive-drab reinforced breeches, brown coats and soft felt hats. The Earl's other executive—Alfred Deems, his chief chemist and biologist—they had left down at the laboratories, as the conference of the moment was outside of his particular field.

Stepping over to one of the side-walls,

all of which were lined with books, His Lordship pulled down from a spring-roller above the book-shelving, a large-scale Admiralty Pilot Chart of the North Atlantic, and traced with his finger the course of the *Bremen* from Ireland to the Strait of Belle Isle.

"I don't know whether either of you chaps have been struck by the discrepancy, but I haven't seen in any of the news-sheets a comment upon what is to us the outstanding conclusion obtained in that flight—what it had clearly taught us about the Fastnet-Newfoundland route across the Atlantic. Aviators coming this way have stuck to it, time after time, because it is the shortest direct hop and follows the steamer-lanes very closely—the argum't being, presumably, that for the last hundred years the Merchant Marine has been working out the most advantageous route and that the bulk of their experience has been in favor of it. Well, the *Bremen*—the first plane ever gettin' across to west'ard—has shown us that for an air-route, bringing diff'rent factors into consideration, it is most decidedly nothing of the sort! Eight months in the year, it is atmospherically and magnetically so objectionable that it would take a hundred years to overcome the diffic'ties sufficiently to maintain anything like a regular schedule. I'm of the opinion that, for another two or three years, a good deal of time and expense will be wasted in concentrating upon



At Staten Island field, a company of marines had been detailed to guard the plane.

making that route a practical one, instead of looking for an easier way—which quite suits our book, d'ye see. We'll not waste any more of *our* time over it! By the time the other chaps realize the futility of buckin' that proposition, we'll have a daily mail-service running upon a fairly reliable schedule. At least, that's the way I see it now—and I don't mean to lose an hour in working toward that result. Now, Harry, let's hear what you consider the first important feature in a better route."

"Well, I'd begin by concentrating upon radio communication both ways—plane to station, and station to plane. The consideration of weight is against storage batteries for high- or low-frequency receiving-sets and a thousand-mile transmitting equipment. I fancy that Boyd and I can work out a small dynamo, air-driven, which will furnish sufficient power for all three—stepped-up or stepped-down, according to the circuit."

"**W**AIT a bit!" Trevor interposed. "An air-driven dynamo is going to retard your speed somewhat—and you're bucking against head-winds, going west. A little dynamo-motor like that can be run on much less gas than a two-cylinder automobile. Seems to me a thirty-hour supply of petrol for it would be a negligible weight on a tri-motored, ten-passenger monoplane—the whole equipment wouldn't weigh more than two average passengers."

"Hmph! Fancy your Lordship may be right as to that—we'll figure it out on those lines, and see. For antennæ, I'd run a two-wire grid from a three-foot rod on the upper side of the wings, aft, to a similar rod on the tail-fin. That does away with the trailing antenna, which is never reliable, and gives us a good ninety feet of braided copper aerial. But we'll not be able to overlook a much more expensive feature which is part of the radio proposition. There'll be no diffic'ly in getting radio-compass bearings in any part of the Atlantic under average conditions, but to eliminate guesswork altogether—as must be done before we can establish any regular schedule—there must be a broadcast-in' station at each end of each hop; and I'd say, just so there would be no question whatever as to power, that the equipment should be capable of delivering fifty kilowatts of high frequency and a hundred kilowatts of low. Which means Govern'm't concessions for the establishment of any such stations. Our own hundred-kilowatt plant will be quite all right for this end, but there'll be at least two others—two diff'rent Governm'ts to deal with; negotiations may take some time. I'd say that should be the first move—can't start it too soon!"

"Er—quite so, Harry," agreed Trevor. "I'd determined to send some one to Portugal an' Washington tomorrow—preferably Her Ladyship, as I'm figuring upon

work in another quarter for myself. Now as to the type of plane. On the Newfoundland route, allowance would have to be made for weight of ice on wings and fuselage. On the route *we'll* take, that's eliminated altogether. We've mentioned a 'ten-passenger' bus merely to indicate the desired carrying power—but at first, the weight would be distributed between five passengers and the rest in mailbags. When service has been established a year an' we know all about the flying conditions, we can try Goliath planes—but not before. I suppose sea-planes would be best—eh?"

"Sea-planes—or amphibians? My impression would be that they shouldn't be limited either to land or to water."

"That would be the ideal type—but can it be worked out to carry the necessary load easily, without grunting over it or bogging down unexpectedly? How about that, Boyd?"

"Not so difficult as it looks," responded the chief designer. "I'll fix up that last new hydro we turned out—have it ready for a trial flight in a few days—we'll run down to Funchal an' back to see whether it's really the type we want. If the Countess is flying to Lisbon tomorrow, I'll go along with her in one of those tri-motored sea-monoplanes—the slight extra weight of landing-wheels will make but little difference. Off-hand—I'd say that the amphibian is the most reliable type if you're going to settle upon a two-hop flight."

"How much wind?" questioned Archer.

"Not more than fifteen or twenty-mile head-breeze all the way across, going west; tail-breeze, coming east."

"Is that constant—dependable?"

"That's the pilot-chart average for the last twenty years—wind five or ten miles stronger during the winter months."

"How about hurricanes?" asked Lambert doubtfully.

"About one in each hurricane-season just around the halfway stop—nowhere else. Barometer warns you of that."

"How much snow and sleet?"

"Only get it in the first three hundred miles out—December to March. None the rest of the year."

"How much fog?"

"Three to five hundred miles of it at the start—but only in the spring months."

"MY word, Chief—those are dependable conditions!" exclaimed Boyd Lambert. "Our last model will do that flight the

year around—like a clock. We'll need do no more than make her an amphibian and install Harry's radio outfit, at the start. Prob'ly make a few changes as we go along, based upon the experiences they have in crossing. Testing every plane as we do, with endurance-flights to bring out any possible weakness in plane or motor, I'll guarantee each one we turn out to make those two hops week after week, without bogging down from any structural fault."

"Well, I'd wager a pretty heavy sum upon them myself. One of our planes has made the Cape flight—ten thousand miles out an' back, flown by a woman—two have been to Melbourne and back; one to Hongkong; one to Tokio. But if we start an Atlantic mail-service, there'll have to be a navigator who's also a radio expert, in addition to pilot an' mechanic. Over land, one needs but a knowledge of topography—but to hit a tiny dot in the middle of an ocean requires more knowledge of a marine-chart and the stars than aviators have, unless in very exceptional cases. We'll eliminate a good deal of the observation necessity with our radio-compass checking-up, to be sure—but we must allow for unexpected failure or fading-out of the radio signals.

"Somehow I've a hunch—as the Americans say—that there may be a political use for this service of ours before we can possibly get it ready for commercial use. One or two incidents have occurred which seem to indicate something dangerous on foot, internationally. So I'm going to play this thing as if we had overcome all the initial obstacles and could go ahead as fast as we please. I'll want you, Harry, to charter a five-thousand-ton cargo-boat in Liverpool, run her up the canal to Manchester and load her with construction-steel for a couple of three-hundred-foot towers and full equipment for a hundred-kilowatt transmitting-set, including dynamos and power, also three or four receiving-sets—anything necessary that occurs to you. As you're going with me tomorrow, you'll have to delegate these details to one of your best men an' have him carry them out after we leave.

"And I want you, Boyd, to have shipped on that same boat full equipment for a first-class machine-shop with a lot of spare airplane parts an' motors. Send down there duplicates of everything we've got in our own shops and anything else which occurs to you. Consign it to the

Anglo-American Mail and Radio Service—Horta—Fayal.”

“Any idea, Chief, that other Governments may have their eyes already fixed on this route?”

“Perhaps not yet—but they’re going to be looking that way very shortly because it’s the only transatlantic route which gives any reasonable prospect of regular service.

in’ on the *Ranee Sylvia* from Salcombe Harbor, in the morning—should make Horta in about two days with the *Ranee* if it’s not too lumpy to crowd her ahead.”

ON the second afternoon, following, the big Trevor yacht was within four hundred miles of Fayal when the radio operator picked up a call from the Monsanto



The radio operator of the big Trevor yacht took a coded message to His Lordship, who was in the saloon with Harry Archer.

And as I remember that group of islands the most practical ground for an airport—land or amphibian—is on the northwest coast of Pico, five or six miles back of the little strait between it and Fayal. It has some slope, but it’s smooth, unbroken ground, covered mostly with vineyards. The sheltered harbor of Horta, on Fayal, is a perfect base for sea-planes. The first company that digs in and owns property in that neighborhood is going to have about all the advantage there is in a desirable site for air-service—repairing, fuel-storage, and radio-stations. There’s not only money in it—but holding the key to whatever mail and passenger-service is built up by way of the Azores. Quite possibly, I’ll manage to get in ahead of any others. We’ll be leav-

Station in Portugal, which has a radius of more than a thousand miles.

The call was: “TYRS”—“TYRS”—“TYRS” (the letters of the *Ranee Sylvia*). After acknowledging, he took a coded message which he worked over in translating for half an hour—afterward going below with it to His Lordship, who was in the saloon with Harry Archer. Decoded, the message read:

Reached Lisbon—dinner last evening with Prime Minister, Villa Margherita, in suburbs. He grasped possibilities new service—considers it advantageous in development of Islands as health-resort. Will cooperate every way possible. Concessions drawn up and signed this morning. Option to erect stations, machine-shop, laboratories—use harbors as sea-plane base—one or all of five islands

if we consider advisable—Flores, Fayal, Pico, Terceira, Sao Miguel. No concessions granted other companies or Governments until we advise non-intention of using space in question. This does not apply to or conflict with existing radio-stations on Corvo, Flores, Fayal, Sao Miguel and Sta. Maria—all less than six hundred mile range—two hundred, except Horta. No flat or smooth land now held by Government—all under cultivation, private owners. Government still holding steeper slopes, forests, volcanic ground. Premier suggests three men having confidence of growers sufficiently to negotiate with prospect of success. Senhores Jorge Baltaes, Horta—Felipe Gomez, Angra—Juan Ribiera, Ponta Delgada. Dept. Agriculture cabling them suggesting coöperation. Picked up hint in Government circles as to Lichnow's activities, London. Advisable return as soon as possible. Chincoteague, Maryland, filing petition Radio Commission for one hundred kilowatt power two thousand meters which does not conflict broadcasting. We can use that, with six-point compass-allowance, for New York.

NAN.

"The Countess doesn't appear to have overlooked anything, Harry," remarked Trevor, handing over the message to Archer. "That's what I call doing a thorough job—in a workmanlike manner—in a minimum time. What? Well—that removes most of the complications except actual purchase of the land we want, and I fancy that Senhor Jorge Baltaes will be of valuable assistance in that direction.

"H-m-m—I don't like that hint about Lichnow! I've had a feeling that that bird was hatching something detrimental to British interests, right under our noses, an' that it's suspected in the other chancelleries—but I've not been able to get a line on whom he's dealing with or for exactly what purpose. We'll have to keep him under espionage an' find out."

ANCHORING behind the half-mile breakwater at Horta, the Earl went ashore to call upon the British Consul—who had been instructed by the Foreign Office to coöperate with him in every possible way—and Senhor Baltaes, whom Trevor found to be an exceedingly courteous merchant of the middle class who was constantly dealing with the growers and possessed their entire confidence. The Earl invited both of these gentlemen, with their wives and daughters, to dine with him on the yacht—exerting himself to make the dinner a pleasant one. He did not disclose to them all that he had in mind to do, or his confidence that a transatlantic air-service was almost within reach—but he did

say that he wished to purchase ground on Pico, Flores and Sao Miguel.

Baltaes at once asked him where he wished to locate—what sort of ground.

"Cultivated ground, Senhor—as smooth and as level as may be obtainable," replied Trevor. "From your Government maps, I fancy there is ground over across the strait on Pico which would answer my purpose very well. And it may be that there is high ground on Terceira which would suit me better than anything on Sao Miguel."

"The *lavrador de vinho*—wine-grower—is very tenacious of his land," remarked Baltaes. "You will understand, Milord, that he may hold it at a higher price than he paid for it, or even the assessed value—"

"Price is no consideration whatever, Senhor. I would prefer that you offer him a sum which is sufficient to keep him, comfortably, for several years longer than would his land—living as he is accustomed to live."

"But that is magnificent, Milord! It removes much of the difficulty in dealing with such a man. There is, however, another point to be considered. Much of that land on this end of Pico is covered with vineyards. The air is very dry. They grow the grape over there as we cannot on Fayal, because we are so much more damp—more suitable for tobacco. Well—this crop of grape is almost ripe. The growers have spent much time and patience and hard work in caring for their vines. You would, I suppose, permit them to hold the land until the grapes can be gathered and pressed?"

"That's what I really haven't time to do, Senhor—because I wish to prepare the ground at once—for a special purpose which I have in mind. If it is possible, however, for the growers to transplant the vines—if they can find other near-by land for the purpose—I will purchase that land and let them have the use of it rent-free for a year or two, on condition that they begin transplanting at once. I'll pay for all the extra labor they have to employ; if their crop is injured, I'll pay the full value of that. But I want the ground just as soon as I can get it."

"H-m-m—on such generous terms, I think it can be done. Oh, to be sure! It *can* be done," Baltaes conceded. "But I don't say it will not require some diplomacy. The people here are slow—they cannot think as fast as that."

"If you made some of them an offer, to-

morrow—an offer of three or four times what the land is worth—how long do you think they would insist upon considering it before they'd sign a deed?"

"Not less than a week, Milord—in the case of a simply unheard-of offer, such as you are making."

"Well, suppose you go across the strait with us in the morning, and find us some good horses to ride—go up and look the ground over—make the owners an offer—hand over to them a deposit and then leave them to soak in the idea for a week—you going up to Flores with me on the yacht. They understand of course that they return the deposit if they don't take me up."

"You will not lose a single milreis, Milord," Baltaes assured him. "And whatever agreement they make with you they'll stick to, even if it isn't written out."

PROBABLY no such land-purchase ever had been made in the Islands—it was simply unheard of. The thought of transplanting their vines and probably losing more than half their crop was what took the greatest amount of persuasion to overcome—but they considered it princely of the purchaser to pay for the entire crop in addition to the land—buy other land in which the grapes might continue to be grown—and give them all the vines they could salvage, besides. It was a sample of broad-gauge modern business with which they had never come in contact, but the final deed was signed twelve days after the *Ranee* had come to Horta.

While she was anchored there inside the breakwater—the day before clearing for England—a man by the name of Brunn arrived on the steamer *Sao Miguel* of the *Empreza Insulana*, from Lisbon and Madeira. He transferred his luggage to the Hotel Fayal, then hired a motor-car, and took a ride around the Island. The next day he went across to Pico, hired a horse, with a guide to run alongside, took a leisurely ride through the vineyards on the smoother levels and made casual inquiries as to land-values, taking down the names of several owners. When the *Sao Miguel* came back from Flores, he went down on her to Terceira and Ponta Delgada—where he met another man by the name of Kopf and took rooms at Brown's Hotel.

A fortnight later, the two returned to Horta with the intention of dickering for land on Pico—but found to their amazement that everything they wanted had been

sold and the land cleared for an immense airport. Two skeleton steel-towers were beginning to rise from considerably higher ground, and a concrete machine-shop, hangars and laboratories were going up along one side of the landing-field.

On Flores and Terceira, they also found that the ground they had come to buy had been purchased under their very noses. Supposing that the world's attention was concentrated upon the northern route for airplane flights, they had calculated upon developing another route before anyone knew what they were up to, but found that there were other men with more far-reaching vision who had outguessed them.

When Earl Trevor returned to London, after nearly three weeks of absence, the air-service proposition had been pretty well worked out—it was then merely a problem of making flight after flight until average conditions could be tabulated and discounted. In the Cabinet, during his absence, one or two questions had come up which might have a far-reaching bearing later on—but Earl Lammerford and Baron Abdool Mohammed gave him the gist of these so that he really missed nothing of the political situation.

ONE feature which had been engaging their attention more closely than others was the mysterious activities of the man Leon Lichnow. He had been seen in conference with American Congressmen and Senators who were over on short vacation-trips or as members of certain commissions—in Paris and in London. But he seemed to be most frequently in touch with a man known as Maurice Walsingburg, a naturalized American who was said to have a good deal of political influence at home and to represent unofficially a certain party in the United States Government. When Earl Lammerford mentioned this, Trevor gave a growl of dissent.

"I don't believe that any lobbyist of any breed has much real influence in the House or Senate. Certain Congressmen or Senators have their following—unquestionably—but none of them pay much attention to an outsider!"

"Wait a bit, George! This bird, Walsingburg, isn't as simple a proposition as a mere lobbyist—he has no option on blocks of Members in either chamber. Suppose he's directing a subtle, carefully worked out propaganda campaign which crops out in a thousand different places—under as

many kinds of camouflage? That influence gets to the Members through letters from their constituents—when there are enough of such letters, they begin paying some attention to them. They have to—if they don't want to lose out at the next election. Well, d'ye see, this chap starts out to accomplish a certain result by such propaganda—when he sees it beginnin' to work he chats with diff'rent Members. They've no belief that *he* could shape public opinion even if he wanted to—yet because what he says is so closely in line with the letters they've been gettin', they give him credit for being exceptionally well-informed on the political trend an' listen to him respectfully. He doesn't urge 'em to vote for his particular measures—never lets 'em see that he has any—but he gives it as his opinion that the people of all parties are more or less out to support certain foreign policies, and that they are going to say something pretty drastic unless their wishes are consulted in the matter.

"My word, you know! You can make the average citizen—the man in the street—believe that black is white if you go after him persistently with that sort of propaganda. Take but one of the instances with which everyone is familiar—the claim that Germany did not start the war. At first, there was a storm of protest among all of the Allies against that statement. But the Germans kept right on sayin' it—over and over—so monotonously that it got to be rather hypnotic. And today—look at the result! Three-quarters of the people in each of the Allied countries are saying: 'Well, I'm not so sure—perhaps they really *didn't* start it. Perhaps it really was forced upon them, as they say!' That's a pretty good illustration of the 'black-and-white' statement. So when a rumor gets about that a certain man may be exerting a powerful influence upon any constitutional Government, it's not always a safe bet that he isn't doing so. If the mass of the people did their own thinking, such a claim would be ridiculous—but—"

"You're not implying, as I understand, that this Walsingburg may actually control so many votes in the House and Senate, over there?"

"I'm not making that statement—but I'm tryin' to show that it's by no means an impossibility. Of course he's not doin' anything of the sort by direct contact. But, for example, if you wanted to know

whether a certain policy was likely to be adopted by Congress—an' he assured you that it was—you might find him a pretty good prophet, always provided the opposition didn't get wind of what was in the air an' start out to block him. Chap like that is always workin' underground—in the dark—with delicately adjusted chances for and against his success. Expose his methods, publicly, at certain stages in the game, and you're quite likely to swing public opinion against him."

"**WHERE'S** he stopping—here in London?" asked Trevor.

"One of the big hotels, where he's likely to see most of the prominent men and women who pass through to the Continent. He's seen hobnobbin' with this or that well-known person—creates a widespread impression that he knows, intimately, about ten times the number he actually does know and, of course, that does increase his circle of acquaintances."

"Where does Lichnow hang out in this town?"

"Very quiet an' respectable house near Cornwall Gardens in Kensington. Supposed to be a writer upon political an' scientific subjects, occasionally contributin' to the reviews an' fiction magazines. He's seen, occasionally, diggin' in the Imperial Institute, over there. House frequently visited by journalists, actors, artists an' politicals who are supposed to drop in for general discussions. Quite obviously a place where you'd see a chap like that naturalized American without bein' struck by anything unusual or compromisin' in it. In fact, Walsingburg occasionally fetches in some prominent American to hear or take part in the discussions. Apparently, nobody has been struck by the fact that this bird is the last of the guests to leave—or takes the trouble to watch the house until he comes out at two or three o'clock in the morning, as we've done."

"Any way, not too complicated, of overhearing his conferences with Lichnow?"

"Abdool an' I have been giving our attention to that. I fancy we may be able to get hold of some data within the next three days. This is a case, George, where you'd best keep entirely out of it."

"Er—why so? Why interfere with my innocent pleasures?"

"Because you've taken enough chances, lately, where your political standing would have been ruined if you'd been caught.



Two men cautiously stationed themselves outside a second-story window and listened through microphones resting against the window-pane.

Cabinet Ministers, d'ye see, can't do the sort of things we five used to do all the time—”

“Hmph! You and Abdool are taking some risk in this case, and you're both in the Cabinet!”

“Aye—but neither of us is the biggest man in it, old chap—bigger than even the Premier himself! What you've just been up to in the Azores is more in the line of Cabinet accomplishment—adding so materially to British prestige that it will increase your personal reputation. If we succeed in getting incriminating evidence against Lichnow and that naturalized Yankee, we'll give you the chance to make political use of it—that's more in your line than ours.”

ON the second night afterward—a breathless, oppressive one, when London was gasping for better air to breathe and a pall of soft-coal smoke lay over the streets—two men cautiously stationed themselves on the roof of an extension outside of a second-story window in the rear of Lichnow's Kensington house. After listening two hours through microphones resting against the windowpanes, they dropped a gas-bomb in a thin and flexible container through a very narrow opening at the top of the window.

Inside of three minutes, the two men who had been talking in the private study

were unconscious. Then the sash was raised, and the wary eavesdroppers, wearing gas-masks, entered the room and carefully examined wallets and documents which they coolly took from their victims' pockets. There was but one paper in the lot which they really wanted—a single sheet of bond paper which they had seen Lichnow take from a drawer in his desk and place in a typewriter, afterward writing upon it a memorandum-understanding which he and Walsingburg signed with initials.

This sheet of bond paper was taken from Lichnow's wallet. The disguised Earl then found another sheet of the same paper and made a verbatim copy of the memorandum upon it, even to a clever forging of the initials. After this he placed the copy in the wallet and put that back in the unconscious man's pocket—keeping the original himself. Everything about the room was replaced exactly as it had been before they came in and the intruders silently disappeared just as the two in the study were beginning to recover consciousness, attributing their supposed fainting-spell to the closeness of the air that night.

Two hours later, at the Trevor mansion in Park Lane, the original memorandum-sheet was being passed from hand to hand in the big Jacobean library and digested, with full appreciation of just what the agreement on it might accomplish.

London . . . 1928

It is hereby understood and guaranteed, as far as may be humanly possible, that in the event the Government of . . . for any reason declares war upon the Government and people of . . . the Government of the United States will remain neutral and will in no way come to the assistance of the country last mentioned or encourage assistance from other States. That, while selling to either belligerent munitions and supplies which according to International Law such neutral nation is permitted to sell, all such munitions and supplies shall be delivered f. o. b. United States ports—said U. S. A. making no attempt to deliver them at destination.

It is further understood that all goods produced in or by the nation first above mentioned may be imported into the United States under as favorable a tariff as may be legislatively obtained and that no legislative restrictions shall interfere with any selling campaign introduced by said first-mentioned nation to push its said goods in the United States. In the event statements are made in said campaign that said goods are superior to similar goods made by other nations, they shall be permitted to challenge such statements in the courts if they wish, but the Federal and State Governments will remain strictly neutral in any such controversy.

(Signed) M. W.—L. L.

"HMPH!" commented His Lordship. "Without a key to the underlying meaning in all that, the average person in the United States would fail to see any great harm in it to his own country or any friendly State. Actually, it would isolate the State not mentioned—but very well understood as the British Empire—in the event of war against her by the nation whose agent signed this. With an active submarine campaign sinking or bottling up our ships, it would prevent us from obtaining munitions and supplies from the United States while our enemy was loading his ships with them in American ports.

"A careless reading of that agreement would make the average American fancy there was no discrimination in favor of any nation's goods in American markets—while actually it permits this foxy Government to start and carry on any selling campaign and propaganda it pleases in American cities without the slightest interference—and all another nation can do by way of protecting the sale of its own goods is to bring an action for false and discriminating statements in the American courts. Even if the other nation gets a judgment in its favor, this foxy nation goes right on making similar statements equally bad. It may keep fighting and having such litigation put over for years while its selling

propaganda, day after day, is steadily making itself felt in the way of discrimination against all other goods.

"My word! That's about as crafty a bit of international politics as ever I've seen! It puts this unmentioned nation, which a schoolboy might guess, in the position of the closest political an' commercial friend of the United States—permittin' this scheming Government to isolate an' mop up other States, one at a time, without America coming to their assistance even in case of the direst necessity. An' the joker in the whole proposition is that no legislation is asked for from the United States until some emergency arrives where action is necess'ry. By that time, this bird's propaganda has become so effective that he can probably deliver the goods on a 'peace-and-noninterference' basis. Walsingburg is sailing Saturday—guaranteeing to have a flood of his initial propaganda started over the entire United States within ten days. The time to block him most effectively is before he reaches New York—start a backfire ahead of him!"

Lammerford nodded.

"Aye—but that'll take some doing, I fancy! Where would you begin, old chap? Special conference with a Congressional Committee?"

"Even in the matter of a diplomatic protest from us through our ambassador, that would take months, if not a year, to get definite action—Congress would be adjourning in a few weeks. And no sort of political legislation will get this thing before the people with sufficient clarity to make them understand the scheme an' discount the propaganda."

"H-m-m—fancy we may be approachin' a serious situation very shortly!" said Abdool Mohammed, who had been listening quietly.

"I say!" remarked Trevor; "I'm going to pass this agreement around at the Cabinet meeting tomorrow—then, if they see it as we do, make it the subject of a Governm't protest backed up by Parliament."

"Aye? And then what, George?"

"I'm going to block the scheme in a way I fancy may prove quite effective."

"With—or without—Parliament'ry permission?"

"Either way! I doubt if they'll repudiate what I do—but I really don't give a damn—it'll be *done* before that! It's the only practical way I can see for handling

the matter—and it's simply out of the question to let those scoundrels get away with murder—like this!"

AT the Cabinet meeting, it took some time to make two or three of the Ministers clearly understand just what the effect of the agreement would be unless it were blocked at once. They grasped the evident intention without much difficulty, but the point they made was that it could not in any way be considered a diplomatic understanding, and for that reason could not be taken up with the United States through diplomatic channels—also that an agreement between private individuals could have no possible binding force upon the Governments referred to.

"That is exactly what makes the thing all the more dangerous, gentlemen!" Trevor explained. "No constitutional Government can force its citizens to ratify a diplomatic agreement which is made without first being sure of their approval. On the other hand, a general trend can and often does force a Government to do something which the people feel themselves tacitly bound to do as a matter of policy with other people. This man Walsingburg has no power whatever to make the United States Congress carry out his wishes by openly directing them to do so or controlling so many votes personally—but he has the means and the intention of using subtle propaganda to sway public opinion until the constituents of a majority in Congress demand some action in that direction."

"Do we understand that Your Lordship proposes an exchange of conversations protesting, upon our part, against the existence of such an agreement as this and demanding official denial of any intention to support it?"

"We must certainly do that through our ambassador, in an official way—though it wouldn't do a particle of good if we took no other action. The matter would be treated diplomatically—not permitted to get out where the people would hear anything about it. We would, of course, get ample assurance that their Government has never had anything of the sort in mind—which is the literal truth. But the agreement would become effective in spite of that—as I have explained to you."

"How would Your Lordship propose handling the matter?" asked another hearer.

"Walsingburg sails from here Saturday.

I can't arrange to get away before that—but I will leave on Tuesday afternoon from South Devon—reaching New York in forty-two hours, or less. I'll start a commercial campaign, to expose an' defeat this agreement, throughout the entire country—instructing executives in New York exactly what each of them is to do in order to accomplish this. My business connections have rather widespread ramifications, you know. Then I will see our ambassador in Washington and give him this original agreement, with instructions to take it up with the State Department after the thing has become publicly known—not before. Altogether, these arrangements should take me not longer than a day and a half, let us say—and before Walsingburg can reach New York—"

"But Your Lordship is forgetting that the adjustment bill with the Unions is coming up very shortly and that it will be absolutely necessary for you to be present at the special Cabinet meeting called for a week from Monday!"

TREVOR smiled with quiet assurance. "I've every intention of bein' present at that meeting, Your Excellency—I'd not quite finished what I was going to say. If I leave Devon Tuesday afternoon, I shall be in New York Thursday morning—and be ready to start back some time Friday. Coming this way, I should make the trip in not over thirty hours—thirty-five at the outside, allowing for everything—which would bring me into London some time Saturday evening."

"Oh, but that's quite impossible, you know! Assuming, of course, that you mean to go by plane, as it couldn't be done in any other way, you should consider that, so far, but one plane ever has gotten across, going west—and that one only got as far as Belle Isle Strait!"

"Aye—but I shouldn't dream of takin' that route! The *Bremen* showed us it'll never be a safe one—not even practical, for years to come. I shall go by the safest an' easiest route—with atmospheric conditions upon which I may depend nine times out of ten. Transatlantic service will be in operation next year, gentlemen—and my planes will be covering the course before that."

After a moment of incredulous silence, there was a chorus of doubts and protests.

"Nonsense, man! Rank nonsense! We know, to be sure, that you're by way of

bein' a brilliant aviator with years of experience—but so were the brave an' foolish men who have been lost attemptin' it! We infer that you're considerin' the trip by way of the Azores—and the distance alone is against you—it's a much longer trip than by way of Newfoundland!"

"Your Excellency may be surprised to know just what the figures are. A difference of only three hundred and fifty-two miles between the two—but all the difference in the world in atmospheric conditions."

"But at St. Johns, one can refuel, if necessary! In the Azores, one can't depend—really depend—upon airplane petrol at all—an' if anything gets out of order or breaks, there's no chance whatever for repairs."

"Really—you gentlemen should keep better posted upon what's going on in the world! There is now one of the finest landing-fields in the world on Pico, opposite Horta—two hundred acres of firm smooth ground for taking-off, with hangars an' machine-shops, fully equipped, along one side of it. They're not yet fully completed—it will take another two months for that—but they're in shape to make repairs right now, an' the fuel is there in the tanks. On the higher ground, there is a hundred-kilowatt radio-station equipped for both high and low-frequency service."

"My word! German plant, I suppose?"

"Not at all! Plant of the Anglo-American Mail and Radio Service of which I am the president-treasurer. We also have other stations on Flores an' Terceira."

"By Jove! You're not spoofin' us, are you, Trevor? My word! The nation'll owe you a vote of thanks for that! Even if a regular service doesn't get going, it'll be a most desirable base for Navy experiments an' practice-flyin'."

"You gentlemen are all blinded by some obsession upon the part of the general public that the Azores route is so much the longer as to be prohibitory—and you're entirely overlookin' the fact that no aviator has yet been lost on that route. Two have not quite reached the islands and had to be towed in—but on the Northern route they'd have gone under before help could have reached them. The longest hop is only the same distance that Lindbergh covered between Washington and Mexico City—and that was much more dangerous flying than from Horta to New York."

"But isn't it much shorter from Horta to Newfoundland than to New York? Why not make that the second jump instead?"

"Climate, man, climate! And it's but a hundred and eighty-four miles farther to New York—one hour and a half of flying time. On the hop to New York in winter weather there's no risk of ice forming on the wings and fuselage. On the Newfoundland hop you get a dangerous lot of it at the end of the flight, when there's floating ice an' bergs under you. Running out of Plymouth in the winter over the Azores course, there's a chance for snow an' sleet only for the first few hundred miles—after that, you've warm air all the way across, following the Gulf Stream."

TWO of the Ministers were convinced from the start that such a round-trip flight as the Earl proposed was sheer insanity.

"Your Lordship should be placed in confinement as a madman! Such attempts are regrettable enough in the case of aviators who have no public value, but in the case of a Cabinet Minister whose services are depended upon by his sovereign and his Government, they're simply criminal, and shouldn't be permitted. Why, it's suicide! The chances are a hundred-to-one that you can't make it!"

"I fancy Your Excellency wouldn't care to book a stiffish amount of cold cash upon that? Eh?"

"A wager? Why, man, I'll bet a hundred pounds that you can't make such a round trip in a month!"

"That wasn't my proposition—and I see you haven't really much confidence in what you're saying. I'll book a wager with you of five thousand pounds that I go to New York Tuesday and return to London not later than the following Sunday morning!"

"Very good—I'll book you!"

"Faith—you'll do a bit more than book me! You'll deposit your check, with mine, in Sir Austen's hands—now—with a typewritten memorandum of exactly how the bet stands—with these gentlemen as witnesses. I will also be glad to take on similar bets from you others if any of you feel as pessimistic about my flight."

John Craithness, the Premier, quietly protested:

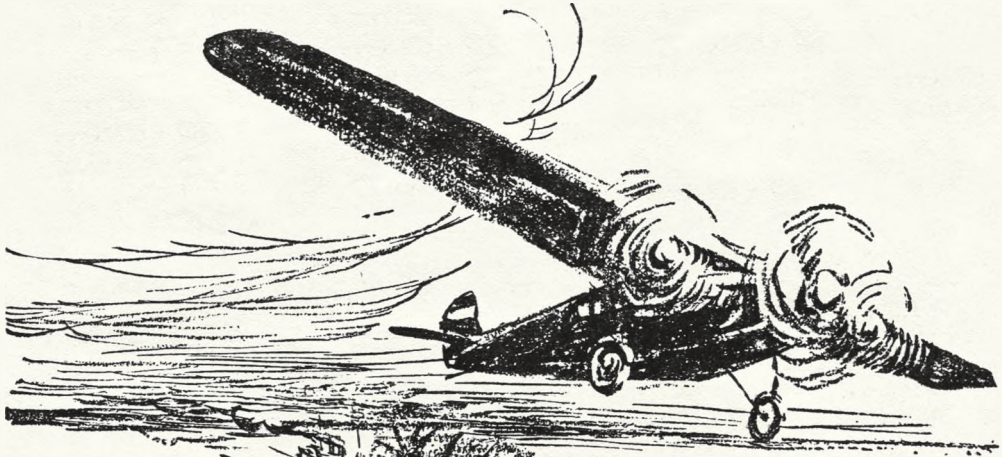
"Let this one bet stand if you insist, gentlemen—but let the matter rest there. It's neither good taste nor a proper subject for

gambling to stake the lives of three valuable men as you're doing in this case. That's what it amounts to, you know! And I must caution you against letting His Lordship's real object in making the flight leak out where the press gets hold of it. Talk about the wager, if you wish—that's

puttin' on an output of eighty kilowatts, an' has a man signing that station five times, at five-minute intervals—says we can depend upon gettin' that over the low-wave set until we reach there."

"Is he getting us?"

"Not yet, sir. I fancy our range can't



The plane passed over two incoming liners just at dusk, and laid their course for Horta.

good camouflage. But keep the diplomatic side in the dark."

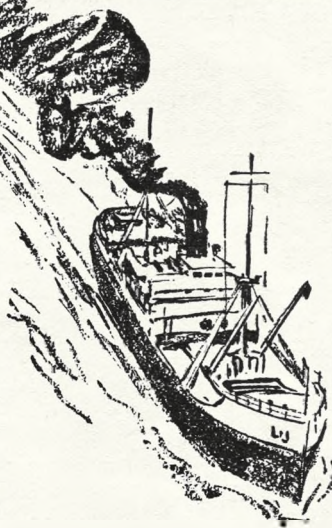
Before Earl Trevor went up from his South Devon estate, Tuesday afternoon, the terms of the wager had been flashed all over Europe and America. He had booked other bets until the total was around forty thousand pounds—which of course was sufficient to give him front-page space in every newspaper.

The Earl himself had put the wager entirely out of his head and was concentrating, as a navigator, upon the job ahead of him. They passed over two incoming liners just at dusk, and laid their course for Horta. Boyd Lambert had installed three corrected and compensated compasses of the latest type—a navigator's magnetic—an earth-induction—and a radio-compass mounted in gyroscopic rings so that it was always right-side up and level.

At seven o'clock, Trevor said:

"Any word from Harry Archer?"

"Aye, sir—gettin' him quite perfectly on the high-freq'ncy. He says he has but one of the towers up sufficiently far to rig temporary umbrella-aërials from it—but he's



be over six hundred miles on the low waves. I'll try him presently on high-freq'ncy an' see if I can get it through. Clouds should deflect that properly."

"Pick up one of the liners and ask 'em to relay our dead-reckoning position to him—using his new call-letters on two thousand meters."

When this had been done, Trevor started to fix his first position and check up. Consulting the Navy hydrographic department book, "Radio Aids to Navigation," he ascertained the call-letters. night wave-

length and compass-signal of the big London station, and connecting the loop on his radio-compass to the most powerful receiving-set, he swung it around until its edge pointed in the direction from which the London signals came most clearly and with the greatest volume. The compass-direction from the plane was N. E. $\frac{3}{4}$ E.—which, with the correction of 14° west for magnetic variation, made the true bearing N. E. $\frac{3}{4}$ E. Drawing a faint pencil-line on his chart in this direction, he next got the big Monsanto Station in Portugal which, with the correction, bore S. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. from him. Drawing a pencil-line of this bearing across the first one, the intersection of the two lines gave him the exact position of the plane at that moment—48-25 N. Lat.—10-20 W. Lon.—or exactly 170 miles S. W. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. from Plymouth.

This position, two hours after he had started, showed that the big plane had been doing on an average of ninety-five sea-miles an hour against a fifteen-mile headwind, and that by keeping her headed straight on a true bearing for the signals from the Pico Station, according to the earth-induction compass, there had been no drift at all. Figuring the actual drift of the wind and her slewing a bit to the right in order to keep aiming at the radio-signals, she was actually flying in a direction six points to the left of where her compass indicated.

Without the radio-signals to guide her, she would have been at least forty miles off her course toward the Bay of Biscay—which shows the difference between *navigating* a plane over the ocean and flying by guess or by luck. The Island of Fayal has the same area as Staten Island in New York harbor—though ten times higher. The Island of Pico would stretch only from the Battery to Asbury Park—but its mountain rises more than seven thousand feet above sea-level and can be seen a hundred miles away on a clear day. Even at that, either island is a very small dot to hit, with an airplane in mid-ocean!

AT four o'clock in the morning they were less than three hundred miles N. E. by E. from the Pico landing-field—coming down there without the slightest injury at seven-twenty A. M. Harry Archer had been anxiously following the progress of the plane through the night, having picked up their signals at eleven P. M. and was delighted with the way they were holding a true course in spite of wind and variation.

They were equally pleased with the remarkable progress he had been making. He said that while he had been able to get the Chincoteague Station in Maryland on his most powerful receiving-set, he was doubtful as to their being sure of it until they had gone five or six hundred miles. His Lordship, however, pointed out something which hadn't occurred to Archer:

"We're getting *this* station at twelve hundred miles, Harry, with no difficulty at all—so we'll simply keep running on a tail-bearing from here until we pick up Chincoteague with sufficient strength. That is—instead of trying to keep his signals due west on the compass, we keep the Pico Station due east, over our tail-fin. The wind is light all the way across—variation from twenty-two degrees at this end to fifteen near the coast. Possibly a little rain, but no fog—the steamers are all reporting clear weather."

After a three-hour stop—during which they took on more gasoline, overhauled motors and bracing, ate a hearty breakfast, and put cooked food and hot coffee aboard—the big plane was up again, with Archer replacing the radio-operator until Saturday. At three in the afternoon, they got a cross-bearing from Pico and Cape Race which showed them on the thirty-sixth meridian, W. Lon., and indicated that they were averaging a good hundred miles an hour. At midnight, they were crossing the fifty-third meridian and at eight A. M. they were a hundred miles from the Jersey coast. At ten, they made a beautiful landing at the Staten Island field.

Messages from liners and shore-stations all through the night had indicated widespread interest and enthusiasm concerning the flight among people of every class.

His Lordship knew that mobs would be gathering at all of the Long Island fields and felt that he had no time to waste upon them. Leaving Archer and his machinist in charge of the plane, the Earl was whisked away in a car—across the ferry to the Battery and up to the editorial offices of a leading morning paper—while the news of his safe landing was being flashed around the world.

In the office, Earl Trevor handed the managing editor and the president of the publishing company a number of typewritten sheets with a negative taken from the original memorandum-agreement, which he showed them, rapidly sketching the conference between Lichnow and Walsburg.

Though they were quick-witted enough to grasp the whole thing and visualize the effect such a scheme must have if carried out, they were doubtful as to method.

"Just what does Your Lordship suggest that we do with this?"

"Print the story as written on those sheets, with a reproduction from this negative—and don't altogether drop the subject for a month!" ordered Trevor.

Still they hesitated.

"It's news—legitimate news which ought to be printed," the managing editor conceded; "but there's going to be one whale of a howl if we do it! The country is full of their nationals, you know—they're bound to say it's conspiracy against their business houses and their Government!"

"Which doesn't alter the fact that it is conspiracy against *my* Government—the best friend and ally the United States has in the world!" His Lordship rejoined sternly. "Possibly I should have handed you this letter from the Universal Syndicate Service, Limited, which owns this paper—but I didn't fancy I'd need to. You have no option in the matter, gentlemen! Print this matter without regard to consequences. We'll hold you harmless!"

Trevor's next visit was to the offices of the syndicate itself, uptown—where he left fifty other negatives, with duplicates of the story. The New York representatives of the syndicate were there to carry out his orders implicitly, as received from the management in London, and knew what would happen to them if they didn't—and immediately dispatched the matter to newspapers all over the country, by air-mail. Then Trevor went to Washington and left the original with the ambassador—while all New York was searching for him.

When the New York papers were put aboard the steamer from the quarantine-tug, Walsingburg saw the memorandum at that moment in his pocket staring him in the face from the front pages—with a detailed description of that conference which neither he nor Lichnow even dreamed had been suspected, much less overheard. It was an absolute checkmate.

At the Staten Island field, a company of marines had been detailed to guard the plane and keep the crowds at a safe distance. Nobody knew where the Earl was until he suddenly appeared, ready to start—Archer having kept the plane in readiness. They went up in a beautiful take-off and disappeared over the Atlantic, heading

one point south of east. Then the public interest rose to fever heat. Everybody who had access to a radio-set listened all day and all night for the half-hourly reports. As all of the steamer-lanes were considerably to the north of the plane's course, only those along the more southerly lanes succeeded in keeping up direct communication—but the big stations at Chincoteague and Pico were in constant touch, and sent out hourly reports of her progress.

THE run to the Azores was as uneventful as the outward hop but several hours faster—averaging one hundred and twenty miles ahead of a light tail-wind. They reached Pico at four A. M. Saturday morning—leaving three hours later after refueling and overhauling as before. At five in the afternoon (the plane having gained five hours in Greenwich time) it was rumored about London that Earl Trevor and his companions had landed on his estate in South Devon—and the city went wild.

At nine that evening, His Lordship quietly slipped into the House of Commons and sat down in his usual place on the Government bench. Until the Speaker stepped down from his chair to congratulate him, none of the Members quite realized that Earl Trevor himself was present. But then a roar went up which shook the rafters. Presently one could distinguish in the turmoil, shouts of "*Speech! Speech!*"

His Lordship got upon his feet and waited until quiet again obtained.

"My Lord—and Honorable Members," he began. "I have only a brief announcement to make to you; I trust you will find it a pleasant one. An air service is now being inaugurated across the Atlantic—and I fancy we may depend rather closely upon the average time which I myself have just made—leaving South Devon at five P. M. Tuesday afternoon and reaching there on the return trip at five this afternoon—Saturday—after covering a distance of six thousand seven hundred and twenty-four miles as pleasantly and uneventfully as one would on any of the liners. A thirty-hour stopover in the States should be deducted from the running time in order to indicate that which is expected to be maintained. This Service is strictly under British ownership and management!"

Then the House cut loose again in a wild enthusiasm, while crowds massed outside yelled in sympathy.



The Defective Detective

By CALVIN BALL

Remember Ed, the wizard garage mechanic, whose adventures Calvin Ball described for you so amusingly? Here he introduces an even more attractive character, a small-town soda-jerker who aspires to be a detective.

I carried the gold into the bank and finally made Mr. Perkinson believe it.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IT was a few months after I finished the special course from the Banner Detective School, and received diploma for same, that the robbery took place in the Junction City First National Bank.

On the day after the robbery, Walter Benton came into the drug store, and stopped at the soda fountain for a drink. Walter is a hearty young man, well known in town because he is a great kidder. He walked around to the end of the counter where I was and slapped me on the back.

"Well, Whittier," he said to me, "you've got your chance now to show people what you can do. And you can feather your nest at the same time. I just came from the bank where they're putting up a thousand-dollar reward notice, and when I saw them tacking it up, I said to them right away that the one who is going to win the reward is Whittier Bope. And I'm betting you can do it, Whittier." Walter slapped me on the back again, and I moved farther away from him around the counter.

"Walter," I said, "I've mentioned it quite a few times, and I don't like to be

always speaking of it, but I wish you wouldn't slap me on the back like that when you come into the store. Mr. Purdlow likes me to run the fountain in a businesslike way, and not be fooling with patrons. And it don't look right to be too familiar."

"Mix me up a vanilla straight, and don't mind me being friendly, Whittier," he answered. "You know how I am. And I want to see you pull down the reward. Where is that diploma you were showing us a week or two back?"

"It's under the counter, Walter, and not so very easy to get at just at present," I answered; and I began mixing up the vanilla straight.

"You ought to have it framed and hung on the wall," he commented. "Have you done anything about this bank job yet?"

"No, I haven't done much as yet," I confessed. "I've been busy here at the fountain this morning, but I've been thinking if I get off this afternoon, I'll run to where the sheriff's posse is searching."

"The sheriff will never find them, Whit-

tier. It needs somebody like you that can go at it from a scientific angle. You've got plenty of facts to work on. There were three men in the gang, and the cashier can identify all of them. They didn't wear masks. And they all had guns. If you can trace which direction they went, and corner them, and get the stolen money away from them, all you'll need to do is bring the money back to the First National and collect your reward."

"A thousand dollars is a tidy sum for the bank to offer," I responded.

"Sure it is. It's generous; considering what you have to do to get it. It's a wonder the bank president isn't out after it himself. I guess he isn't feeling like it; I understand when the shooting was going on, somebody took a pot shot through the office window at him. And if I was you, Whittier, I wouldn't let any soda job stand in my way. You've got technical training. And while the sheriff is out playing blind man's buff in the swamps, you can pick up the trail at the bank, and you've got as good a chance as the next one. And I wish you luck."

LATER, as Walter was leaving, I was forced to call after him. "Walter," I said, "I don't see the dime here for the vanilla straight. Didn't you forget to leave it?"

"Why, so I did." Walter replied at once. "Any time I forget a thing like that, just holler right out; and I wouldn't want you to think I did it purposely."

"I know you didn't do it purposely," I answered. "Anybody is apt to make a mistake; I do myself sometimes."

"Sure you do. We all do." Walter looked through his pockets, but finally snapped his fingers. "By crickets!" he exclaimed. "I changed my clothes, and left my pocketbook in my other pants. Mark the dime down for me, Whittier."

When Walter had gone, I set to work at the fountain, polishing and putting it in order so that when Mr. Purdlow, who owns the drug store, returned a little before noon, I had the morning's work well in hand.

The talk I had had with Walter had not influenced me. I had already made up my mind before seeing Walter that I would take up the bank-robbery case. And the news that the bank had offered a reward made me more eager than ever to get started.

When Mr. Purdlow came in, I spoke to him, asking him for the afternoon off.

"What is the matter, Whittier?" he asked. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"There's nothing wrong that way, Mr. Purdlow," I assured him. And after a moment I explained to him more fully. "You see, it is something about the bank robbery," I said. "I have always been very interested in robberies, and in crime of all kinds; and lately I have completed a course at the Banner Correspondence Detective School."

"'Detective School,'" he repeated, and seemed to be surprised.

"It was only a mail course," I explained. "But it was very practical; and detective work is the line I believe I have a leaning toward. If things go right, I have been kind of planning to take it up as a regular profession. Of course that would be later on; I don't think I'm really qualified for it yet. But the robbery at the First National seems to be a chance for me to break the ice, and if you could get along this afternoon without me, Mr. Purdlow, I'd like to go over to the bank and talk with them."

Mr. Purdlow took off his glasses and stood holding them in his hand and looking at me.

"Well, well, Whittier," he said to me finally, "is that what the diploma of yours was about?"

WHEN I told him it was, he inquired further about the school, and about my intentions, questioning me until I had given him a full account. When I had finished I said to him, "Of course I know, Mr. Purdlow, that holding a diploma does not make me a detective. And the school makes no claims of that kind. All it offers is a grounding in the principles of crime detection—just everyday examples taken from practical cases in the great cities. But as the school has sent me some very complimentary letters, I am hoping that with hard work I will be able to make a success."

"Well, Whittier," Mr. Purdlow responded, "you have a worthy enough ambition. It seems to me that Junction City is kind of small for a detective; we've got a good sheriff here, and a chief of police; but on the other hand, if you've made up your mind to it, I guess there's nothing to stop you. Only I'd advise you to take it up as a side-line. And hold on to your

regular job here at the fountain. And if I were you I wouldn't mix up in this present bank trouble. The gang that did it are all hard customers, and if they're ever found they will be armed and ready to shoot."

During the noon-hour I walked around to the First National, and stopped in front a few minutes to read the reward notice. A number of other people were on the sidewalk, some of them standing near the door examining the splintered places where the bullets had struck, and commenting how lucky it was that no one had been hurt.

It was while I stood there that I saw Walter Benton again. He was passing by on his way home; and for a few minutes he stopped to talk.

"I see you're getting on the job, Whittier," he said to me. "I knew you'd be here before long. And I'll bet, for a change, old Purdlow himself is slapping out the soda."

"He will probably handle the fountain this afternoon," I agreed. "I'm going to speak to him when I get back to the store; but of course, it will be an extra bother for him."

"What do you care? Let him dish out his own drinks. If you were the kind to let a soda job stop you, you'd never break into the detective game. What you ought to do, Whittier, is leave old Purdlow entirely; he don't appreciate you anyhow, and once you're started in the detective line you'll make more in a week than you do now in a month. This bank job is your big chance, and if I were you I'd put in full time at it."

"Well, I don't know about it, Walter," I said. "I wouldn't want to do anything hasty; and I haven't quite decided yet."

"Leave him flat, I say; and look out for Number One. Have you found any clues yet?"

"I've only been here a few minutes," I explained. "I was out to lunch and stopped here on my way."

"Then you haven't been in to see Perky yet?" Walter meant Mr. Perkinson, president of the bank.

"Not yet," I replied. "In fact I think Mr. Perkinson is out to lunch just now."

WALTER stepped closer to the window and raised himself on tiptoes so that he could look through into the office of the president.

"No, he's not out to lunch, Whittier. He's in there; I can see the top of his head. But he'll be leaving for lunch in a few minutes, and if you're going to catch him before he goes out you'll have to hurry. If I were you I'd get right in; now's your chance."

I had not intended to visit Mr. Perkinson until later, but now that I was here, I thought it over awhile, and the present moment seemed as good a time as any for the interview. Mr. Perkinson was still in the office, and as he did not look to be busy, I decided finally that I would go in at once.

"And while you're in there," Walter suggested, "you ought to find out whether they're going to pay the reward in gold or in paper money. I hear they're going to pay it in gold."

"What would be the difference, Walter?" I asked. "One is as good as the other."

"Yes, that's a fact," he answered. "When you take that view of it. But paper money is easier handled. I believe you'd rather have it in paper, when it comes down to it."

"It doesn't seem to me that it makes any difference at all," I said. "I would as soon take gold as paper, any time."

"But look at the trouble there'd be lugging gold around. Sagging down on the pockets, and wearing holes. Figure what a twenty-dollar gold piece weighs. Do you know what one weighs?"

"No, I don't know exactly," I said. "It weighs about an ounce, or a little more or less."

"How do you know it weighs an ounce, Whittier?" he inquired.

"I remember it from school," I informed him. "And I have a little book with weights and measures in; it's about an ounce."

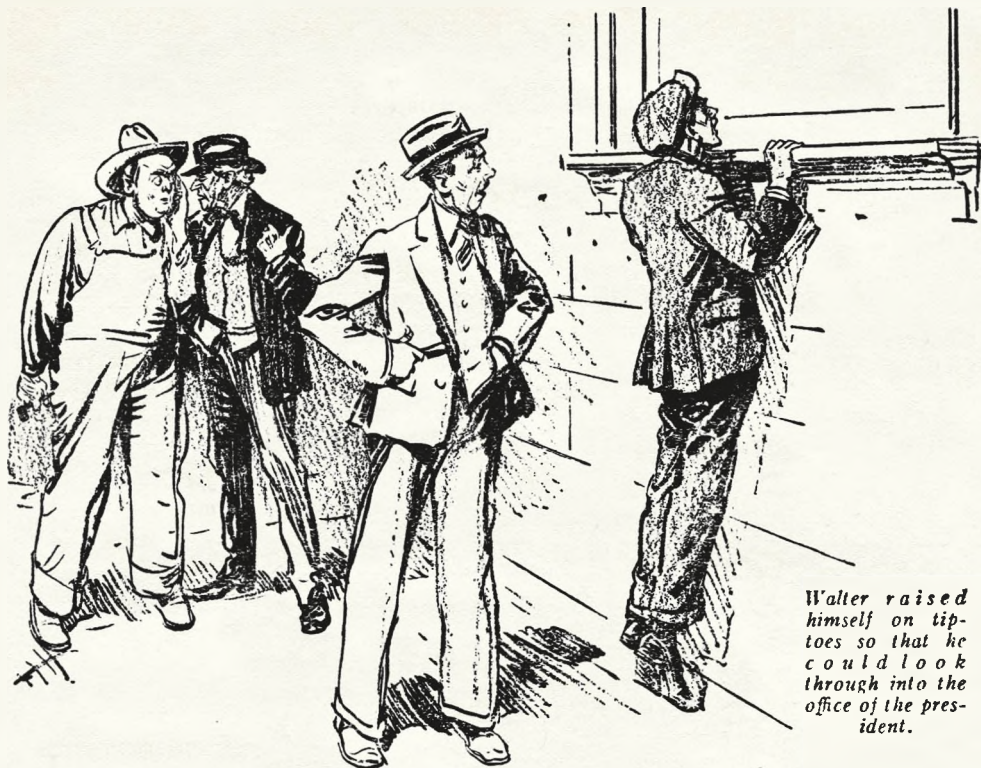
"Where is the book now?" he asked. "Have you got it with you?"

"Yes, I have it in my pocket," I said. "It's just a little red book of tables and so forth."

"Are you sure it says a twenty-dollar gold piece weighs an ounce?" he questioned further.

"Why, it's about an ounce, Walter," I responded. "I wouldn't say exactly."

"We might as well have it right," he urged. "Get the book out. Find out what a twenty weighs, and then you can figure up what the thousand is going to weigh. Have you got a pencil?"



Walter raised himself on tip-toes so that he could look through into the office of the president.

I started to reach for a pencil, but decided not to. "What is the use of figuring it up?" I said to Walter. "I haven't won the reward yet, and it may be that I will never win it. To start figuring now would be like counting your chickens before they are hatched."

"That's a fact," Walter replied. "You look at it more scientific than some people would." Walter glanced up at the bank clock. "It's quarter past," he said. "You're probably anxious to get in to see Perky, so I'm not going to keep you here talking. Good luck to you, Whittier; and I'll bet you'll be digging up a clue before you hardly get started."

INSIDE, when they asked me what it was that I wanted to see Mr. Perkinson about, I told them that I wished to speak to him regarding the bank robbery. They brought me in immediately.

Mr. Perkinson knows me quite well, as I have a modest account in the savings department, and he always says good morning to me when he stops for a mint ice at the fountain, and sometimes talks awhile. He was interested now when he saw me, and received me friendly.

"What is it, Whittier?" he inquired when we were alone. "They say you have some information about the robbery?"

"Not exactly that," I corrected him. "I said that I wanted to get information. That is why I came in to see you, Mr. Perkinson. I wanted to talk over the robbery, and get the facts as to how it happened; but before asking you any questions I suppose I ought to explain just why I am interested."

Since Mr. Perkinson had never heard of the Banner Correspondence Detective School, and did not know that I had taken the course, I started to explain it all to him at length. For a few minutes he sat looking at me curiously. And then he made as if to interrupt me, but deciding not to do so, he finally lighted a cigar and listened quietly until I was done.

"And so, Mr. Perkinson," I said when I had finished, "I hope you won't think I am forward in coming to see you this way, because I realize you are a busy man, and I am at present only a soda attendant, but I have ambition to strive for something greater in the world, and I am a young man trying to get ahead, and I believe that the course at the Banner Detective School will be a stepping-stone to my future."

After a few moments Mr. Perkinson inquired: "Where you going to locate with your detective profession, Whittier?"

"I was thinking of Junction City," I

replied. "The school believes that every small town is a fertile field for detective work."

"Yes, I guess that's true enough," he agreed. "What is it that you want me to do about it?"

"The reason I came in to see you," I explained, "is because of the robbery. It is a chance for me to break the ice, and I would be glad to try my hand at winning the reward."

"Go right ahead, Whittier," he said to this. "If that's all you wanted, you needn't have asked me at all. There's the reward notice posted up, and you'll see the bullet marks at the door, if that'll help. Do you use a magnifying glass?"

I smiled somewhat when I replied: "It is only in stories that they go round with a magnifying glass, Mr. Perkinson. Of course we do use a glass at times. But we rely mainly on deductions. And in this case I wouldn't take too much interest in the bullet marks."

"Perhaps you're right, Whittier," he answered. "The bullet marks kind of interested me—you'll notice a splinter gone there from the corner of the desk where they aimed one in my direction. It caught my attention at the time."

"His firing at you proves that they are killers," I stated. "We classify them as killers and non-killers. Do you remember how many men there were in the gang?"

"Yes, I believe I could tell you that, Whittier. I peeped out a time or two while the excitement was on, and if I counted right, there were three. Two inside, and one out on the steps."

"The one on the steps is what is known as the outside man," I said, and I drew out a pencil and slip of paper. "Do you mind, Mr. Perkinson, if I jot down a memo as to that?"

"Not at all," he responded. "Go right ahead in your own way. But I understand the sheriff's posse is already on the trail of these fellows. Don't you think he may collar them before you get started?"

THERE had been rumors during the morning that the sheriff was after the men, but no one held much faith that he would catch them. And one of the first rules of the Banner course, as to winning a reward, is never to be discouraged because others are trying for it. My chance,

I realized, was as good as the sheriff's. And in a tactful way I explained this to Mr. Perkinson.

"No doubt you are right," he agreed at once. "Tell you what you do, Whittier. This is lunch hour just at present, and I'm going out, but you gather all the information you want from the cashier, and the clerks outside. They saw it all. What the gang got is three bags containing thirty thousand dollars. When you get these bags, turn them in at the cashier's window, and the cashier will pay you your reward. Will that be satisfactory?"

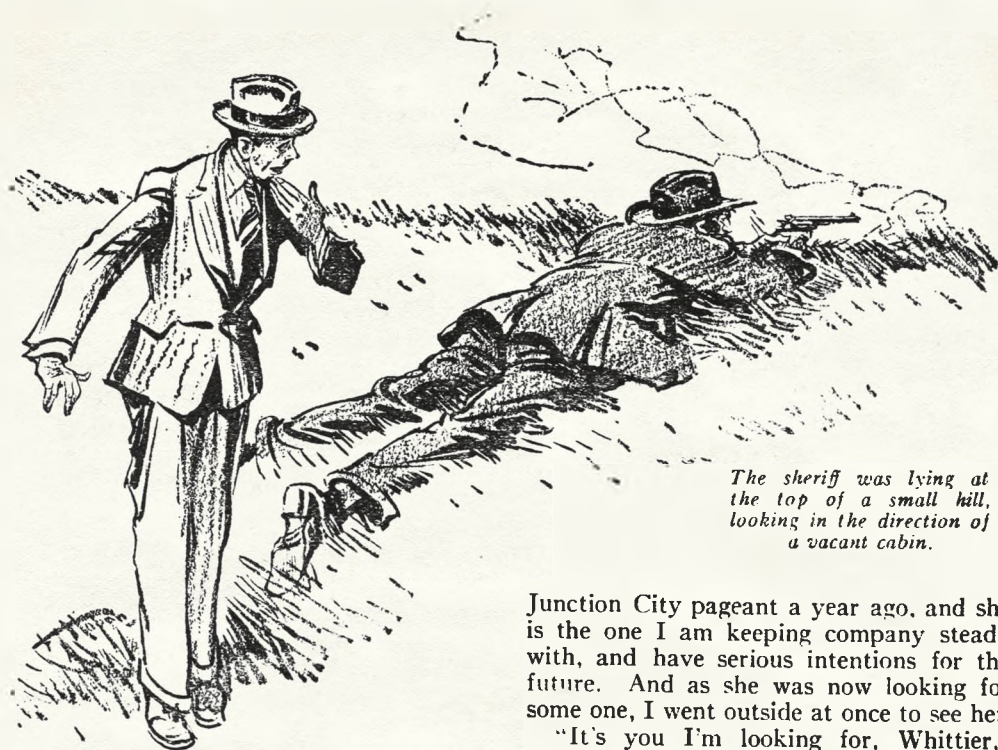
"It is very satisfactory," I said; "but of course, Mr. Perkinson, I could not guarantee in advance that I will be the one to win the reward. I can only say I will work hard. And I have confidence that I may be the lucky one."

LATER Mr. Perkinson left, and during the rest of the noon-hour I remained at the bank, asking various questions of the employees and making memos, and in all ascertained that the bank had been robbed by three armed men who had escaped with the loot amounting in all to thirty thousand dollars in gold.

It was nearing one o'clock when I finished, and knowing that Mr. Purdlow would be expecting me back at the drug store, I hastened along in that direction. I had by this time become so engrossed in the bank case that my position at the soda fountain seemed of less and less importance. And as I walked along I revolved the matter in my mind until by the time I had reached the store I had come to a definite decision. The bank case was one that might drag on for some time. And in order to be free to give my attention fully to the work, I resolved finally to cross the Rubicon and resign my position at the fountain.

Mr. Purdlow was surprised and sorry when I informed him, and he made an effort to talk me out of it. But when I explained that this was in a small way a crisis with me, and that my future might depend on the results of the next few days, he at last gave in.

"It is as sudden for me as it is for you, Mr. Purdlow," I said. "My relations with your drug store have been very pleasant; but I have always been expecting to get out of the soda rut sooner or later, and if I am going to win success in the detective line, or any other line, it means that I



The sheriff was lying at the top of a small hill, looking in the direction of a vacant cabin.

must be ready to take a chance and burn my bridges behind me."

When I finally left the drug store, after receiving back pay up to date, and shaking hands with Mr. Purdlow in a friendly spirit, I walked out on Pearl Street feeling more enthusiastic over my future than I had felt since the start. There hadn't been time at noon for me to have lunch. And with the excitement of seeing Mr. Perkinson at the bank, and of making the decision to leave Purdlow's, my appetite was something I hardly thought of.

The notes made at the bank contained a good many details jotted down at random; and before starting my next move, I hastened over to the Metro poolroom, which is always practically empty during the daytime, and finding a chair at the back, I sat down, and for the next twenty minutes worked swiftly with the notes, comparing one fact with another, fitting the facts together wherever they would fit, and also making deductions.

And it was while I was busy in this way that Mr. Sandberg, who runs the poolroom, called to me from the desk, and told me that Myrtle Haines was out in front, and was peeking in the window like as though looking for somebody.

Myrtle, as most everyone knows, is the one who took the beauty prize at the

Junction City pageant a year ago, and she is the one I am keeping company steady with, and have serious intentions for the future. And as she was now looking for some one, I went outside at once to see her.

"It's you I'm looking for, Whittier," she said to me; and before I could say anything in reply, she asked, "What are you doing here?"

From her tone and manner of speaking, I saw that she was not in a cheerful mood like usual, and that something must be wrong. But I answered her in the same light way as ever.

"It is not a question of what I am doing here, Myrtle," I said. "It is a question of what you yourself are doing here. And as I can see you are worried about something, I will ask you to tell me what it is."

"I have just come from Purdlow's drug store," she said in a curt way. And as I did not answer anything, she stopped for a minute and stood looking at me. And then she said unexpected, "Will you kindly tell me, Whittier Bope, what crazy idea you are up to now?"

There was a silence following this, as I have made it a rule never to speak without first putting my thoughts into order. No one has a better disposition than Myrtle. But her one fault is that she sometimes jumps at conclusions.

"In the first place, Myrtle," I said to her, "I don't know what you are talking about. It is not customary with me to have crazy ideas; and if I have any crazy idea at the present time, I would like to be informed what it is."

"If I could tell you, I would be a wizard," she answered. "I've just been to the drug store, and I've found out you've quit your job."

"Yes, that is true, Myrtle," I admitted freely. "I am no longer working at Purdlow's."

"And can you tell me why not?" she asked. "Were you canned?"

"Myrtle," I said to her, "you know I have never been discharged from any position where I have ever worked. And I have not been discharged at Purdlow's."

"You quit for no reason at all then!" she said. "Is that what?"

"No, it is not what," I returned. "And I wish to state, Myrtle, that although you have a good disposition, you have one bad fault which is that you jump at conclusions too quick. If I have resigned my place at Purdlow's, I have good reasons for doing same. And if you would ask me what the reason is, instead of leaping in the dark like you do, we would be getting somewhere, Myrtle, and not be going in circles."

I continued talking rapidly, and as there was no one on the sidewalk to interrupt us, I explained to Myrtle the full details of what was going on. She already knew that I had taken the Banner Correspondence Detective course; I had talked of it many times with her, and she had objected strongly at the time I was paying for it, and wanted me to quit in the middle of it.

"So you see, Myrtle," I said to her now, "it is fortunate that I have a more determined nature than you, and did not give up the course like you advised. Because now when opportunity knocks, I am prepared. And I want you to know, Myrtle, that I am doing it all for you, as I could not think I am worthy to be engaged, unless I made an effort to be something bigger than an ordinary soda man. And Walter Benton says the same."

MYRTLE had listened to me throughout, and said nothing until the end when I mentioned the name of Walter Benton. At hearing his name her eyes came open wide. And she seemed to forget everything else I had said.

"Walter Benton!" she exclaimed. "I knew it from the beginning. That's the little mut that's talked you into it! Do you know where Walter Benton is at the present minute?"

"I can't say that I do know," I replied

curiously. "I've seen him several times today."

"Sure you have. And I'll tell you where he is right now. When I was at Purdlow's he was getting himself into a white jacket, ready to start work at the fountain, and it was Walter that told me you had quit. And it's clear enough now that he was the one who talked you into it."

The news about Walter kind of surprised me, and before I could think of any remark to make, Myrtle said to me further: "Whatever you're coming to, Whittier, is more than I can tell. How are we going to start housekeeping if you don't work steady? And how much can you make in the detective line compared to soda? And also, the bank robbers you're talking about will be caught before the day is over. If you haven't heard it, I have. The sheriff has already cornered them out at Polliwog Swamp."

I started to say something at this point, but Myrtle edged in ahead of me with a final remark. "Whittier," she said, "in the past you've done many foolish things, but the way you have cut up today caps the climax. There is only one way out of it. And that is, I will go back to Mr. Purdlow myself, and tell him all the facts, and get him to take you back again on your old job. And the quicker I do it, the better."

BY the time Myrtle had stopped talking, she had got my thoughts so twisted up that all I could think of was the fact that she wanted to go to Mr. Purdlow, and ask him to take me back. And when I answered, I spoke of this humiliation first.

"Do you think I have got no self-respect, Myrtle?" I asked. "I have already told Mr. Purdlow that I am going into the detective line. And I have shook hands with him in a friendly spirit. How will it look for you to come running in now with a new story, like as though I don't know my own mind? I would rather work digging on a railroad track. And also, Myrtle, I am not so weak to be swayed with every breeze, and as I have made up my mind to be a detective I am going to be one."

"Very well, Whittier," Myrtle answered. "You can be one if you want to. But I'm not going to be married to one, and you can bet a silk hat on that."

"And in addition, Myrtle," I said, ig-

noring her statement that she would not marry one, "I don't believe any rumors that the sheriff has surrounded the bank gang, because the sheriff has never yet caught a man he goes after, and I don't think he will catch these. And if Walter Benton wants my job at the fountain, let him have it. Mr. Purdlow has encouraged me, and Mr. Perkinson has encour-

a heart, but I have always had courage to go ahead when I know I am right, and if Walter Benton was the scheming type who would talk one way to my face and another to my back, then I could only feel sorry for him having such a crooked nature.

With more determination than ever I went back to the bank. And here I learned



"Get out of here!" the sheriff ordered. "Do you realize there's gun shooting going on?"

aged me, and all others have encouraged me to go ahead and win the reward; and you are the only one, Myrtle, who is throwing around cold water."

This was the nearest to a quarrel with Myrtle that had yet taken place, and I regretted it very deeply; but by the time we finished talking I realized that it is sometimes the best policy to be firm and stand by your guns, because at the end Myrtle became more friendly.

"If you insist on having your way, Whittier," she said on leaving, "then for the present I won't say any more. Except I want to tell you that Walter Benton has been trying regular of late to date me up for the movies; and I would advise you as soon as you get over this detective idea to get back at a steady job, where you can save money, or you will be losing all around. And in the meantime everything will be the same between us as ever."

When I left Myrtle it was with a heavy feeling like a lump of lead instead of

for a fact that the sheriff and his deputies had cornered the gang in a cabin out at Polliwog Swamp, and was expecting some time before night to capture them.

With quick action I thought of the flivver automobile owned by my uncle on Maple Street, and as in this emergency the memos I had made at the bank were not of much help, I crammed them into my pocket, and hurried along over to Maple.

The car was one they often let me use, so there was no question asked about it. And within a short time, after stopping to get my flashlight, and changing to a soft shirt and cap, I was on my way.

When I drove by Purdlow's I looked, but didn't slow up, and in the doorway was Mr. Purdlow, and beside him in a white jacket stood Walter Benton. When Walter saw me he waved his hand at me in circles above his head like as though he was cheering. Mr. Purdlow only looked. I stepped on the accelerator and was soon out of sight of both.

ON reaching Polliwog Swamp, which lay only a few miles north of town, there was no trouble locating Sheriff Blynn and the other men he had sworn in as his deputies. When the sound of a revolver shot reached me I left the car. And from there I walked the remaining distance.

The sheriff was lying in the grass at the top of a small hill and was looking over the edge in the direction of a vacant cabin on the other side. Although I couldn't see it, I knew the cabin was there, and from the reports which had reached town, it was in the cabin that the bank gang was cornered. When the sheriff finally saw me approaching, he slid down from the knoll and came swiftly along toward me.

At this juncture I wish to state that the meeting with Sheriff Blynn in the next few minutes was one that I will probably never forget. Before being elected as sheriff, Mr. Blynn used to be in the dray business, and was always good-natured and cheerful, and as at times he had talked to me in a joking way at Purdlow's, I expected now that he would show a friendly attitude. But instead of this, Sheriff Blynn came at me like as though I was a bandit myself.

"Get out of here!" he ordered. "Do you realize there's gun shooting going on? How many times do I have to tell you curiosity prowlers to stay in town where you belong, and not be out here making things harder for us than they already are? I can't look around without seeing a new one walking up. Beat it now before one of them bullets clips you on the beazer."

For several moments I stood staring at the sheriff. And when finally I found words, I spoke to him with a determination which matched his own, except I was calm, as I always remember what President Washington said, or they say he said it, that dignity has its place even in battle.

"Mr. Blynn," I said to him, "I know you are excited; and no one could expect you to be your natural self at such a time. But even at a moment when danger threatens, don't you think it pays to inquire of people first what they are doing here, and not claim at random that they are curiosity prowlers? I am not here for a curiosity purpose. And if you will listen until I explain it, I am sure you will not make any more remarks about a bullet is going to clip me on the beazer."

At this point I started to explain to Mr. Blynn the full circumstance of why

I was here, but before I could get farther than that I had taken a course in the Banner Detective School, the sheriff broke out in a fresh tirade, saying, "Detective, hell! Get out of here!" and repeating it, and waving his hands, until I at last decided there would be no hope of reasoning with him in his present state of mind, so I withdrew like as though I was going home.

But when I have settled my mind to do a thing, though the roof may fall, I am going to do it; and while I must say that I did not know what it was I was going to do, I had anyhow determined not to return to Junction City until the bank gang was captured, or something settled definite.

And as the thread of Fate works everything out for the best, my leaving the sheriff proved to be lucky for me, and not unlucky as I had at first supposed. Because on reaching the automobile I drove at once to a point back of the hill where I would be concealed from the sheriff, and yet be close enough to have a clear view of the cabin.

I found I was not cringing at the thought of bullets, as I had feared I might, and by lying down flat against the ground, the crest of the hill, some thirty feet in thickness, formed a natural protection. There was very little danger of bullets anyhow, since the sheriff had exaggerated the situation regarding same, the fact being that only two or three shots had been fired since I had arrived. Moreover, I was at one side and not in the line of fire.

IT was at five o'clock that the exciting event of the day began, and up to that time I had done little but stay flat on the ground, and now and then, if somebody fired a shot, I would look over the summit to see who fired it.

The sheriff was watching the cabin windows and whenever he saw a hat or a head at the window, he would aim a shot at it, but he always missed the man, and the window too, and I think the cabin also.

At last at about five, knowing by this time that the sheriff could not shoot straight, the men in the cabin made their break to get away. From where I was located there was a view of the back of the cabin as well as the front, and as the men left by the rear window I saw them as soon as they started. The sheriff caught sight of them a few seconds later and gave the alarm.

The first man out the window made a dash across the yard and over the top of a rail fence where, on the other side, there was a gully that he would be safe in. In order to reach the gully it was necessary to jump the fence in sight of the sheriff. And it was while he was going over the fence that the sheriff saw him and started firing, but missed him as I was afraid he would.

The other two gangsters followed quickly after, both of them vaulting the fence safely and disappearing into the gully. Deputies who were stationed at different points about the cabin, began shouting and closing in, but after gaining the shelter of the gully the three bandits made a desperate sprint, running so rapidly in fact that they came out a point several hundred feet beyond where they had been expected to appear.

They were by this time so far away from me that it was hard to make out which were gangsters and which not, but when presently I stood up, the view was better, and I realized then that the three had got past the line of deputies and had in some way taken possession of one of the automobiles.

The scene of confusion which followed was one I will long remember, as it held me there like fascinated. Most of the deputies were shooting in the air, the reason for this being that if they aimed at the bandits they might easily hit the deputies on the other side. With this advantage the bandits got started with the car, the sheriff and deputies following close, and all of them shouting and shooting, and making an uproar of which I never expect again to see the like.

When it finally became quiet I was still standing on the same spot, and could see the last of the deputies disappearing with their cars in the direction the bandits had gone. For a few seconds I remained there, and with the sudden stillness, and nobody in sight, the scene was like deserted.

I had just turned over in my mind the question of whether to jump into the flivver and follow after the rest, and whether if I did so there would be any hope now of winning the reward, when, by some manner, my thoughts turned to Walter Benton.

The thought came to mind about how Walter talked to me in front of the bank, and what he had said about gold and how

heavy it is to carry around. After which it came in a flash that the thirty thousand taken by the bandits was in gold, and by figuring it quick I saw that it must weigh a good deal over a hundred pounds.

I looked down toward the cabin. And when I recalled how light-footed the three men had been in running and jumping the fence, I realized how impossible it would have been if they had been burdened with the gold. And the next minute I was in the car and headed for the cabin.

AT this juncture it can only be stated that I am nearing the end of the story dealing with how I won the reward offered by the First National Bank for the return of gold taken by robbery to the amount of thirty thousand dollars, and how I found same in the cabin, and working like mad loaded it into the flivver, and while the sheriff and deputies were pursuing the bandits I returned to town and found Mr. Perkinson still at the bank; and in the midst of a crowd that was bigger and cheering louder than anything Junction City has heard in many days, I carried the gold into the bank and finally made Mr. Perkinson believe it.

"I don't know what to make of it, Whittier," he said to me at last, after he had examined the sacks; "but of one thing there's no question—the reward is offered for the return of the money. And you are the one who has returned it."

In conclusion, Mr. Perkinson paid me as agreed, and in the evening when the excitement had died down, and I had explained to Myrtle Haines a good many times how I had done it, and also took her to Purdlow's drug store for soda, where we were served by Walter Benton, who for the first time on record had very little to say, I finally said to Myrtle: "Well, Myrtle," I said, "it looks like at last I am getting ahead."

"You're ahead a thousand berries, Whittier," she responded, "and the way to do now is keep ahead. And as lightning wont hit the same spot twice, I have already talked with Mr. Purdlow and your old job is waiting for you tomorrow, so you can be working steady, and as a sideline be a detective."

And as that's the way it turned out, I am still in the soda game, but am reading up in spare time, so that if a detective opportunity again knocks, it will not find me unprepared.

Barren-Land Battle

By

REG DINSMORE

Illustrated by William Molt

MATT DENNISON reached a long arm for two pairs of radio head-sets that hung from a peg on the log wall of the cabin. He pulled them down and passed a pair of the phones to the crippled man in the bunk.

"Clamp 'em onto your cranium, Beaver. A little music will help you forget the pain of that leg," he advised cheerfully.

The man in the bunk, an Indian, nodded and took the phones.

Young Dennison adjusted the other set of phones to his own red head and settled his lanky six-foot form upon a hewn stool before the small receiving set. His strong, well-shaped fingers turned a dial; and Chicago, eight hundred miles to the south, came in with the lively music of a jazz band.

Blue Beaver, the Ojibway, closed his eyes and turned his body slightly to accommodate his injured leg to a more comfortable position. His dark face contorted with the pain the movement cost him. Dennison picked up a partly completed fisher stretcher that lay within his reach and idly smoothed its hewn edges with his hunting knife as he listened to the music.

The rhythmic beat of the jazz ceased, and the announcer began his spiel. Matt Dennison chucked the point of his knife into the pole floor and reached for the dial.

"Let's see what they've got on in Toronto tonight, Beaver," he said. "Great stuff, what—this radio? Here we are, way up here on the Kapiskau, two hundred miles from the nearest railroad, and yet we're in touch with the outside world. Great stuff!"

The Indian grunted disdainfully. "No good!" he commented.



The radio and the airplane have wrought great changes in the Far North also—as you will see, in this exciting story of a tremendous adventure—written by a professional guide who really knows the country.

Matt Dennison glanced at him in surprise. "No good? Why, I thought you liked the music, Beaver!"

"Likum all right. No good just the same. Damn' one-way box!"

Dennison laughed. "Yes, it's a one-way box, Beaver. We can't talk back, if that's what you mean; but it sure helps pass these long evenings."

"She heavy on portage," grumbled Blue Beaver. "We listen to her talk an' sing when we ought to peelum skin off mink, martin, fox. Sometime we no sleep half de night, she sing so purty. Nex' day we drag out racquet over trap-line likum old man."

"But you like it, Beaver?"

"I likum."

"All right, then," grinned Matt. "Now we'll see what's happening in Toronto." He adjusted a dial, twiddled a rheostat.

DENNISON picked up the station just as the announcer began speaking. The man's voice came in as clear and distinct as if he had been standing in the very door of the partners' trapping cabin.

"The number just played, ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience, concluded the program of the Happy Harmonizers. Now, before we continue with the rest of our



Matt heard the motor roar suddenly, heard Blue Beaver yell. Then before his eyes the cabin rose into the air in ten thousand splinters.

evening's program, I am asking you to stand by for a moment while I put something on the air for the benefit of just one man. This is unusual, but I will explain.

"Something like three months ago, a young man by the name of Mathew Dennison—M-a-t-h-e-w D-e-n-n-i-s-o-n," the announcer spelled it out slowly, and Matt Dennison and Blue Beaver looked at each other in wide-eyed unbelief, "left the Indian reservation on Lac Seul, Ontario, with the intention of spending the winter trapping somewhere about the headwaters of the Kapiskau River. With him was a single companion, one Blue Beaver, an Indian of the Ojibway tribe.

"It is known that Dennison had with him a small radio receiving set, and it is in the hope that he will pick up that which we are about to broadcast that this station has been requested to put the following message on the air. Here it is:

"The law firm of White and Corbin, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, wish to inform Mathew Dennison of the recent death of his uncle, Jonas Dennison, of Grand Rapids. On his deathbed, Mr. Jonas Dennison asked his lawyers to say to Mr. Mathew Dennison, his nephew, that he had forgotten and forgiven all differences that ever existed between them. He also asked to have Mathew Dennison informed that there were certain business matters that would need his immediate attention, and for him to appear at the offices of White and Corbin at Grand Rapids, at the earliest possible moment, regardless of cost or effort.

"Mr. Jonas Dennison wished his nephew to know that there is a possibility that an attempt may be made to prevent him from reaching Grand Rapids. Sinister interests are at work against him. This is a warning, and Mr. Mathew Dennison should act accordingly.

"That," the voice of the announcer continued, "is the context of the message from the law firm of White and Corbin, Grand

Rapids, to Mr. Mathew Dennison, somewhere to the southwest of James Bay. Here's sincerely hoping that you picked up the message, Mr. Dennison.

"The same message will be broadcasted from this station two more evenings, on the chance of reaching Mr. Dennison."

THE voice of the announcer ceased, and another announcer's voice, describing the swift play of a hockey game, came over the air. But Matt Dennison did not hear. His thoughts were elsewhere.

Uncle Jonas dead! That fiery, big-hearted old man, who had been Matt's guardian since the boy was in his early teens. Matt Dennison could hardly make it seem possible.

Why, he wondered bitterly, had he been such a young ass as to come off to this forsaken corner of the world to leave the old man to die alone? He should have realized that Jonas Dennison was getting old. He should have overlooked his uncle's frequent wordy outbursts, the merciless razzings that the old man had given him upon occasions. Now, as Matt thought over some of his wild escapades, he guessed the old boy hadn't hazed him half as much as he deserved. Torn between sorrow at his uncle's death and disgust at his own performances of the past, he jerked off the receivers, rose and began pacing the cabin floor.

Blue Beaver, the Ojibway, gazed at his white partner questioningly. His keen mind had grasped the meat of the message, and he sensed something of Matt Dennison's quandary.

"Whatum all mean?" he asked.

"It means, Beaver," Dennison told him soberly, "that I'm in a devil of a mess, I guess."

Blue Beaver was not one to stand between a partner and his duty.

"You takum dogs an' go south to railroad, Matt. Leave Blue Beaver plenty firewood. He'll be all right."

"And you with a broken leg? Beaver, when you're well again, I'm going to short-gaffle you for that remark! What kind of a piker do you figure I am, anyhow?"

The Ojibway smiled one of his rare smiles, but continued to urge.

"Dis honcle—he have fine canoe? Mebbe lot o' traps—good dogs? You his only nephew? Sure you go!"

Dennison showed his even teeth in a slow smile.

"I don't know about the canoe and dogs, Beaver. But Uncle Jonas had a trap—a darned big trap! It's a money-trap, Beaver. I've known him to catch more money in it in one evening than we'll make if we trap the upper reaches of the Kapiskau for two winters. He baited his trap with fine music, pretty girls, colored lights—Uncle Jonas was part owner in one of the largest theaters in Grand Rapids."

Blue Beaver knew what a theater was, for once he had been inside one at Port Arthur. The magic fascination of the place had been something to furnish the Ojibway foundations for pipe-dreams by the light of many a camp-fire. He grasped Dennison's simile.

"An' this great house of purty squaws, an' lights dat go red like the smoky sunset, an' green like the new birch leaves, an' silver like the winter moon—she yours if your trail cuts dis so-great city before the new year?"

"Perhaps—part of it—if Clegg doesn't put the skids under me."

"Who Clegg, Matt?"

"Arthur Clegg was my uncle's partner. Owned a half interest in the theater. I never liked the man—never saw much of him, in fact; but I always had a hunch he was crooked. It must be he that Uncle Jonas warned me to watch out for.

"To tell you the truth, Beaver, my uncle and I quarreled about the man just before I came up here. I suspected he was fleecing the old man and accused him of it before my uncle; but I darned soon discovered that I'd overstepped. Both of them pounced onto me like snow owls on a rabbit, and I got the biggest bawling out of my young life. Uncle Jonas gave me to understand that when he wanted advice about running his business he'd call on some one beside a 'sissyfied cake-eater,' like myself. I'd just got back from a couple of years of cattle-punching, out in the Jackson Hole country of Wyoming, and I didn't consider myself either sissyfied nor a cake-eater. What's more, the city didn't seem to satisfy me after two years in the open, so I hit for Canada. That's how you and I happen to be up here on the Kapiskau."

FOR a moment the Indian closed his eyes in deep thought. Then suddenly:

"But what you do about dis show-house business, Matt? You can't let dat go, jus' 'cause I big fool enough to bust a leg!"

Matt Dennison was thinking fast. Somehow he must get down to Grand Rapids before January first. To be sure, he had nearly three weeks to do it in—time enough, if it were not for Blue Beaver's lamentable condition. To all outward appearances Matt had made a good job of splinting up the Indian's leg, and two weeks of care had reduced the swelling and started the bone to knitting nicely; but it would be at least another month before the Ojibway could begin walking. There was no help that Matt could summon to care for the crippled man in his absence, and to leave him alone was out of the question.

"What you do?" insisted Blue Beaver.

"I'm going to stay right here and listen in to that Toronto station when she broadcasts those other two notices. I want to see if anything further develops."

NEXT evening at the same time, Matt Dennison's aerial, stretched between the tips of two firs, plucked a repetition of the message from the ether. The wording was identical. He learned nothing new. The following night it was the same.

Matt glanced at his red partner and disappointedly shook his head, but before taking off the receivers he idly turned the dial a few points. Instantly both men stiffened in breathless attention.

Biting into their ears, with the perfect clarity of faultless sending and receiving, came again and again the words:

"Mathew Dennison—Kapiskau River—Mathew Dennison—Kapiskau River—Mathew Dennison—Kapiskau River. Expect plane on the morning of December tenth to carry you to the States. Plane will land on the ice of some near-by lake or river. Give us a marker of some kind to locate you by. White and Corbin, Grand Rapids."

For five minutes the message was repeated, then died out of the air.

Matt tore off the receivers, kicked his stool the length of the cabin and did a buck-and-wing.

"Wow, Beaver! Some dog to us, what? Coming in after us with an airplane—what d'ye know about that! We'll skim down to Grand Rapids like a greenwing teal—me straight to White and Corbin's, and you to a hospital and a good doctor. Boy, where's that calendar? Yes sir, day after tomorrow's the tenth—we'll be on our way, and I don't see how those sinister interests

we've been warned against are going to stop us!"

With the proverbial obstinacy of his race Blue Beaver shook his head.

"You go. Me stay!" he insisted.

"We both go, Beaver. It's the very thing you need. It's a streak of luck for you! I'm not at all sure that I set that leg as it should be. It was all guesswork. I'll feel a mighty sight better when some Doc has taken an X-ray of it and I know it's set straight.

"Now, tomorrow I've got to make some provision for the dogs. Think I'll go over back of the big muskeg and pile up that old bull that's getting ready to winter there. That moose is older than Methuselah. He'd probably never winter, anyhow. It's just as well for the dogs to have him as it is to leave him for the wolves. I'll take the dogs over and haul in a load of meat to leave here at camp. The dogs will know where the carcass is, and will go there to feed when the meat here is eaten. Then when we get out to a wire, I'll send word through to the trading-post at Martin Falls, and tell the factor there to have some of his Indians that are trapping to the south of us come up here and get the dogs."

BEFORE noon the next day Dennison was back at the cabin with a quarter of moose meat on his dog-sled. The dogs, plumped with the fill they had eaten at the carcass, sprawled lazily in the snow as soon as the harness was stripped from them. Dennison hung the quarter in the limbs of a fir, ate a lunch, and set himself to the task of putting up a signal for the expected plane.

He cut a long, slim pole. To its top he nailed a discarded undershirt. He climbed the tallest spruce in sight, dragging the pole after him, and lashed it to the spiring tip of the tree. The ragged signal floated thirty feet above the surrounding treetops.

Dennison climbed down, surveyed his grotesque flag with a grin, and busied himself piling a huge pile of brush for a smoke signal. That done, he felled several trees that would screen the cabin from the sight of an aviator, then on the snow of the cabin roof he pegged an old red blanket.

"There, Beaver," he told the Indian as he entered the cabin at dusk and pulled off his parka. "we're a mighty small pinpoint in the wilderness of the upper Kapiskau valley; but if tomorrow's a clear day, and

any aviator flies within twenty miles of us, he can't help seeing our smoke signal. If he comes to investigate, he'll see the flag, and the red blanket on the roof, and should know that this is our camp. The ice of the straight stretch of river below here is as smooth as a flying field. A plane should have no trouble landing."

Again, that evening, they listened to the radio, trying to pick up some further message that might concern themselves, but nothing came. Dennison persisted till midnight, and then began packing the few articles that they would need for their airplane journey of the morrow.

Tired as he was with his labors of the day before, Matt Dennison was out of his bunk two hours before daylight. At the first streak of dawn he touched off the signal-fire. Its gray column of dense smoke climbed straight into the motionless air of the winter dawn.

Eight, nine, and ten o'clock rolled around; and Matt, tirelessly feeding the fire, was still watching the horizon anxiously for the thin blur of an approaching plane. At noon, when he went inside the cabin to snatch a bite to eat, he had lost some of his buoyancy of the morning, but was still hopeful.

"Little late, Beaver," he told the Indian. "But I guess she'll come. I'll keep the old smudge going till dark, anyhow."

THE Ojibway said nothing. His dark eyes burned, twin points of lambent light, from the shadows of his bunk. Perhaps some elusive, unexplainable sense, handed down to him through a long line of forest-dwelling ancestors, whispered that his white friend was doomed to disappointment. And in this Blue Beaver was not mistaken. No plane came that day.

Breathlessly Matt Dennison twisted dials and adjusted knobs of the radio that night, hoping to hear some explanation of the failure. Jazz and opera, lectures and soprano solos mocked his efforts. At two o'clock he gave up in disgust and turned off the machine.

"You're right," he told the Indian bitterly. "She's a one-way box, Beaver. If we could only talk back, now!"

All next day Dennison burned his signal fire and watched the sky. That evening discouragement sat heavily upon him. He tried his best not to let the Indian guess his feelings. "Well," he told him, "we should worry whether that cussed plane

comes or not; we're all set for the winter. Let's forget all about it!"

"And let Clegg of the crooked tongue have that beautiful money-trap all to himself?" Blue Beaver inquired. "No! Tomorrow we go!"

"Go—what d'ye mean?"

"We gotum dogs. Me ride-um sled. River ice is hard and smooth. We go up Kapiskau, cross de divide, and hitum Kenogami. Ice all de way to railroad den."

Matt knew that if he were alone, or if Blue Beaver was uninjured, he could easily make the railroad with a comfortable margin of time to spare. But with a crippled man on the sled, together with what provisions they would be obliged to carry, the journey at once became a thing to dread. They had had room for but three dogs in their canoe when they came in to the Kapiskau in the fall, and a three-dog team hauling a six-dog load does not make for speed.

"You never could stand it, Beaver."

"Huh!" snorted the Ojibway. "At Vimy Ridge me fight for four hour with a piece of shrapnel t'rough my belly! You t'ink me sick squaw jus' 'cause one my laigs, she broke?"

"You were across, Beaver? I never knew that before. Gosh, I envy you! I was too young to get into the ruckus. But for the luva Pete, why haven't you mentioned it before?"

"No likum talk about it," replied the Indian, closing his eyes for a moment as if to shut out unpleasant memories. Then, with dogged persistence: "We go tomorrow, huh?"

"We'll have too much load for three dogs. We might hit bad weather and deep snows. If we did, three dogs could never take us through," objected Matt.

"Huh! If Blue Beaver had two good leg, he'd push on gee-pole to beat hell for one dem money-trap houses wid purty squaws and many lights dat shine all color!"

For answer Matt grinned and went outside. In a moment he returned with the dog sled and began putting it in order for the long trail.

AN hour after daylight the next morning found the partners ready to start. Dennison closed the door of the cabin, threw the last armful of brush on the signal fire that he had lighted again that morning as a kind of last bet, and they pulled away



"Hold it!" barked Matt! "Stand right where you are! The sights of my rifle are lined on your chest!"

from the cabin to face the two hundred miles of wilderness trail that lay before them. In the fringe of stunted trees on the river-bank they drew to a halt for a last look at the little cabin.

As Matt gazed back somewhat regretfully at the low log building, squatted comfortably on the side of the ridge, the Indian spoke.

"Me hearum plane!"

Hoping, yet unbelieving, Matt Dennison tore the parka hood from his head, baring his ears to the biting cold.

The Ojibway's ears had told the truth. From the north, faint but unmistakable, came the steady drone of an airplane motor.

Speechless with joy, the partners watched until through the leafless branches of the birches among which they stood, they saw the plane break over a low ridge and head up the east side of the valley.

For heart-rending moments it looked as though the plane would miss them. Then its pilot, evidently catching sight of their signal smoke, swung the ship and bore straight in toward the cabin.

LEAVING Blue Beaver sitting on the sled among the birches, Matt Dennison yelled exultantly, sprang out into the clearing, and waving his arms to attract the attention of the pilot, ran toward the cabin.

The pulsations of the motor overhead

slowed. The plane dipped into a gradual incline. Now it was almost directly above the cabin, perhaps four hundred feet above the earth. Matt, glancing up as he ran, saw some small object leave the bottom of the ship. It fell in a glancing, silver-colored streak, straight toward the cabin. He heard the motor roar suddenly as the pilot tore the throttle wide open. He heard Blue Beaver yell. Then, before his very eyes, the cabin rose into the air in ten thousand splinters, a mighty concussion hurled him backward into the snow, and timbers, rocks, and earth rained down about him.

DAZED and bewildered, Matt Dennison sat up and looked around. Where the cabin had stood, a great hole gaped in the side of the ridge. The plane had turned in a sharp bank and was driving straight back at him. Intermingled with the roar of its motor, the thrash of its propeller and the scream of air among its struts, was a sharp sputtering like that of a bunch of firecrackers. Little feathery puffs of snow began dancing about him. From the birches below, Blue Beaver screamed for him to run.

Matt's head snapped clear again. So, they had bombed the cabin and were machine-gunning him, eh? As he leaped to his feet and started in a swift zig-zag run for the sled, a bullet seared his thigh and another ripped the parka across his ribs.

As he reached the sled and wrenched at his rifle that was under the lashings, the plane swept over with fresh roar of opened throttle and climbed into the steep bank of another turn.

"Leggo dat gun an' get de dogs into dem spruces over dere!" barked Blue Beaver. "He can't see us honder de spruce! We stay here, an' he'll beef de whole outfit!"

Matt instantly saw the wisdom of the suggestion. He grabbed the gee-pole and shouted to his leader. The team swung and mushed for the thick evergreens a hundred yards away.

When the sled was yet fifty feet from the dense growth of the evergreen wall, the plane was diving back at them again. Its pilot had divined the intention of the men on the ground, and in the hope of cutting them down before they could reach cover, he opened fire while yet at long range. His shots went wild however, and it was not until the team plunged into the edge of the spruces that the bullets came near enough to do damage. Then it was that bullet-cut twigs began to fall about the sled, and the wheel-dog twisted in his harness and bit in agony at a gaping wound in his flank.

The gun ceased sputtering; the plane roared into another climb; and Dennison, cutting the dying dog from the traces, swung the two remaining dogs at a sharp angle and drove them mercilessly for a dozen rods, where he halted them in the shelter of the overhang of a tall rock.

Back came the plane and raked the thicket with bullets, but Matt and Blue Beaver knew that now the pilot was firing at random, and they had no great fear of being hit. Matt whipped his rifle from beneath the sled lashings and pumped a magazineful of cartridges at the speeding plane. He reached beneath his parka for more cartridges from his belt.

"No good waste-um ca'tridge. Chance too small," the Indian protested.

Matt Dennison slammed the butt of his rifle into the snow and shook his fist at the plane. "Damn you, Arthur Clegg!" he said. "You've played a good card, and you haven't got me yet. I'm two hundred miles into the wilderness, with only two dogs and a big load—but I'm not through!"

"You t'ink dat Clegg?" inquired Blue Beaver.

"Yes—Clegg or some of his agents. He cooked up this airplane deal hoping to wipe me out of his path at one crack. Something happened to delay him, or he'd done

it too. Guess Uncle Jonas knew his onions when he had that warning broadcasted. Well—we've got a trail outfit, a fair supply of grub, and a fighting chance to win through to the rails. We ought to be thankful for that."

Blue Beaver shook his head. "Me know what come when dat shiny thing drop for the cabin. Me see-um bomb railroad base once. Lucky you no nearer cabin. Blue Beaver lucky too!"

THE plane circled above the thicket for another hour, then gave up and bore away up the river valley. Dennison, after the ship had reached a safe distance, worked his way out of the thicket to watch it go.

At a distance of three miles or more to the southward it swooped low over the crest of a spruce-clad ridge and disappeared from sight. Twenty minutes later it climbed again into the sky, spiraled to a high altitude, straightened its course and faded from sight in the southern sky. With lines of worry puckering his forehead, Matt returned to the sled and told Blue Beaver what he had seen.

"Bet you she landed on dat little lake over dere," guessed the Indian.

"What for?"

"She big fly-machine," asserted Blue Beaver. "She carry three-four men, easy. Mebbe somebuddy land, try for clean us up, eh?"

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Matt. "If that's so, whoever stayed will either come back downriver to see what became of us, or else they'll lay for us somewhere along the river-bank. What we've got to do is to keep away from the river till we're south of that lake. That right, Beaver?"

"Right! Le's go."

Matt Dennison tied on his snowshoes and started the two dogs. The fall had been an unusually open one, and what snow there was on the ground was packed and frozen hard. This made for easy going; the runners of the sled hardly marked the crust. Matt pointed the team straight across the low ridge that formed the eastern buttress of the river valley, dipped over its crest and paralleled the other side. The dogs were fresh, well fed and strong, and with Matt helping at the gee-pole, snaked the load along at a fairly good pace. Before noon they had passed the lake where the plane had landed, dropped down the ridge to the ice of the river again, and were mushing steadily toward its headwaters.

With Matt's help, Blue Beaver had rearranged his seat on the sled; faced about so that he could watch the back trail; and now, with his rifle across his lap, sat grimly watching the river-bank. Matt, now that the level surface of the river ice no longer called for a steadying hand on the gee-pole, was trotting beside the laboring dogs, pulling at a thong he had fastened to the nose of the sled. They were making good time.

With nothing to do but to pull at the moose-hide sled-thong, Matt Dennison had much time for thought, and gave his mind to a diagnosis of his peculiar and somewhat hazardous situation:

Who but Clegg could it be who was seeking his life so desperately? Clegg, and Clegg alone, so far as Matt knew, would be the only person to profit by his demise. With himself, Jonas Dennison's only heir, removed from his path, Clegg doubtless would find little difficulty in absorbing his dead partner's interest in the lucrative paying theater at Grand Rapids, and perhaps other of Jonas Dennison's property of which his nephew knew nothing.

Though Matt had never liked Clegg, it was hard for him to visualize him as a murderer. Yet Matt Dennison had seen but little of the man. As he remembered it now, he had come in contact with Clegg but twice in all those years: once when Clegg had come to Jonas Dennison's home to arrange some business detail with the old man, who was temporarily kept from his office by illness; and again when Matt with his uncle had dropped in at the bachelor apartment that Clegg maintained in an exclusive residential section of Grand Rapids.

IT was upon the occasion of this visit that Matt had been surprised to learn that Clegg was an out-of-doors man—a hunter. The walls of the man's rooms were covered with trophies of the chase—mostly these were heads and furs of Northern game: bear—Kadiak, grizzly and polar; massive antlered heads of moose and caribou; on the floors were deep-furred rugs of lynx, timber wolf and musk-ox. Above the mantel of Clegg's fireplace hung beautiful canoe paddles of birch, broad, fine-meshed snowshoes, a hand-plaited dog-whip, all obviously of Indian workmanship. Through the plate glass door of an oak gun-cabinet Matt had caught the dull gleam of the carefully polished steel and Circassian walnut of some high-powered rifles of different makes.

Matt had burned to ask questions about all this paraphernalia of the great outdoors, but had found no opportunity, for Clegg and his uncle—disregarding Matt and a fourth man who took little part in the conversation and whose name Matt could not now recall—were engrossed in a heated discussion concerning the dishonesty of a ticket-seller at Clegg's and Jonas Dennison's theater. It seemed that Jonas Dennison had suspected the man for some time, had checked up on him, and had discovered a shortage of something like twelve hundred dollars. The ticket-seller, mistrustful that he was being watched, had grabbed the entire evening's receipts from a full house and had vanished. Jonas Dennison swore that he should be caught and punished if it cost the theater twice the amount he had stolen. Clegg was inclined to let the matter drop.

Matt Dennison, listening to the one-sided argument, had construed Clegg's indifference to possible complicity, and with his usual hair-triggered impulsiveness had accused Clegg of being in cahoots with the thief. Then it was that Jonas Dennison had turned loose the entire battery of his vitriolic vocabulary upon his dumfounded nephew, and had made it plainly evident to Matt Dennison that he, Jonas Dennison, was amply able to conduct his business without suggestion or remark from his "cake-eating, sissyfied" relative. The old man also demanded that he make instant apology to Mr. Clegg.

But for Matt Dennison to eat his own words was like swallowing gall. Angry and humiliated, he had walked out of Clegg's apartment, had himself whisked home in a taxi, thrown some necessities into a kit bag, and boarded a train for northern Ontario. Relenting slightly at the last moment before plunging into the wilderness, he had scribbled his choleric uncle a short note, telling him of his destination and intention. Then with Blue Beaver, his newly found Ojibway partner, they had turned their faces northward toward the distant reaches of the Kapiskau, and had left civilization and all its disquieting influences far behind. . . .

The perfect condition of the river ice was much in Matt Dennison's and Blue Beaver's favor, and for all of the wide swing they had made, nightfall found them camped twenty miles from the site of the blasted cabin.

When coming in to their trapping-

grounds in the fall, they had started with a canoe from the Indian reservation at Lac Seul. Their outboard motor, which to the present-day bush Indian of the North is as essential as is the automobile to his more civilized white brother, had kicked them down through Lake St. Joseph, along the wide sweeps of the mighty Albany River, past Fort Hope, Martin Falls, and down to within forty miles of where the Albany is joined by the Kenogami from the east. There they had left their canoe, portaged their outfit across a fifteen-mile carry that traversed a low divide to a small eastern feeder of the Kapiskau. A raft was built, the outfit loaded onto it, and the coffee-colored waters of the Kapiskau were allowed to carry them down the Arctic slope until the country looked right to them for trapping. Here they had built their cabin.

But coming out with a dog-team was a different proposition. Instead of following the Albany nearly to its source, they would turn down the river when they reached it, follow it toward the Bay until they reached the Kenogami, then up the ice of the Kenogami a hundred miles into the south, to where the northern branch of the Canadian National Railway crossed the stream. By this route they would cut off scores of miles and days of time.

"How much more Kapiskau ice before we leave it and climb over the divide to the Albany waters, Beaver?" inquired Matt as he built a soft pillow of fir tips under the Indian's injured leg.

"Make-um tomorrer night all right."

"Make what, the turn-off or the Albany?"

"Make-um turn-off. Take-um two, mebbe t'ree day cross the divide. Rough goin'. Lotta blow-downs. Have to chop-um trail some places. Blue Beaver no good! No pushum—no pullum—no chopum! Ride sled all time like old woman. Holdum up parade all time. Hell!"

"You forget that 'no good' stuff, Beaver. If 'twas my prop that was busted, you'd haul me out of here, and I know it. We'll make that divide slicker'n a whistle. Why, with this going under our feet, there's nothing to it, man!"

Blue Beaver raised dark eyes to the dimming stars that glimmered wanly through the feathery boughs of the river-shore spruces.

"Me thinkum we catch big storm," he predicted. "Dis win', she smell like snow. Mebbe hard day on trail tomorrer. You go sleep, Matt. Me watch for while."

Matt knew that Blue Beaver was right about his sleeping. Rest he must have if they were to make time on the trail. He knew that the Ojibway could catch considerable sleep as he rode the sled during the day. Moreover the Indian's forest-trained ears could be relied on to detect prowling danger far quicker than his own. He rolled in his blankets beneath the hastily constructed brush lean-to and was asleep almost at once.

When Blue Beaver awoke Matt, it yet lacked two hours of daylight. Snow was sifting silently down through the branches overhead. The fire was out, and the dead embers were covered with six inches of frosty crystals. Matt kicked the snow away, made a fire and boiled coffee. He broiled a couple of steaks from the loin of the tough old bull he had killed for dog-feed, dug out some cornmeal bannock from one of the packs, and they ate a hurried breakfast. Then, making the Indian comfortable on the sled, he pulled down the bank onto the river. And then, as Matt straightened the team away up the river, trotting beside the dogs, cheering them, pulling at the rawhide thong, Blue Beaver's rifle barked sharply.

MATT whirled, reaching for his own rifle under the sled lashings. Blue Beaver, with rifle at ready, was bent forward peering intently back at the wooded bank they had just left. Through the smother of flakes that fell in the first glimmer of daylight Dennison could see nothing.

"What was it, Beaver?" he whispered.

"Jus' a shadder. Man, me think."

"Maybe a wolf—or a caribou," suggested Matt, hopefully.

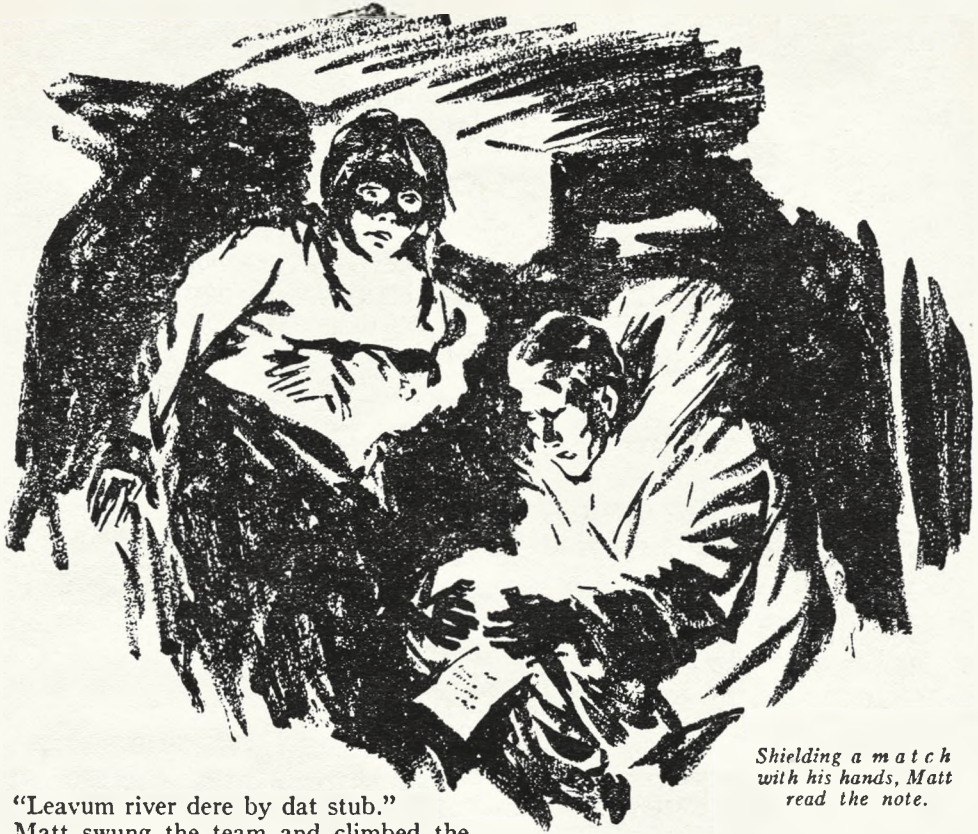
"Caribou an' wolf no walkum on hind legs!" commented the Ojibway succinctly.

"Hit him?"

"Not tell for sure. Not seeum sights on gun very good."

All that day as the snow deepened on the river ice, Dennison pushed the dogs along. After the incident of the fitting shadow of the morning, he expected at any instant that a rifle would belch its leaden death from the thick growth of the shore. He wondered what a bullet would feel like tearing its way into the tissues of a man's body; it was not to think about.

Late in the afternoon Blue Beaver, who had been riding the sled throughout the day in mummylike silence, pointed to a dead hemlock on the eastern bank and spoke.



“Leavum river dere by dat stub.”

Matt swung the team and climbed the bank, glad in a way to feel the forest close around him. Here among the thick growth of spruce, hemlock, birch and fir, an antagonist would at least have to come to closer quarters. He couldn't stand hidden at a distance and pick them off as if they were helpless rabbits.

FOR another hour they pushed on, then made camp by the side of a twenty-foot up-thrust of rock that offered partial shelter from the drive of the storm. Matt insisted that the Ojibway should catch a few hours of sleep during the first part of the night, for he knew that Blue Beaver had been too intent in his scrutiny of the river-bank to sleep during the day. At midnight he awoke the Indian and rolled into his own blankets. The night passed uneventfully.

The next two days were days of hard labor and short distances covered. As the Ojibway had predicted, the divide was a tangle of blow-downs, and Matt, cutting a trail through them, easing the sled over fallen logs and the rough going of side-hill slopes, worked doggedly from daylight till dark. He knew that the sudden jolts and plunges of the sled were giving Blue Beaver excruciating pain, but not once did the

*Shielding a match
with his hands, Matt
read the note.*

Indian complain. His face remained an inscrutable mask of copper, but his eyes were never still. Always they searched the shadowy forest aisles for a first glimpse of the lurking danger that both men now felt was on their trail.

Less than a foot of snow had fallen during the storm, light, feathery stuff that did not greatly retard their progress; and on the afternoon of the fifth day the two men topped the crest of the rocky outcrop that marked the summit of the divide and looked down onto the ice-fettered stretches of the Albany that flung the white ribbon of its course in wide reaches through the valley below. That night they camped on its southern bank.

Though weary from the difficult crossing of the divide, Dennison's spirits had climbed to a high notch. Other than the vague shadow at which Blue Beaver had fired, back there on the storm-shrouded banks of the Kapiskau, they had seen nothing to cause them the slightest uneasiness, and he began to believe that the shadow must have been some animal, and that the plane and its murderous passengers must have left the locality in the belief that their machine-gun bullets had found their marks.

The divide was behind them. The dogs were still in good condition. Nothing but open ice of river travel lay between them and the railroad—no more brush and blow-downs to fight. Blue Beaver's leg, although swollen considerably from the jolting it had received, was doing well. Matt grinned cheerfully across the campfire at the Indian.

"Well, Beaver, if Clegg thinks he cleaned us up with his little old air raid, he's got considerable of a surprise coming to him, huh? I can picture the look on his map when I walk in on him down there at Grand Rapids. Wow!"

"She's long trail to Grand Rapids!" remarked Blue Beaver pessimistically. "Plenty time for everybuddy get surprise."

"What d'ye mean, you old raven?" laughed Matt. "You're always looking on the dark side of everything!"

"Mebbe-so raven likum look of his own color; but lemme tellum you he one damn' smart bird jus' the same. If dis raven, he have two good leg, he'd drop one-two lines t'rough the ice out dere an' we'd have an ol' pike fer breakfast."

"You tell 'em, Beaver!" whooped Matt, delighted at the return of his partner's good spirits.

He found a couple of heavy fishlines in the Indian's pack, baited the large hooks with hunks of moose meat, and taking an ax, trotted out onto the ice of the river to set them. He lowered the last baited hook through the hole he had chopped in the ice, made the line fast to a small stick, laid the stick across the hole, and straightened up to return to camp.

By chance his gaze turned to the north. Back on the barren summit of the divide, at the place where their trail of the day had crossed it, a pinpoint of light glowed steadily in the blackness of the forest night. Matt rubbed his eyes and looked again; then he returned to the camp and told Blue Beaver.

"Somebuddy make-um signal," was the Ojibway's instant decision.

Sometime during the night Dennison was awakened by a gentle shake at his shoulder. His eyes flew open in the darkness. There was no need to question. The sound that reached his ears explained it all. From somewhere to the northeast of them came the steady drone of an airplane motor.

There in the darkness of their brush lean-to the two men listened breathlessly

until that sinister droning had faded to nothingness. Then Matt spoke.

"What do you make of it, Beaver?"

"Me make it we catchum hell soon!" grunted that dusky son of the muskegs.

THE little caravan was moving along one of those wide sweeps of the Albany that because of their width almost resemble lakes. The sun was shining brightly. From the northwest a strong though not cold wind pushed at their backs. Matt had turned this wind to their advantage by rigging upon the sled a sail made from a blanket. With the steady drive of the wind against this rude sail, the dogs romped along at a good pace with little or no help from Matt.

Matt's parka hood was thrown back. His cheeks glowed red with the healthy blood the swift exercise pumped into them. As he ran, he sang a negro "spiritual" that he had picked up over the radio the week before. The miles slipped behind them with satisfying swiftness. And then—disaster struck.

High, high above them a new note crept into the wind—a high-pitched, whining note. Both men glanced aloft. Matt cried out in his astonishment.

Straight down from the blue of the winter sky plunged a gray shape. Now the whine had changed to a roar; and intermingled with the roar, biting through it as the sharp reverberations of percussion instruments bite through the swelling brass of an orchestra, came the death-chatter of a machine-gun.

Matt Dennison lurched his weight against the gee-pole and yelled sharply at the lead dog. The team, obeying the command, swung at a right angle toward the shore. A heavy gust of wind caught the sail as the sled careened in its turn, and in spite of Matt's best efforts the rig was tipped onto its side.

Blue Beaver was thrown from the sled. He hung to a runner and grunted in pain as the fear-maddened dogs dragged him along. Matt flung himself onto the overturned sled and dug in his heels in an effort to stop the frenzied team, so that he could get the Indian onto the sled again. The lead dog leaped high in the air, yelped agonizedly, and fell sideways into the snow. The wheeler hunched grotesquely and settled slowly down as if his legs had melted from under him. Bullets ripped through the packs on the sled and slashed into the

ice below. And the plane, roaring like a demon, shot over their heads not twenty feet above the ice, and climbed into a sharp turn.

"You hit, Beaver?"

"No. You?"

"Not yet!"

"Dey clean us up dis time, damn 'em!" raged the Indian. "You go for shore, Matt! I can't!"

"Watch me do it! I'm stickin', Beaver!"

"You git kill'—sure as hell!"

"I'm stickin'!"

Now the plane had turned and was coming back at them. Matt Dennison, lying face down across the overturned sled, could not see it, but he could tell its nearness by the roar of its motor. An idea flashed in his brain.

"Lie still, Beaver! Play dead!" he yelled. Then, slowly, he let himself roll from the sled and sprawled in the snow.

Twice the plane circled above them. Twice Matt Dennison expected to be sprayed with leaden death. Again it turned and came back—very low this time. Matt, watching from slightly parted lids, and holding his breath for fear that the white vapor of it might give him away, saw a door in the side of the ship open. A helmeted head was thrust out. Binoculars were at the man's eyes.

Matt concentrated every power to make out the man's identity, but muffled as the flyer was, in close-fitting helmet and with the binoculars held before his eyes, it was impossible to see his face. Seemingly satisfied with his close scrutiny, the head was drawn in, the door was closed; and the plane, with roaring engines, climbed higher and bore away into the north.

Not until the ship was half a mile distant did either man speak. Then Blue Beaver from the other side of the sled said:

"We no have to feedum dog tonight, Matt."

"We sure don't—poor devils! Dead, both of 'em. But for God's sake, Beaver, don't move till that plane is out of sight! They're probably still watching us with glasses."

"Was dat Clegg stickum head out of fly-machine?" the Ojibway wanted to know.

"I think so, but I couldn't see him plain enough to be sure. If I'd had my rifle in my hands I believe I'd tried a crack at him. Down as close as he was, I think I could have cold-calked him too, the murdering devil!"

"Much better play dead dan *be* dead!" commented Blue Beaver sagely. "Dey burn us up for sure wid dat sputter-gun, if we no playum fox!"

MATT righted the sled and helped the Indian onto it. Luckily the upset had not rebroken the Ojibway's leg, but the jolt of the spill had hurt the injured limb badly. Blue Beaver's face was ashy with pain as he watched his partner strip the harness from the dead dogs.

From the harness Matt rigged shoulder-straps for himself, slipped into them and faced doggedly upriver. Before he had pulled the heavily laden sled ten rods, he realized that before him lay the biggest test of physical and mental endurance that had ever fallen to his lot. It was yet a hundred and twenty miles to the railroad. With the snow no deeper on the ice than it was at present, he might with good luck drag out ten miles a day. But more snow was sure to fall soon, perhaps a couple of feet of it. With it would doubtless come bitter winds that would pile the fluffy stuff into deep drifts on the river ice—drifts into which the sled would sink to its cross-bars.

Yet, Matt had no idea of quitting. Now that he had entered into his grim game he was surprised to discover that he gave less and less thought to the financial benefit that he might derive, and dwelt with ever-growing concentration on the single idea of thwarting Clegg in his crooked game. It was that motive that drove Matt Dennison's square shoulders against the pull-straps hour after weary hour, that urged him from his blankets long before the first streaks of wan dawn showed in the eastern sky. The same unrelenting tenacity caused him to refuse to listen to the repeated pleas of Blue Beaver to leave him grub, blankets and firewood and push on alone.

"You may as well quit that fool talk, Beaver," he told the Indian, almost savagely. "When I hit the railroad, you hit it too—never forget it! There'll be time enough to square with Clegg if we don't make it till spring."

"But dat show-house, an' dat flock o' purty squaws dat go wid it!" lamented Blue Beaver. "You takum light pack an' hitum trail—hard. You makum all right. Den you send somebuddy back wid dogs for me."

"Damn the show-house—and the squaws too! It's Clegg I'm after! I want to feel my knuckles connect with that smooth jaw

of his! I want to pick him up in my hands and smash him into the earth! I want to hear him yelp—the same as those poor dogs cried when his cursed bullets plowed into 'em!”

THREE days it took for Matt Dennison to drag the sled to the junction of the Albany and the Kenogami. Here they turned south up the ice of the latter river. By now Matt's shoulders were chafed raw by the unrelenting bite of the straps, and every muscle of his long body was as sore as if it had been pounded with a club. He was wearing his belt three holes shorter than he normally did, and his temper had shortened proportionately with his belt.

Up ahead, the Kenogami swept in a wide elbow around a heavily wooded point. Matt cast a glance at the western sky, where half an hour before the sun had dipped below the saw-toothed line of spruces. Just around that point they would be out of the chill wind. There they would camp for the night. Matt gritted his teeth, nerved himself for the last half mile of the day, and swung the nose of the sled toward the point. Blue Beaver, sensing his partner's intentions, leaned forward and began untying the lashings of the load.

With bent head and shoulders hunched into the pull-straps, Matt plodded past the finger-like point of land and turned sharply in toward the bank. Suddenly Blue Beaver, from the sled behind him, spat a guttural exclamation in his own tongue. Matt had no idea what the Indian had said, but the tone was enough. He swung sharply around.

The Ojibway was crouched among the packs, his normally stolid face tense with excitement. One of his mittened hands was pointing stiffly upriver. Matt's eyes followed the direction of that rigid arm.

On the ice, perhaps half a mile up the stream, rested a huge, gray airplane. In the lurid reflection from the sunset sky, her silvered wings gleamed deeply red. From the spruces of the shore, at a point near the plane, climbed a thin column of camp-fire smoke. The blaze itself was concealed by the thick growth of the shoreline.

One long look, and Matt swung the sled and yanked it back around the point, out of sight from the plane. Slipping out of his straps, he ran back to the point and peered cautiously around. No movement up there by the plane to show that their

presence had been discovered. Just that climbing ribbon of smoke that the sharp wind tore into gauzy fragments as soon as it topped the dark green of the spruces, and the red glow reflected from the polished wings of the great plane.

Until the darkness of the northlands cut off his view, Matt Dennison watched. Then he returned to Blue Beaver.

“They didn't see us,” he told the Indian as he dragged the sled ashore and arranged some young firs that he had cut with his hunting-knife to act as a windbreak. “And now I'm going to give Mister Clegg a little dose of his own medicine!”

“Killum?” inquired the Ojibway.

Matt did not answer. Instead he pumped the cartridges from his rifle, made sure the arm was in perfect condition, refilled its magazine, and turned toward the river. “I'll be back as soon as I can, Beaver. I'd build you a fire if I dared, but Clegg might smell the smoke. Dig yourself something out of the packs to eat.”

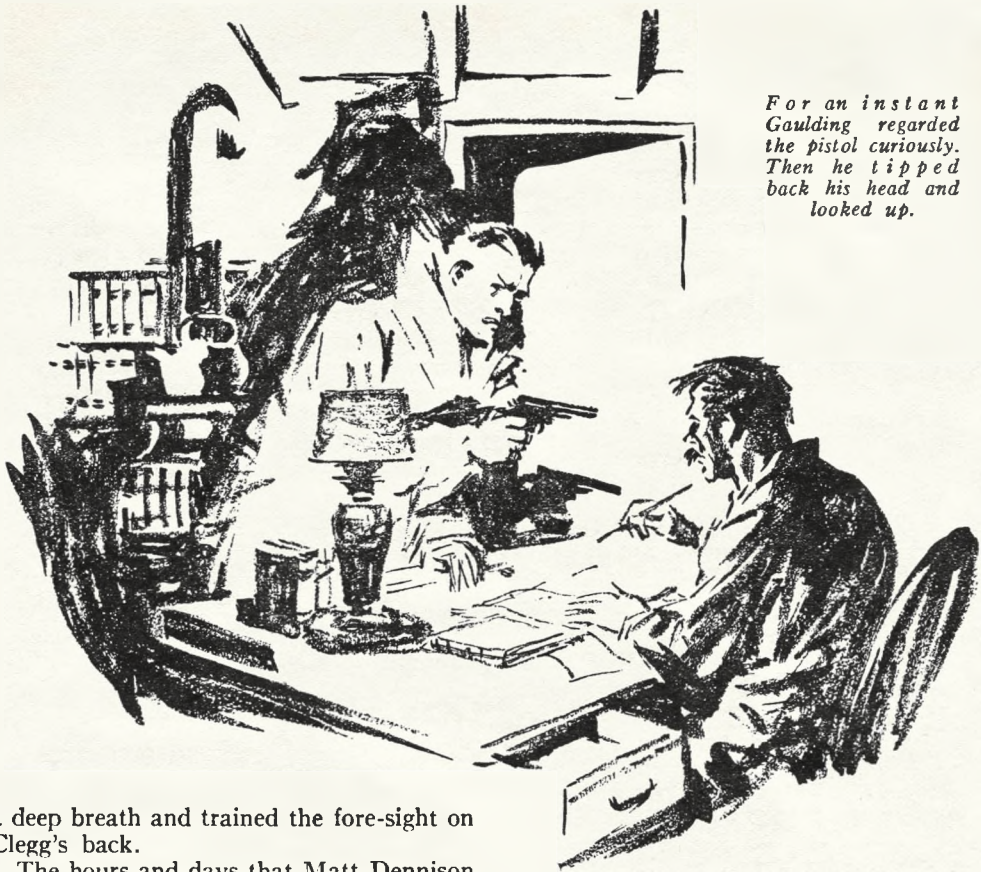
“You no eat?”

“Not hungry. So long!”

“Shootum Clegg in the belly, Matt. Him die slow den. Plenty time to be sorry,” advised Blue Beaver coolly as he set his white teeth into a hunk of bull meat.

WITH all the stealth of a stalking lynx, Dennison crept into the spruce thicket there on the banks of the Kenogami. Ahead of him, through the thick-standing trunks of the trees, glimmered the blaze of a small camp-fire. Near the fire an open-fronted shelter tent had been erected, its white canvas showing ghostly against the dark background of evergreens. Inside the tent, sitting cross-legged on the fir boughs that had been piled for a bed, was a young man dressed in the quilted leather coat of an aviator. At the fire, busy with some sort of cooking utensil, knelt a second man. The hood of the kneeling man's parka, rimmed with the frost-defying fur of the wolverine, was hunched on his shoulders in such a way that Matt could not see the face behind it; but his voice, as he spoke to the man in the tent, told Matt all that he wanted to know. The man was Clegg.

Matt wormed his way forward another yard and settled his elbows firmly in the snow. He drew back the hammer of his rifle—holding his finger on the trigger meanwhile so that the sharp click of the trigger sear could not be heard. He took



*For an instant
Gaulding regarded
the pistol curiously.
Then he tipped
back his head and
looked up.*

a deep breath and trained the fore-sight on Clegg's back.

The hours and days that Matt Dennison had waited for vengeance were at an end. Now, in the contraction of a tiny finger muscle, he held Clegg's life, the life of a man whom he believed to have twice made murderous attempts on his life.

And then with anger and disgust at his own weakness, Matt discovered that he could not do the thing to which he had looked ahead through those days and nights of hate! His finger refused to bring pressure on the trigger of his rifle.

"It's because of my cursed weak white blood!" he raged at himself. "Blue Beaver would pot him with a grin—and in the belly, at that. I wish to hell he was here!"

Clegg passed a tin plate of food to the man in the tent, took another plate from near the fire, and squatting like an Indian on his heels, began eating and talking.

Matt marveled at the care-free trend of the man's conversation. How a man who but a day or two previously had murdered two of his fellow-beings, as Clegg must believe he had done, could joke and laugh, was beyond Matt Dennison's understanding. Why, to listen to him you'd think his weightiest worry was because he'd slightly scorched the bacon he'd just fried.

"Some different than the city, isn't it, Ira?" Clegg smilingly asked the pilot. "I love this country up here, though. It's the only place I feel at home. Civilization freezes me up—makes a cold-blooded machine of me. Up here—well, my grandfather on my mother's side was a full-blooded Cree. Perhaps that explains why this lures me so strongly."

Clegg finished his supper, tossed his plate beside the fire, and filled his pipe. "Well, Ira," he said, "I guess we've done everything we can here. Tomorrow morning, if you've got those ailerons trued up to suit you, we'll pull out."

"Those ailerons are as right as wheat now, Mr. Clegg. The old bus was never in better shape than she is this minute."

Clegg puffed his pipe in silence for a few moments, rapped the dottle from it, and crawled into his sleeping-bag. The pilot deftly flipped his cigarette-butt into the fire and followed suit.

Dennison was stumped. He realized now that he could not shoot these men. What, then, was he to do? If there had been but one of them, and that one Clegg, he would have gone into the camp and had

it out with him, man to man. But with two against him, he could ill afford to take chances, especially when his partner with a broken leg was waiting for him behind the point back there.

They were pulling out in the morning, were they—Clegg and his pilot? He'd have no chance to get at Clegg then until they met down in the States. Pulling out in the morning—and how much quicker and easier they would annihilate the distance between them and civilization!

Matt tried to visualize himself looking down from a speeding plane, following the white gash of the Kenogami until it dwindled to nothingness at the Height of Land. Then boring steadily on, with the southern slope slipping beneath him, down, down, to the Great Lakes and the States. Dreams of that kind had nothing to do with his present situation, however.

But to save him he couldn't break away from the fancy. Somewhere behind those thoughts an idea was pecking feebly but persistently at its imprisoning shell. And then, with an illuminating flash, the idea hatched and sprang full-fledged into Matt Dennison's brain.

TWENTY minutes later he was back around the point where he had left Blue Beaver and the sled. Without a word he opened the packs and began sorting their contents.

For some minutes the Indian asked no questions, but sat with stonelike face and watched his partner work; then leaning suddenly forward, he pulled Matt's hunting-knife from its sheath and examined the blade critically.

"Bad! Ver' bad!" with a reproving glance at Matt. "Me no hearum shot. No blood on knife. You no find Clegg?"

"Clegg was there," Matt told him simply. He knew it was useless to explain to the Ojibway why he had not killed the man. His was a different code.

With a puzzled grunt Blue Beaver relapsed into silence and watched Matt as he worked at the packs.

Matt chopped a few pounds from the chunk of frozen moose meat on the sled. The rest of it he hung as high as he could reach on the limbs of a spruce. A bag of corn-meal, two of the blankets and an extra pair of snowshoes he also hung on the limb.

"Whyfor leavum cache?" inquired the Ojibway, a slight tinge of worry plain in

his voice. "Ten, twelve, mebbe twenty sleeps to railroad. We no eatum moss like caribou!"

Matt grinned. "We're mushing light from now on, Beaver. Just a few pounds of grub, rifles, blankets and snowshoes, will be about all we'll need, I'm thinking."

"Huh!" grunted the Indian, and wondered if the toil of the trail had not slightly touched his white partner's mind.

"Now, Beaver," said Matt, as he made the diminished load fast and swung the sled out onto the river, "Clegg and his man are asleep in a tent up there on the shore by the plane. We've got to be mighty quiet. If we wake 'em, the game's a goner. Whatever I do, don't you yip!"

There was no moon, but the myriad brilliant stars, and the ever-changing banners of the aurora that swept the northern sky brought out objects with startling distinctness. Even at a distance they could make out the outline of the great plane as it rested like some mammoth bird that had forgotten to fold its wings, on the ice of the river. Matt kept well out to the center of the stream. The soft snow that lay on the river ice muffled the squeal of the sled-runners and the slight clacking sound of his snowshoes. Their progress was almost noiseless.

They were nearly opposite the plane now. Its dim bulk lay directly between them and the point on shore where Matt knew Clegg's tent to be, concealing them effectually from anyone who might be watching there. And then Matt suddenly pointed the sled straight at the plane, and lurched into a run.

Blue Beaver, catching the drift of Matt's plan, grunted in surprised satisfaction and tugged a rifle from under the lashings.

MATT hurried the sled to the side of the plane and slipped out of his harness. He grabbed his own rifle from the sled, knelt so that he could see beneath the plane, and covered the shore-line, where at any moment he expected Clegg or his companion to appear.

One, three, five minutes slipped past, while Matt and Blue Beaver waited, fingers curved about triggers, in the tense expectancy of attack. But attack did not come. Other than the ghostly wraith of smoke that climbed lazily through their tops, the dense spruces of the shore gave not the slightest hint that they sheltered human beings.

"Sound asleep," whispered Matt. "You keep that shore covered, Beaver, while I look over this air-wagon."

Matt climbed to a strut, silently slid back a door in the side of the plane, and stuck his head inside. In a moment he was back on the ground.

"Beaver," he whispered, "I've got to get you into that plane somehow. I'll probably hurt like the very devil doing it. Can you stand it?"

For answer Blue Beaver swung his good leg to the ice, hooked an arm around Matt's neck and pulled himself erect.

"Good Injun!" whispered Matt. "We'll show Mr. Clegg where the bear camped in the buckwheat yet! Easy, now. Up!"

Dennison realized what pain that climb through the narrow doorway was costing his red partner, but never once did the Ojibway complain.

"That's over, Beaver, thank the Lord! Now I'll toss the packs in here, and we're ready to announce ourselves."

Matt lifted the packs aboard, stowed them, then picking up his rifle he poked its muzzle through the doorway and discharged it into the air.

"And now, Beaver, pray to your pagan gods for a lucky break," he told the Indian as he closed the door all but a narrow slit.

"No time for pray," commented the Ojibway succinctly. "Save-um breath. Plenty fight soon, me think!"

Down the bank scrambled two dim figures. Gaining the ice, they sprinted toward the airplane. Matt remained perfectly quiet and let them come. He wanted them close enough so that there would be no excuse for missing.

Nearing the plane, Clegg and his pilot slowed to a walk and approached more cautiously. Now their low-pitched voices reached him. Clegg was speaking.

"Yes, Ira, I'm sure it was a shot I heard—and it sounded out near the plane here."

"I don't see anything wrong, Mr. Clegg. It might have been the river ice cracking with the cold."

"I know the sound of a rifle when I hear one," insisted Clegg. "But who in heaven's name could it have been?"

Matt knew that he had the men dead to rights. Such knowledge is conducive of steady nerves. His voice was steely with a deadly calmness when he spoke.

"Clegg," he said, "allow me to inform you that the person who fired that shot is none other than Mathew Dennison!"

FOR a moment the men on the ice stood as if petrified; then Clegg started forward.

"Hold it!" barked Matt. "Stand right where you are! The sights of my rifle are lined on your chest; and after what you've given me with your bomb and machine-gun, I'm taking no chances. One funny move from either of you, and I'll drill you with no more pity than you showed those poor dogs of mine."

Clegg muttered an exclamation that Matt did not catch and fell back a pace.

"Oh, no, Clegg, I'm no ghost! Neither is my Indian partner inside the plane here. You didn't wipe us out with your spray-gun as you thought you did. You got the dogs—yes. But we fooled you. Before I'm through with you, Clegg, you're going to realize just the mistake you made by not pumping the rest of that belt of bullets into us!"

For the first time Clegg spoke.

"Matt Dennison," he said, "—if it can be possible that it is you,—you are doing me a grave injustice. You are accusing me of—"

"You bet your life I am!" interrupted Matt. "I'm accusing my uncle's erstwhile partner of two attempts on my life. As I happen to be my uncle's only heir, the motive of those attempts is obvious. Oh, yes, I know of Uncle Jonas' death—learned of it by the same medium that told me to make a target of my cabin for your bomb—the radio. Now, Clegg, I'm going to do the rest of the talking—which will be but mighty little. Here's the works:

"Drop those rifles into the snow. . . . Thank you, that was very nice. Now back away—five steps. Good! Now I'm coming outside and cover you while you climb into this plane."

KEEPING his rifle trained on Clegg, who was now whispering excitedly to his pilot, Matt dropped from the plane, secured the rifles, and motioned the men to climb aboard.

"And remember," he told them, "that when you go through that door you're under the rifle of an Ojibway Indian. He's got a broken leg, and it doesn't sweeten his disposition any to speak of. He'd go without eating a week for the sake of riddling your pelts with bullets."

Matt pumped the cartridges from the two rifles and followed the men into the plane. Some one had switched on a dome-

light in the ceiling of the cabin, and under its soft glow, the four men sized each other up. Clegg and his man were standing near the instrument-board. The frowning muzzle of Blue Beaver's rifle swung from one to the other of them, effectively discouraging any thoughts of resistance. Matt deposited the rifles at the rear of the cabin, passed swift hands over the two men's clothes in search of concealed weapons, and finding none, stepped back and faced Clegg.

Clegg met his gaze steadily, his dark face inscrutable.

"Well, Matt," he said, "you seem to be holding the high cards. What next?"

"Home, James!" Matt told him grimly. "Point the nose of this crate straight for Grand Rapids, and do a Lindy. I've urgent business in that burg!"

Without a word the pilot took his place at the controls. Clegg raised a folding seat from the floor of the cabin close behind the pilot, locked it in position, and seated himself. The pilot touched a knob. The motor clicked over three or four times and burst into a roar. The plane taxied along the ice with ever-increasing speed and surged into the air. Matt Dennison's heart leaped exultantly. To him it began to look as if he had beaten Clegg's game. He made himself comfortable among the packs beside Blue Beaver and settled himself for the long ride.

Still, not such a long ride after all, when you considered the speed of an airplane and its direct line of travel. Straight down across the Height of Land, the eastern horn of Lake Superior, Mackinaw, Petoskey, Traverse City, and you were most there. Why, it couldn't be much over five hundred miles to Grand Rapids, at that! And at a hundred miles per hour. This flying sure was the way to travel!

Out front, the big propeller sliced powerfully into the chill night air. The pilot, his gloved hands grasping the aluminum control-stick with the touch of a master, sat with his eyes on the instrument-board before him. Clegg was leaning close, speaking above the roar of the motor in the pilot's ear.

Blue Beaver, experiencing the sensation of flying for the first time, was intensely awake. Although his face registered the same nonchalance it would had he been riding a dog-sled or a canoe, his black eyes glittered with suppressed excitement.

As for Matt, he was nearly famished. Since early morning he had leaned his

weight steadily into those galling sled-straps with only a small lunch of moose-meat and bannock at noon, and with no supper. Now he opened one of the packs and ate. The food made him sleepy. The monotonous, hypnotic drone of the motor strengthened the desire. He leaned and spoke in the Ojibway's ear.

"Watch those birds while I catch a nap, will you, Beaver? I can't keep my eyes open. Wake me in an hour or so, and I'll take a turn while you sleep."

The Indian nodded. "You go sleep. Me no sleepy."

Matt untied the lashings of a blanket-roll, wrapped himself in one of the blankets, and with a pack for a pillow dropped almost instantly into deep slumber.

BLUE BEAVER was shouting in Matt's ear—shaking him. He sat up, knuckled his eyes open, and was surprised to discover that it was daylight. That was funny; they should have reached Grand Rapids long before morning!

Up front, Clegg and the pilot talked excitedly and peered through a window beside them. Blue Beaver also had his nose flattened against the glass of a round dead-light. He grabbed Matt's arm, motioned for him to look. Matt leaned across the Indian's body and pressed his face to the glass.

He had expected to see farmlands, roads, towns, swimming in the depths below him. But they were not there. Instead, a vast snow-field stretched away to meet the horizon. Unbroken by any mark of man's handiwork it rolled on and on in monotonous blankness. It was a country the like of which Dennison had never seen before.

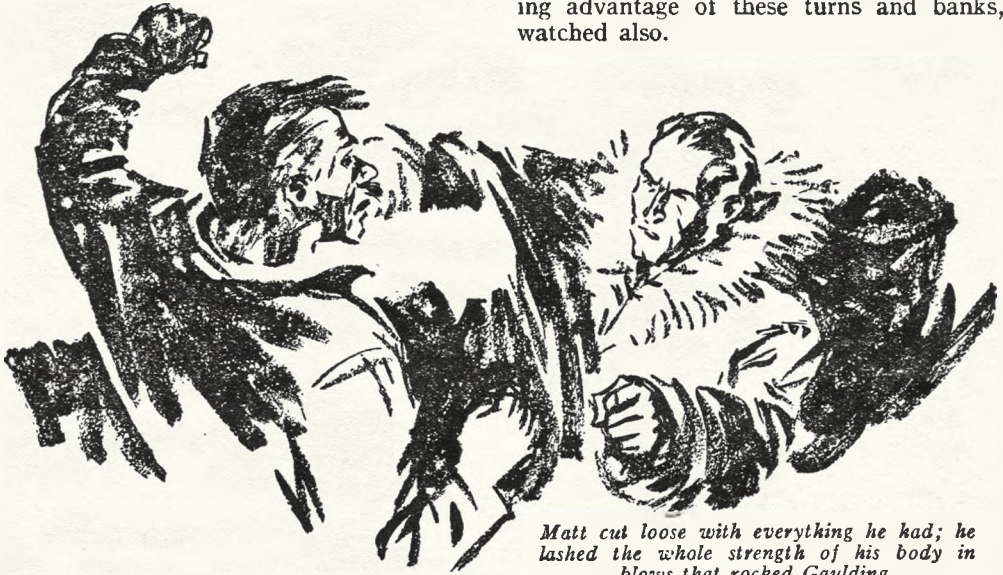
What did it mean? What sort of trick had Clegg played upon him? As he jerked away from the window to demand an explanation, the pilot rolled the plane at such an angle that they could look almost straight down. Matt Dennison caught his breath. Even Blue Beaver, the unemotional, grunted his amazement.

Almost directly under them, perhaps a mile below, many dark pin-points moved. Like ants across a white table-cover, hundreds—yes, thousands—of these little shadows crawled with infinitesimal slowness toward the south. In places the shadows were so thick that they blotted the snow entirely from the sight of the men in the plane. Out at the sides and behind the main body the shadows moved more openly,

dwindling off at the edges like the fringe of a shotgun charge on a white paper target.

Blue Beaver placed his lips close to Matt's ear. Above the roar of the motor he shouted the single word: "Caribou!"

It was hard for Matt to believe, yet the Ojibway must be right. And if those thousands of moving specks down there represented a caribou herd in migration, where must they be? There was but one conclu-



Matt cut loose with everything he had; he lashed the whole strength of his body in blows that rocked Gaudling.

sion. Clegg had brought them to the great barrens.

Thought he could get away with a stunt like that, did Clegg? Nothing stirring! Where was that rifle? But again the Indian clutched Matt's arm and pulled him toward the window.

In the crystal pit beneath, halfway between them and the earth, another great gray plane swam in from the north. It seemed to hover, to poise, as does a peregrine for its stoop; then nosing into a sharp dive, it glanced down at the herd.

The caribou, thrown into a panic by the roaring motor above them, paused, milled and bunched. Matt saw swift spurts of fire wink at the front of the hurtling plane below. Straight across the massed herd a swath appeared—a swath of fallen animals. As they rolled and kicked in their death-throes, the white of their upturned bellies showed plainly among the dark backs of the standing deer.

"Great Pedro, he's machine-gunning 'em!" shouted Matt.

An instant later Clegg's pilot leveled off the plane, and the picture of wholesale slaughter that was taking place below vanished from the window.

Matt swung away from the window and glanced at Clegg, who was again talking excitedly with his pilot, shaking his head, gesticulating. The pilot too seemed uneasy. Every few moments he would maneuver the ship so that he might catch sight of the plane below. And Matt, taking advantage of these turns and banks, watched also.

Now the man below had swung his ship away from the caribou herd, had left them behind. He had evidently sighted Clegg's plane and was climbing to its level. Now the two planes swam side by side, with no more than three hundred yards separating them.

Clegg reached for the door, slid it open and waved at the other plane. There was no answering salute. Instead, the strange ship drew still farther away, banked sharply and swerved straight in at them. In surprised consternation they saw fire spurt from the muzzle of the machine-gun mounted above its wings—swift, red fire that flashed and played like the tongue of an angry snake. *C-r-rack!* A bullet bit at the side of the doorway. *Whu-utt!* Another tore through the fabric of a wing.

The pilot pointed a wing-tip straight at the zenith in a sharp *rajale*. The pressure of the sudden turn threw Matt and Blue Beaver against the side of the cabin, seemed to be pressing them through the very wall of the ship. The strange plane

hurtled past them, the bronze laughter of its gun ripping the crystalline heights in echoless threats of sudden death.

Their own plane leveled off again. Blue Beaver, loosening a string of Ojibway invectives, grabbed his rifle and regardless of the pain the effort must have cost him, clawed his way to the door. With his rifle-butt Matt deliberately smashed the glass from one of the circular windows on the opposite side of the plane and pumped half a dozen shots at the side of the strange ship. He saw white splinters fly from a strut and stream back in the wind, heard Clegg yell in exultation at the shot, saw the other plane dive out of range.

Ira, the pilot, was slowly pulling his control-stick toward his ribs, going into a steep climb. Matt crawled forward up the sharp incline of the cabin floor and put his mouth to Clegg's ear.

"Get busy with your own machine-gun! Going to let that bird down us without a come-back?" he yelled.

"We have no machine-gun."

"Ditched it, did you—after you thought you'd cleaned me?"

Clegg laughed.

Words were useless. The peril was a common one now. Matt glared at Clegg for a moment, trying to read the peculiar expression on the man's face, then worked his way back to the broken window and crammed more cartridges through the loading-gate of his rifle.

He could see nothing of the other plane—it was out of his range of vision; but suddenly Blue Beaver, seemingly oblivious to the danger of being hurled out into space by a sharp lurch of the ship, pushed his head and shoulders out the doorway and began pumping bullets toward the rear.

CLEGG seemed to have forgotten the attacking plane. He was peering ahead expectantly, Matt thought. After twenty minutes, during which the other plane hung behind them like a trailing wolf, perhaps made cautious by Matt's and Blue Beaver's bullets, Clegg half rose in his seat, shouted something unintelligible, and pointed.

To the northeast, perhaps ten miles away, rugged headlands pushed their snow-covered summits above the flat reaches of the barrens. Beyond the headlands Matt glimpsed the cold blue of salt water—salt water and barrens! That could mean but one thing: they were well north, somewhere on the west shore of Hudson Bay.

Through a break in the headlands so narrow that at first glance Matt did not see it, an arm made in from the sea—an arm so narrow that at first he mistook it for a river. But following its frozen course with his eyes, he almost instantly saw his mistake. Inland, perhaps six miles, it terminated in a basin almost circular in shape and something like half a mile in diameter.

On the north shore of this basin, and Matt Dennison gasped in surprise as he saw them, squatted some half-dozen buildings. A Hudson's Bay Post? Perhaps. Yet never had Matt seen the buildings of a Hudson's Bay Post painted as were these. Each building, from the largest to the smallest, was decked in red, a red so vivid and startling that against the snow of the barren they resembled brilliantly painted toy blocks that some tired child had left scattered on a white carpet.

From the shore of the basin, directly in front of the largest building, a short wharf ran out. Fifty yards from the wharf, frozen into the ice of the basin, lay a small two-masted schooner. Unlike the buildings, her hull and deck-house gleamed as white as the snow about her.

Blue Beaver had quit shooting. Matt glanced toward their rear. The other plane had forsaken the pursuit, had swung away, and was cutting straight across toward the distant buildings. It was evident by the ship's maneuvers that she was planning to land there.

Ira, the pilot, exclaimed sharply and pointed at the gasoline gauge on the instrument-board. Matt's gaze leaped to the instrument. The needle of the indicator was slowly but surely moving toward zero! One of those machine-gun bullets must have punctured their fuel tank.

Clegg's excited voice came to Matt's ears above the throbbing pulsations of the ship.

"Nothing else to do, Ira. We've got to land there! There isn't another safe landing within forty miles!"

The pilot said nothing more but grimly swung the plane toward the red buildings.

SO they were hit, and were being forced down at the same place this hostile plane was showing intentions of landing! It looked to Matt Dennison as if things were shaping up for a fight. Well, he'd do his best to look out for Blue Beaver if it came to a scrimmage. Clegg and his pilot could look after themselves, for all he cared. What happened to them, after

what they had tried to do to him and the Ojibway back there on the Kapiskau and the Albany, mattered little to Matt.

When yet two miles from the red buildings the motor faltered, choked, and died. Matt's heart shrank as he looked down into the crystal depths that became shallower with each breathless second.

Again Clegg spoke. With the roar and throb of the motor stilled, his voice seemed distressingly loud. "Well, Ira?"

The pilot, hunched intently over his control-stick, did not turn his head.

"Haven't the altitude to make the landing-field. Going to try to set her down on the ice, there by the schooner."

"She'll crash! That ice is rough!"

"Only chance."

Matt, with his eyes at the broken window, watched the frozen basin and its red buildings rush up at them. As he looked, the other plane made a perfect landing in a long level space to the west of the basin, and a man sprang from it and ran swiftly toward a row of small cabins that squatted by the shore. As he ran, he swung his arms wildly, his mouth open. Matt knew that he was shouting.

MEN, a dozen or more, swarmed from the cabins like angry bees from a hive. Catching sight of the running man, and evidently acting on his shouted orders, they turned back into the cabins to reappear almost instantly with guns and lances in their hands. Sledge-dogs, excited by the shouting and running, came from everywhere, adding their yelping to the hurly-burly. Evidently Clegg's plane was to be met with a warm reception.

The human eye can record many things instantly, and as the pilot banked the plane and swept across the basin to make his landing, the whole panorama of this strange barren-land settlement swept across Matt Dennison's vision. His mind was too occupied to give conscious thought to the things he saw; nevertheless the picture stamped itself indelibly in his brain.

On the summit of a low rise, directly back from the wharf, was the largest building of the group, evidently a house. Long and low-posted it was, with an outside chimney at each end. Its porchless front was broken only by a centrally located door and a few small windows. Without question the place had been built more for comfort and warmth than for beauty. At a short distance from the house was a

smaller structure that might have been a storehouse. Beyond it a long low shed, and down on the shore of the basin the small cabins from which Matt had seen the men emerge. These buildings, together with a galvanized iron hangar down at the end of the field where the strange plane had landed, made up the little settlement.

To the west of the long shed began tier upon tier of wire-netted yards. These small yards, with narrow paths running between their fences, covered fully twenty acres. In each screened enclosure the low roof of a small, boxlike kennel showed above the snow. Small animals moved about in some of the yards, their slim, dark bodies silhouetted in graceful outline against the white background of snow. Outside the group of smaller yards stood a tall fence of wire mesh, its right wing running away into the north, to be lost to sight in the trackless barrens, while its left wing followed the course of a small stream that entered the basin from the west. Undoubtedly the place was a fox ranch; but a fox ranch of such magnitude as Matt Dennison had never before seen.

The plane was near the ice now. A moment more and it bumped, bounced, and bumped again. Its landing wheels came in contact with a hummock of ice; there was a sickening crash; the ship careened onto one wing and the wing crumpled like tissue paper. Then, rearing its tail high in the air, the ship fell slowly over onto its side, and Matt found himself clawing his way out of the tangle that they had been thrown into by the crash.

Clegg was pulling at his pilot's arm. His voice was sharp with anxiety. "Hurt, Ira?"

"Hell, no!"

"Then come!"

"They'll cold-calk you, sure!" warned Matt, forgetting that he had made up his mind to let Clegg care for himself. "Better take your rifles."

Clegg gave him a strange look. "Don't need rifles," he said. "You lie low! Keep quiet! No shooting, unless it's a matter of life or death!"

"Got your nerve with you, aint you?" snapped Matt. "Haul me into a mess like this and then try to tell me what to do. Thanks, but I'm playin' my own hand!"

"Very well," said Clegg grimly, and gave the bruised pilot a helping hand through the doorway.

The wrecked plane was tipped at a sharp angle, but Matt and Blue Beaver, by lying

flat on the floor of the cabin, could still see from one of the windows. They saw Clegg and his pilot march straight on toward the threatening figures that rushed down the banks of the basin to meet them. Brandished lances and pointed rifles seemed to mean nothing to the pair, for they walked square into the center of the bunch, which closed around them as a wolf-pack rings a crippled caribou.

Something was hurting Matt's knee. He put his hand to the floor to move the object, and picked up a pair of binoculars that had been thrown by the crash from their bracket by the pilot's seat. He glued them to his eyes.

At the first glance the glasses showed him that the men who swarmed about Clegg and the pilot were Eskimos. Clegg seemed to be talking to them, expostulating, reasoning. But they would not listen. Instead, a couple of young bucks stepped behind them, and with a seal-spear at each of their backs, forced them up the bank to where the tall man who had landed in the other plane waited. Matt trained the glasses on this man.

Framed in the ear-flapped aviator's helmet, the face that sprang into the field of the lenses was one to arrest attention in any assemblage. Serenity seemed to be its predominating expression. Somber eyes under thick black brows, thin lips, a nose high, thin and slightly hooked.

But the body below that face was what caught and held Matt's attention. It was an anomaly, a misfit. Instead of the supple limbs and thin hands one expected to see, were bulky arms, shoulders which bulged the man's leather flying-coat with knots and hummocks of muscle, slightly bowed legs, huge feet that seemed to grip the ground, and large hands that because of their almost constant movement gave the lie to the false serenity of the face. Even now, as the man watched Clegg and the pilot being brought to him, one of those huge ungloved hands toyed with the buckle of his belt. The other fingered nervously the butt of a pistol that hung at his hip.

Clegg walked straight to the stranger and began talking vehemently. Through the glasses Matt could detect not the slightest change of expression on the stranger's face. He did not seem to hear Clegg.

For a moment only did he allow Clegg to speak; then motioning to one of the Eskimos, a native with a straggling, unkempt beard, he pointed toward the row

of small cabins, turned on his heel and strode in the direction of the house.

The Eskimo, presumably a headman, or chief, Matt concluded, spoke to his men. Clegg and his pilot were seized, hurried to one of the cabins and pushed roughly inside. The cabin door was fastened with a prop on the outside, plank were brought and spiked across the only window. Clegg and the pilot Ira were prisoners.

STRANGELY enough, no one came near the wrecked plane. There was but one explanation for this. No one knew that Matt and the Ojibway were there.

"Got to hand it to Clegg, Beaver," remarked Matt, somewhat grudgingly. "It's evident he never peeped about us being here. Funny!"

"We freeze here!" shivered Blue Beaver.

"Get some of those blankets around you, Beaver. We've got to stick it out until dark. Perhaps we can do something then. If they find us, they'll lock us up like they did Clegg and his man—or something worse. That won't be so good!"

Throughout the day Matt and the Indian shivered with the cold and the expectation that one of the many dogs that prowled among the buildings on shore would scent them and set up a hullabaloo that would lead to their discovery. Nothing of the sort happened, however, and night found the pair numb and stiff and desperate enough to try any wild plan.

"The schooner is our one best bet, Beaver," said Matt. "If we can get aboard of her without being caught at it, perhaps we can hide there until I can get hold of a dog-team here, and we'll make a break for somewhere. If we're discovered, we can stand off that bunch of blubber-eaters for a long time, I think. We'll wait until after the place quiets down for the night, and then we'll make a try for it."

When all the lights of the strange settlement had disappeared, with the exception of one that burned in a gable window of the house, Matt helped Blue Beaver from the plane, got the crippled Indian onto his back and started with him across the ice toward the dim bulk of the little schooner. The Ojibway, together with their rifles, a few pounds of moose meat, and their blankets that they took with them, made the load a staggering one for Matt. He stumbled on across the rough ice, fearful lest he make some noise that would arouse the dogs. Blue Beaver clung to his back



The men at the end of the lines were braced expectantly; they waited for the spear to fall. Matt threw himself to a knee, trained his sights and squeezed the trigger.

like a veritable Old Man of the Sea and cursed in his own tongue at his disability. Somehow they reached the side of the schooner undiscovered, and found that a sloping gangway of plank had been laid from the ice to her deck. Up this slippery incline Matt labored with his burden.

Once on the deck, which had been shoveled clean of snow, Matt paused to listen. Everything was quiet enough, just the distant, sobbing howl of a sledge-dog and the dismal whine of the thin night wind through the snow-incrusted rigging above his head. He crossed the deck and descended the companionway.

Matt swung open the door at the foot of the stairs and stepped down into the dark cabin. His foot struck against some object. He tripped and fell. As he lunged forward in his fall, a pistol spat violet flame from the forward end of the cabin. A bullet cracked as it passed through a panel of the door behind him, and Matt Dennison knew that the fall had saved his life.

Blue Beaver, his leg twisted cruelly in the fall, rolled clear of Matt and groaned in his anguish. Matt, who for all of the tumble still held to his rifle, tried to fire at the place where he had seen the pistol-flash, but his hands were so numb with

cold that to save him he could not cock the arm. He rolled quietly to the side of the cabin and waited.

For perhaps three minutes Dennison lay there, his body pressed close against the cabin wall, listening for some movement in the darkness that might give him a hint of what was coming next. The rapid thumping of his own heart, the pained breathing of Blue Beaver, the doleful wail of the wind in the frozen rigging aloft. No other sound.

SUDDENLY a voice, a somewhat tremulous voice, broke the silence. The words were in the Eskimo tongue. Neither Matt nor Blue Beaver understood them, but the scathing scorn of the utterance was plain in the tone.

Matt took a chance. "Talk English!" he commanded. "We're no walrus-wallopers!"

A match ripped into flame. By its flickering light Matt saw the gray hair and pale, drawn features of an old man whose small form crouched in the expectancy of attack, and whose slim, blue-veined hand shook visibly as it tried to steady the heavy automatic it held.

For a moment he peered at Matt over the pistol-barrel; then with no further hesi-

tation he dropped the weapon into a pocket of the heavy pea-jacket that he wore, walked to the center of the cabin and touched the still blazing match to the wick of an oil lamp that swung in brass gimbals there. By the increased light Matt saw that the object he had stumbled over was the body of a dead Eskimo.

The old man noted Matt's glance. "That," he explained calmly, "is one of Gauling's hirelings. He saw me come here from the house and followed, doubtless to butcher me and claim the reward I have reasons to believe Gauling has offered these poor ignorant natives to take my life. But," he apologized hurriedly, "I forget that you know nothing of our troubles here. Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"We were aboard the plane that crashed on the ice out there," Matt told him.

"But I saw only Clegg and his pilot, Ira Woodsome. How did it happen that Gauling and his Eskimo didn't—"

"You know Clegg?" interrupted Matt in amazement, moving closer to the old man.

The lamplight was full on Matt's face now. The old man was staring at him in wide-eyed wonder. Then one of those thin hands reached out slowly, uncertainly. The old man spoke.

"Mathew Dennison," he said, "I would like to shake hands with you."

Matt was stunned.

"You know— Yes, that's my name. But how—where—how do you know me? I never set eyes on you before!"

"Oh, yes, you have!" the old man smiled. "Let me paint a little mind-picture for you—reconstruct the picture rather.

"Time—last August. Scene—Arthur Clegg's apartment in Grand Rapids. Action—your Uncle Jonas and Clegg in an argument over a dishonest ticket-seller. Does that stir any memories in your brain, my lad?"

Matt was thinking hard. It seemed to him as if there had been another in Clegg's apartment that day, a man he had seen once or twice before at his uncle's home, a man who his uncle had introduced to him upon one of these occasions as—as a—a—Captain—Captain Gramore? No, that was not it! What was—

"Captain Graham!" shouted Matt, and reached for the old man's hand. "But how in the world do you happen up here?"

"This is my home, lad."

"Your home!"

"Certainly! Didn't your uncle ever speak of the fox-ranch here—of me?"

"Never! But that was one of Uncle Jonas' traits—being close-mouthed, I mean. I'm burning up to learn more about this thing, Captain Graham; but first I'm going to make my partner, Blue Beaver, here, more comfortable. Will you help me get him into a berth? He's got a broken leg."

CAPTAIN GRAHAM helped Matt make the Ojibway comfortable in one of the berths; then he nervously examined the coverings that he had previously hung across the deadlights of the cabin to make sure that no light could be seen from the house. This done, he covered the body of the dead Eskimo with a piece of old canvas, and climbed the companionway to the deck. In a moment he was back.

"Everything seems to be quiet up there," he said with a jerk of his white head toward the house. "There is fighting to do. Now is our time to prepare for it. The talk can wait. What have you for arms?"

"Just our two rifles," Matt told him. "But who do we fight, and why?"

"Gaulding and his Eskimos—we've got to get Arthur Clegg and Ira Woodsome away from them somehow. They are in grave danger."

"Who's Gauling?"

"The most unscrupulous scoundrel in the whole North, I'm beginning to think!" replied the old man bitterly. Then with an oblique return to the subject of arms:

"Arthur Clegg's rifle—did he have one?"

"Yes, he and his pilot both. They're out there in the plane."

"Get them. We will need them."

"Why should I worry about Clegg? He tried—"

"Get those rifles, lad! Get 'em—while there's time! They may mean our own lives as well as Clegg's and Woodsome's. Hurry!"

Matt studied Captain Graham's face for a moment, read the fear and anxiety in the old man's eyes, and started for the companionway. If there was fighting to do, as the old man seemed so sure there was, it would indeed be well to have those extra rifles.

Matt reached the crippled plane without being detected, ducked beneath its overturned body and crawled up into its cabin. He found the rifles at once, but knowing that neither his own nor Blue Beaver's ammunition would fit them, he began a search

for cartridges. He dared not light a match for fear it would be seen, and so the search resolved itself into a matter of feeling over the different articles inside the cabin with his hands.

He was busily engaged in this blind groping when the sound of swiftly running footsteps froze him into breathless attention. The runner came directly to the plane, and Matt, convinced that he had been discovered, prepared to sell out as dearly as possible. Grasping one of the rifles, he grimly swung it aloft. But—supposing it was Clegg, or Ira Woodsome, who had escaped from the cabin somehow and was coming to the plane? No, he could not strike in the dark. He laid down the rifle silently and braced himself for a hand-to-hand struggle.

The doorway darkened. Some one put a hand onto each of the jambs and sprang up into the plane. Matt Dennison, with the ferocity of desperation, lunged forward.

He felt his arms go about a fur-clad body. Together he and the newcomer rolled down the sloping floor of the cabin and lodged in a corner in a flying tangle of arms and legs. His antagonist fought with the fury of a wildcat, each movement so dynamically swift that thought could hardly follow, to say nothing of anticipate. All in the same breath strong teeth met in Matt's thumb, a handful of hair was yanked from his head, and a knife bit sharply at his thigh.

By a lucky grab Matt pinioned the knife-wrist, rolled his antagonist under him and snapped a hammerlock onto the other arm. Again those sharp teeth clicked within an inch of his throat, but he shielded his face against the fur parka and began applying pressure to the hammerlock.

THEN all at once Matt realized that the wrists he gripped were slim. The chest beneath that caribou parka he was burrowing his head into was not the ribby chest of a man. He was fighting a girl!

Matt was stumped. He couldn't injure a girl; yet he didn't dare let go of that knife-wrist—not yet.

"I beg your pardon," he panted, "but who are you?"

At Matt's words the girl ceased her struggles. For a moment she lay breathing rapidly. She did not answer, but the knife dropped from her hand and slid along the tilted cabin's floor. Matt let go of the wrist, found the knife and released the girl.

She sat up; Matt heard the rustle of paper; one of her hands groped until it found his and thrust a bit of folded paper into it.

A note! Who from, and what did it mean. Who was this girl?

Matt could bear the suspense no longer. He crawled to the rear of the cabin, away from the windows, spread the little square of paper out on his knee, and shielding a match guardedly with his hands, read:

Matt Dennison:

If you are going to do anything, do it tonight. Woodsome and I are to be strangled by these crazy Eskimos at daylight. The foxes are to be slaughtered tomorrow.

Capt. Graham is aboard the schooner. Don't let Gaolding get to him. The Capt. will explain.

CLEGG.

So this girl was sent to him by Clegg, was she! Why was it she hadn't delivered the message by word of mouth? To the devil with the danger—he was going to have a look at her! For just an instant he let the match flood the cabin of the plane.

Great Scott! No wonder she didn't tell him who she was. No wonder she could fight like an infuriated cat! No wonder her strength was nearly that of a man. The girl was Eskimo—and a darned pretty one!

Matt pinched out the match-flame with his fingers, his mind racing. What if Arthur Clegg *had* called upon him for assistance? Why should he risk his hide dragging Clegg out of a hornet's nest his own trickiness had got him into? But this strangling business—the babiche thong—gosh, that was pretty rank stuff to let these greasy, blubber-eating galoots pull off on a white man, even if the white man was Clegg! Matt supposed he'd have to do something about it, he had no idea what. This girl, he'd have to take her to the schooner with him; that was the only solution to that phase of the tangle.

As Matt continued his search for the cartridges, which he soon found, the girl remained sitting motionless on the floor. Matt stuffed a half-dozen boxes into his pockets, took the girl by the arm and lifted her gently to her feet. She came readily enough when he urged her toward the door, and in another five minutes they were climbing the gangway of the schooner.

WHEN the girl discovered Captain Graham, she ran to him like a child. She clung to his arm; a flood of Eskimo poured from her lips. The old man listened gravely.

Matt, happening to glance at Blue Beaver, had to clap a hand over his mouth to

hide his grin. The Ojibway was sitting straight as a ramrod in his berth, his eyes fastened on the girl, watching the swift play of her red lips, drinking in the cadence of her voice. The expression of colossal surprise and wonder, written so plainly in the Indian's normally stony face, was ludicrous in the extreme.

The Captain glanced at Clegg's note, which Matt passed him. "Yes," he said, "Snow Fawn has just told me. I've seen this thing coming for a long time—the butchery of the foxes, I mean. That Gaulding, he's as relentless as a wolverine! Snow Fawn, here, carried food to Clegg and Woodsome tonight. Clegg can speak quite a bit of Eskimo. He induced the girl to help them. She lives in deadly fear of Gaulding anyway, and would do anything to injure him. You see, her father, old Aku-Ni, has practically sold her to Gaulding—without consulting her feelings. It doesn't go with the girl. Now she's betrayed her father and her tribespeople by bringing us this note, and is afraid to go back to them. Well, she's here, that's all—which doesn't simplify matters any, that I can see."

From Blue Beaver came a single Ojibway word. Neither Matt, the Captain, nor the girl knew its meaning, but through its slow euphonics rippled the music of dancing sunlit waters, the soothing warmth of peaceful camp-fires, the glamorous promise of the bursting buds of springtime. It was the first knowledge that Snow Fawn had of a fourth presence in the cabin. She turned slowly. North was calling North.

For a long moment the eyes of these two children of the snows gripped and held. Then Blue Beaver slowly, imploringly, held out a hand. Snow Fawn, drawn as if by an invisible chain, moved toward him. The wild dark beauty of the girl's face was heightened by its rapt expression. The beaded sealskin *muck-lucks* on her small feet glided noiselessly across the floor. She seemed to float rather than walk.

She stood by Blue Beaver's side. The Ojibway took one of her hands, and with a gesture that would have done credit to a prince of the olden courts, laid it impressively over his heart. Snow Fawn's dark head bowed slowly. With almost ceremonial dignity she lifted the Indian's hand and placed it for an instant on the swell of her young breast. Thus, without words, yet with perfect understanding, did Snow Fawn, daughter of the trackless barrens,

and Blue Beaver, son of the more southern forests, reach sudden understanding.

Captain Graham turned to Matt with a grave smile.

"You see, lad," he said in an undertone, "that the blood of the North does not run as cold as its rivers."

"I see!" replied Matt, grimly, tentatively touching the sizable gouge in his thigh that the copper-handled knife of Snow Fawn had made. "I see that I've just lost a darned good trapping partner!"

"And that being the case," said the Captain, grimly, "the thing for you to do, Matt Dennison, is to figure some way to prevent Gaulding and his Eskimos from slaughtering those foxes out there in the pens and in the big enclosure. Do that, and you'll never have to trap again."

MATT regarded Captain Graham somewhat scornfully. So the old man was trying to *hire* his services in this expected fight, was he? That wasn't Matt Dennison's idea of a scrap—not exactly. When he fought, it was because his feelings had been outraged, to help a friend, to lend some under-dog a hand. For pay—bah! When he spoke, his voice was chill with disgust.

"Captain Graham, it's time we had an understanding. I was brought here against my will, by a man who twice within the week has tried to shoot me down as he would a mad dog—yes, Arthur Clegg. He is made a prisoner by this Gaulding, whoever he is; whereupon he at once calls on me for help. I find you, an acquaintance of both Clegg and my uncle, here. You are offering me *pay* if I will help put this Gaulding's plans onto the rocks. You and Clegg are friends, I take it. Clegg has made two attempts on my life. What are you trying to do, play me against myself? I'd like to hear you talk."

"What?" exclaimed the old Captain. "You trying to tell me that Arthur Clegg attempted to shoot you?"

"More than that! He dropped a bomb on my trapping cabin, down on the Kapis-kau, and blew it to bits. Between the bomb and his machine-gun, Blue Beaver and I had a narrow squeeze of it. Later we captured his plane, forced him and his pilot into it, told them to hit the breeze for the States. Morning found us here. They had tricked us. Can you understand now why I can't work up much enthusiasm over his rescue? I'll do what I can, but frankly I'm not crazy about the job!"

BOOK MAGAZINE

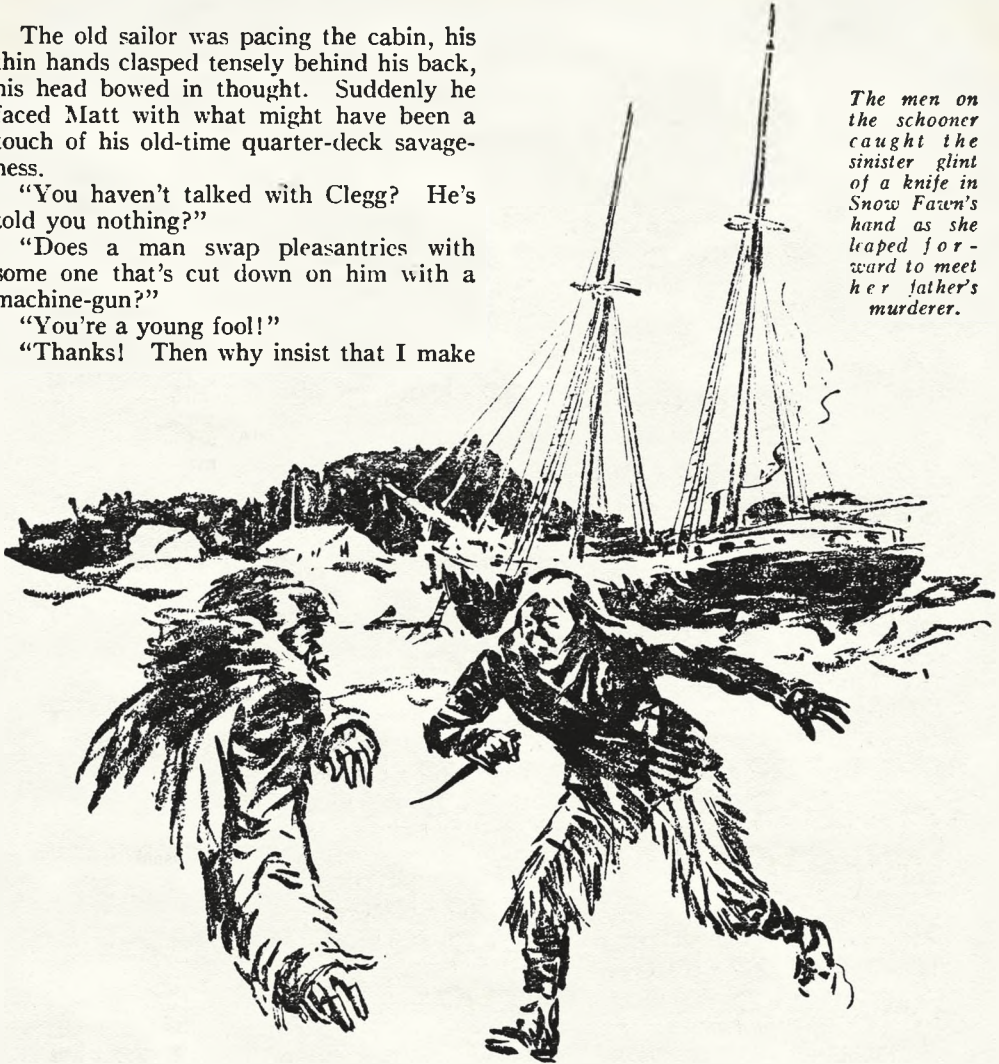
The old sailor was pacing the cabin, his thin hands clasped tensely behind his back, his head bowed in thought. Suddenly he faced Matt with what might have been a touch of his old-time quarter-deck savagery.

"You haven't talked with Clegg? He's told you nothing?"

"Does a man swap pleasantries with some one that's cut down on him with a machine-gun?"

"You're a young fool!"

"Thanks! Then why insist that I make



The men on the schooner caught the sinister glint of a knife in Snow Fawn's hand as she leaped forward to meet her father's murderer.

a bigger fool of myself by jumping into this fight against Gaulding—who, other than shooting down Clegg's plane, which he didn't know I was in, has never harmed me to my knowledge?"

CAPTAIN GRAHAM did not answer. Instead, he turned to Snow Fawn and spoke with her for a moment. The girl left Blue Beaver and climbed the companion-way stairs.

"She'll watch from the deck," said the Captain. "We can't afford to let them surprise us. And now, Matt Dennison, you and I are going to have a show-down. Let's begin at the beginning. We must understand each other. Too much depends on the next few hours' work to go into it blindly. Snow Fawn tells me that Gauld-

ing has posted three Eskimos to guard Clegg and Woodsome, so it doesn't look as if they would be molested before daylight. Now— You know of your uncle's death?"

"Yes."

"You were trapping, down on the Kapis-kau, and picked up the radio message—both messages?"

"Yes. But how did you know that?" questioned Matt in surprise.

"We have a receiving set up there at the house—but more of that later. You put up markers for the plane you expected to come after you?"

"Yes—like a fool!"

"And from what you have said, the plane that came bombed your cabin and tried to finish you with a machine-gun. Is that what happened?"

"Right, Captain! And now the man who did it is in a jam, and is hollering for me to help him out. How does he get that way?"

"And you captured his plane at the time—on the spot?"

"No, some days later. Down on the Albany—miles from there."

"Ah, I thought so!" smiled Captain Graham.

The old man took a quick turn or two about the cabin; chuckled to himself.

"I don't get the joke, Captain Graham!"

The old man came to a halt before Matt, slammed a hand onto each of his shoulders, and looked him square in the eye.

"Matt Dennison," he said, "when you jumped Arthur Clegg, there in his own apartment at Grand Rapids, last summer—accused him of dealing dishonestly with your uncle—I made up my mind that you were one of those impetuous youngsters that are forever jumping to hasty conclusions. I see you still have the fault."

"You mean—what?"

"I mean just this; that Arthur Clegg had nothing to do with bombing your cabin or machine-gunning you down there on the Kapiskau. Never!"

"Huh!" Matt snorted his disbelief. "Who did, then?"

"Gaulding!" shouted Captain Graham. "Gaulding! The man who fired on Clegg's plane out there! The man who is planning to ruin your uncle's and my work of twenty years, and to rob you and me of thousands of dollars' worth of property!"

"Rob you and *me*?" questioned Matt, puzzled.

"Of course, lad!"

CAPTAIN GRAHAM took a nervous turn or two about the cabin, fished a cheroot from a pocket, mended its broken wrapper with his tongue, jammed it in a corner of his mouth, and without lighting the weed began to talk.

"Way back years ago when I was a fo'-castle hand, I used to cruise these waters. In those days I had a matie, a young lad of about my own age. His name was Jonas Dennison."

"My uncle?" asked Matt in surprise.

"Yes. Didn't know your uncle Jonas had been a tall-water man in his time, eh? Well, as I was saying—we were circling the Bay on the old trading schooner, the *Polar Seal*. We were caught in an ice pack that smashed our rudder, and were obliged to

find some sheltered place that we could get into for repairs. The captain picked up the mouth of this inlet out here with his glasses, thought that it offered possibilities, and sent a boat crew ashore to look it over. The men came back with a favorable report, and we worked the old cripple in through the narrow pass.

"Once inside, we had perfect shelter and set about shifting cargo and ballast to bring the stern of the old hooker out of water so that repairs could be made. For the week that the ship's carpenter was at the job of building and shipping a new rudder the crew had much idle time on their hands. Your uncle and I spent most of our time hunting and fishing. We borrowed an old muzzle-loading gun from the second mate and piked off inland every morning. The country abounded with caribou, of which we shot several. Every stream and slough was alive with wild fowl, that had just returned from the south and were preparing to nest. It was a land of plenty.

"We wandered up this inlet and discovered this basin. Its beauty, the abundance of game so near at hand, the millions of fish in its waters, appealed to our youthful fancy. Boy-like, we sat upon its banks and talked and dreamed of living here some day.

"Years passed. Your uncle soon gave up the sea, got married, and settled down to a business life. As for myself, I loved the sea too well to leave it. The time came when as master of my own ship I came to know the ports of the world as the city dweller knows his street corners. Through all these years your uncle and I did not lose touch with each other. The friendship of youth had been a strong one and there were not many months that letters did not pass between us two. Whenever I could find the opportunity I visited at your uncle's home. It was upon the occasion of one of these visits that we conceived the idea of this fox-ranch.

"That was at about the time that the silver fox industry was getting its start in the Prince Edward Islands. It seems that a man had called upon your uncle a few days before my visit, and had tried to interest him in investing in a new ranch that was being started there. Although Jonas did not invest, he was mightily interested in the proposition, and he told me about it.

"Remember the hidden lagoon, up there on the west shore of the Bay?" I asked him. "What a location for a fox-ranch! Plenty of caribou meat and fish for feed, and the

Arctic cold should produce fur with an unbeatable luster.'

"It was enough. Jonas was instantly afire with the idea. Sometimes I think that the reason he bit at the idea so avidly was to have something to take up his mind, to act as a safety-valve for his feelings. He'd lost his wife the year previous, you know.

"Get off the sea, Graham,' he urged me. 'You're getting too old for tall-water voyages, anyhow. Let's go in together and develop a fox-ranch up there that will be different from any other in the world. Besides, if we handle it right, it will make rich men of us.'

"It was no small undertaking, to come into a strange, barren country and do what we have accomplished here. Every stick of building material, wire netting for fences, angle-iron stakes to hang it on—there are no wooden posts here, you know—breeding stock, stoves, and the fuel to run them, everything had to be brought here by boat. I sold my interest in the ship I was master of, pooled my money with your uncle's, and we went at it. We bought a schooner, the *Ptarmigan*, here, loaded it with everything from pins to powder, and sailed away into the north.

"That first summer we worked like the devil. The carpenters we brought with us worked almost every hour of the long daylight. Other workmen labored at the building of the breeding yards. Native hunters supplied us with meat and fish, for which we gave them tools, cooking dishes, guns. These Bay Eskimos were a kindly, honest people as a whole, and Jonas and I made many friends among them.

"THEN came the time when the building was done, the foxes secure in their yards, and the workmen were anxious to get back to their homes and families. And it was high time, for ice was forming along the shores of the inlet and the wild-fowl had already begun their southward migration. Leaving your uncle, with one other white man for a companion, I sailed with the workmen for the States.

"When the *Ptarmigan* nosed her way into the inlet here next spring, bringing in her hold supplies for another year, I found that our venture gave promise of being a huge success. All but two of our female foxes had given birth to fine litters of pups that were playing about the yards like kittens. Your uncle was enthusiastic. Now, that I was back, to work with him among

the foxes, to plan with him by the evening blaze, there was nothing more that he would ask, he said.

"But Jonas and I were destined not to spend this second summer together in the North, for among the mail I brought him was a letter demanding his presence in the States to attend to a half-forgotten, uncompleted business transaction he had neglected to close before coming away the year before. So, though I had rather cut a finger off my right hand than to have seen him go, I made preparations to take him aboard the *Ptarmigan* down the Bay, to Port Nelson, where he could catch a mail steamer.

"Before we were ready to sail, a young man and his Eskimo guide came here. The young man was Arthur Clegg. He had been on a musk-ox hunt miles to the north of here, and was on his way home. We offered him passage on the *Ptarmigan* to Port Nelson, which he gladly accepted.

"Clegg was from Grand Rapids. He and your uncle had many mutual acquaintances there, and it was only natural that a strong friendship should spring up between the two. Clegg was intensely interested in the foxes. He listened to our plans for the future quietly but with close attention.

"Situated as this ranch is, so far from rapid transportation, the sale of breeding-stock is out of the question. In other words the proposition resolves itself to a skin basis. When we started the ranch here, the silver-fox game was in its early stages; then a good skin was bringing anywhere from six to fifteen hundred dollars, so the skin basis was good enough for us.

"Jonas and I were speaking of the number of skins that we should be able to market the following winter, and were figuring on killing only as many as were necessary to meet some of the heavy obligations that we had been forced to incur to get the ranch in running order, when Clegg made a suggestion.

"Don't kill a fox,' he advised. 'Build a big enclosure, four or five miles square, there to the north of your breeding yards. Turn the overflow of your yards into it each year. Hold them for two or three years until they are fully matured. Feed costs you next to nothing, and there is plenty of it. The foxes would be living as nearly natural as it would be possible to raise them, and each skin should be a perfect specimen. It would be easy to differentiate each year's crop by marking each pup that was liberated into the big pasture

by a small tattoo mark in the inside of its ear. The foxes could be fed in a smaller enclosure within the big fence, so that when you wanted to make a killing, they could be run through a sorting gap and the older ones selected for skinning.'

"There at one stroke Clegg had outlined the building of a fortune. But to your uncle and me he might as well have talked of flying to the moon. We lacked the capital to carry us over such a long period. Each year we must cash some of our furs to enable us to keep on in the business. We told Clegg as much.

"Nothing more was said on the subject at the time, but going down to Port Nelson, Clegg brought up the matter again.

"If you men would accept a loan,' he said, 'I'm interested enough in the experiment to back you with what capital you'll need. As it happens I inherited more money than I know what to do with. Think it over, gentlemen.'

"Before we had parted there at Port Nelson, we had taken up with Clegg's offer. Next summer I went south with the *Ptarmigan* and brought back miles of fencing wire and tons of angle-iron posts. For a few rifles, some axes, beads, blankets, sugar and tea, we hired old Ki-Tah and his bucks, Eskimos from Tupik Lake, to build the fence and we turned in our crop of young foxes. Three years from then, after marketing our first crop of skins, we paid Clegg and our other creditors every cent we owed. Since then our income has been far beyond our wildest dreams, even though the wholesale ranching of silver foxes throughout the States and Canada has forced the value of fur down to about one-fourth what it was formerly."

"And Clegg?" inquired Matt. "Does he have an interest in the ranch?"

"Yes, a keen interest, but not a financial one. Why, he even refused to accept interest on the money he loaned us. Said he'd get value received by coming up here on an occasional hunt. That's the kind of a man he is, my lad."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Matt. "And I accused him of being in cahoots with a crooked ticket-seller! But about this ranch, Captain Graham. You trying to tell me that I am a part-owner with you?"

"Of course, lad. Now that Jonas Denison is dead, his interest in this ranch, as well as other of his property, falls to you, his only heir. I know this to be so, for when I saw Jonas last fall, he told me that

he'd willed you everything. So you and I are the sole owners of this ranch. But now about Gaulinging."

"Wait!" interrupted Matt. "Tell me why you think it wasn't Clegg who bombed my cabin and tried to make a sieve of me with his machine-gun. I want to hear that explained away before I'm quite ready to take Arthur Clegg to my bosom."

AS if he had not heard Matt's question, Captain Graham lighted his battered cheroot and continued his explanation in his own way.

"Yes, about Gaulinging: As you know, for the past ten years your uncle has spent the greater part of his time in the States. I, with the help of faithful old Ki-Tah and his men, have run the ranch. Two years ago rheumatism got me. For nearly three months I didn't leave the house. Not daring to leave the care of the ranch wholly to the Eskimos, I sent a man with a letter to the factor of the trading post at Cold Forks, asking for help. He sent Gaulinging up to me. I knew nothing of the man, but he could speak Eskimo, seemed to grasp the details of the work here readily enough, and although somewhat eccentric, was an agreeable companion. Within the year I had practically turned the entire management of the ranch over to him and spent most of my time with my books.

"That fall Arthur Clegg came up with an airplane for his annual hunt. He met Gaulinging, accepted him at face value, and the two became friendly. As a bit of novelty Clegg invited Gaulinging to hunt caribou from the plane with him. The hunt was a success, and Gaulinging discovered that an airplane would aid us greatly in securing meat for fox feed. With something like two thousand foxes to feed through the long winter, you can understand that the task of hauling this meat to the ranch by dog-team was no small task.

"By experimenting, Clegg and Gaulinging discovered that with an airplane the course of a caribou herd could be changed—that they could be driven, as cowboys drive cattle, right to our very doors. It was decided that an airplane would be a good investment for the ranch. So when Clegg returned to the States, Gaulinging went with him, took instructions in flying, and returned with a plane. The machine was an exact duplicate of Arthur Clegg's with one exception—it was equipped with a machine-gun. The gun was Gaulinging's idea.

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He contended that with it he could drop the caribou in a smaller area than could be done with rifle-fire, saving time and labor."

"And you think it was Gaulding rather than Clegg who tried to get me down there on the Kapiskau, do you?"



Blue Beaver followed Gaulding's dodging form with the muzzle. Then the crashing report echoed eerily back from the buildings.

"I think nothing. I know!"

"But what was his object?"

"Greed, lad! Greed! Wait, I'm coming to that.

"The longer Gaulding stayed here, the more independent he became. The time came when he ceased to consult me regarding any detail of the management of the ranch. If I made a suggestion, he would listen respectfully enough, but would never carry it out. Flying became a mania with him. He was in the air much of the time and complained bitterly because the gasoline supply we brought in with the *Ptar-migan* was so limited. Finally rumors reached me through old Ki-Tah that Gaulding was strafing the caribou herds—strafing them not because we were in need of the meat, but just for the blood-lust of the thing. This didn't set well with the Eskimos, for to them the caribou meant much. They became surly. Gaulding could do little with them here at the ranch.

"I had a talk with Gaulding about the situation, and when I say I had a talk, I mean just that. I did the talking—all of

it! Gaulding said nothing, just listened, while those eyes of his seemed to look through me, beyond me. I know now that he was visioning a power and wealth that were not rightly his.

"But my talk had an effect. The very next day Gaulding discharged Ki-Tah and every one of his men, drove them back to their village with the plane and the machine-gun as he drives the caribou herds. He ripped the snow about them into dust with his bullets—a threat of what would happen if they returned.

"Then he went to Aku-Ni, a chief whose village even the free traders avoid because of the treachery of its people. What he offered Aku-Ni I don't know, but probably plenty, for two days later Aku-Ni and fourteen of his men appeared here at the ranch and took possession of the help's quarters there by the shore.

"With him the chief brought his daughter—Snow Fawn. I think that she was considered in the bargain that Gaulding made with Aku-Ni. You've seen for yourself, Matt, that she is pretty enough to cause

all kinds of trouble. I've heard it rumored that her mother's father was a white man, and it's easy enough to believe."

BLUE BEAVER raised himself on an elbow in the berth. "Man killum caribou for fun no kind of feller have squaw like dat!" he said with serious conviction, and lay down again.

Captain Graham glanced at the Ojibway, smiled and continued:

"Since Aku-Ni and his men came, I've been nothing more or less than a prisoner. I have had the privilege of coming and going about the place as I pleased, but that is all. My guns were taken away—all but this pistol in my pocket, which was hidden aboard the schooner here. I was alone—one against fifteen. There was nothing I could do. If I had been younger, I'd have tried to reach Ki-Tah's village and enlisted his help. Perhaps we could have surprised Gaulding and his Eskimos in the night, when Gaulding couldn't have used that cursed machine-gun. Perhaps we might have wiped them out. But it's thirty miles to Ki-Tah's village—too far for me to attempt the trip single-handed—so I sat back helplessly and watched the preparations for what is to take place here.

"Gaulding plans a big clean-up. He has only been waiting until the fox fur is at its prime; then he'll slaughter them all, cure the skins and fade away with them. At a low estimate there are three hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of fox fur on the foot in the big enclosure. You can see what stakes the man is playing for."

Blue Beaver was up on his elbow again.

"Dis gal—she likum Gauldin?"

"If you'd seen her flash her knife at him as I have, when he was forcing his attentions a little too strong, you wouldn't think she's crazy about him," grinned the Captain.

The Ojibway sank back onto the pillow. "Good squaw!" he grunted.

"No, the girl is being forced into this, and she doesn't like it. She knows Gaulding plans to rob me, and between the two of us has sprung up a kind of understanding. Two or three times, when old Aku-Ni has dragged her from his cabin up to the house and left her there for Gaulding's amusement, I've made it my way to stick around pretty close to where she was. Gaulding would have killed me for it if he had dared, but the look of thanks in the girl's eyes was worth the risk."

Matt Dennison had been thinking. "Look here, Captain Graham," he suddenly asked, "you say you heard the message that was broadcasted from Toronto to me?"

"Yes."

"Remember that in that message I was warned of 'sinister interests' that would doubtless try to prevent me from reaching the States?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, if it was not Arthur Clegg my uncle was warning me against, who was it? Uncle Jonas couldn't have known anything about Gaulding's crooked work at that time."

"Another one of your jumping conclusions, Matt," smiled the Captain grimly. "Early last fall, long before Gaulding made any openly hostile moves, I mistrusted that something of the sort was brewing. I had a chance to send a letter out by a trapper who was going down to Port Nelson for supplies, and so I wrote Jonas my suspicions regarding Gaulding. The letter must have been delayed; otherwise Jonas would have sent help to me long ago. Probably your uncle received the letter shortly before his death, and realizing that he was near the end, left instructions to have you called home. Knowing that we have a receiving set here, he was fearful Gaulding would also pick up the message and turn it to his advantage; therefore the warning."

"And Gaulding heard the message?"

"Yes. I was reading in my study the evening the first message came. Gaulding was in the living-room, where the set is located. Before the loud speaker had finished its message, Gaulding crossed the room, glanced in at me, and closed my door. I hadn't moved. The news stunned me. He thought I hadn't heard. The next few evenings he was careful that my door was closed, but I listened at the keyhole and heard the message repeated. I also heard the message broadcasted that told you the plane was coming for you.

"There's only one way to figure that last message—Arthur Clegg must have sent it. He knew that you should be here to attend to your interests—and get here quickly. By the time you had reached the States and had learned how things stood, it might be too late. I'm ready to wager that Arthur Clegg came to the Kapiskau with the intention of bringing you here.

"But Gaulding—for him the message meant something different. It offered him a chance to wipe you from the slate—to

lessen the disturbance that would be raised when it was discovered that he had sacked the ranch here. And then perhaps he thought there might be a chance for him to down Clegg's plane at the same time. With you and Arthur Clegg silenced for all time, it would be a simple matter for him to hire an Eskimo to slip a knife between my ribs and leave himself a clear field. Perhaps in this forsaken place his crime would not be discovered before another spring, and by that time he'd have disposed of the skins and be on the other side of the world.

"At any rate, as soon as Gaulding heard that last message he became a whirlwind of activity. He pulled on a parka and ran out into the night. In a few moments he was back with an empty gallon paint bucket and a bundle of dynamite sticks—we use dynamite to blow our post-holes with, you know. Through the keyhole of my door I watched him make a crude but murderous bomb. Next morning he and two of the Eskimos flew away into the south. A week later he returned. Only one of the Eskimos came with him. What became of the other I don't know."

Blue Beaver opened his eyes and glancing at Matt, grinned.

"Me used to shootum musquash in de dark when me papoose like dat," he said proudly, holding a dark hand some three feet above the floor of the cabin.

Matt stared at him. "You mean, Beaver, that you got that Eskimo the morning we were going up the Kapiskau in the snow-storm?"

The Ojibway closed his eyes languidly. "Cap'n say him no come back," he remarked with placid satisfaction.

MATT DENNISON took stock of himself and was not wholly satisfied with the result. "Well, Captain Graham," he finally blurted, "if what you say is the correct dope on this deal, Arthur Clegg must think I'm some hot sketch! It looks to me as if I'd better get busy! Gaulding is going to get a little jolt, when he discovers that I'm still alive and kicking."

"He thinks you're dead?"

"Yes. Left the both of us for dead, down on the Albany ice. By the way, Captain, how do you happen to be here aboard the schooner?"

"I knew that tomorrow Clegg would start his clean-up. It seemed more fitting that an old seafaring man should make his last stand with decks under his feet, so

after dark I eased myself out a window and came here."

"Gaulding thinks you're still in your room?"

"I left my door locked. I don't think anyone but Snow Fawn knew I was coming. Gaulding wouldn't worry about my whereabouts—he's got a guard over Clegg and Woodsome, and he knows I couldn't escape from the ranch without perishing in the barrens—which would suit him to a tee."

"But Clegg knew you were here on the schooner?"

"Snow Fawn told him, when she carried the food to the men."

With a wave of a hand Blue Beaver indicated Clegg's rifle, which Matt had brought from the plane.

"Lemme lookum dat gun."

Matt passed him the rifle, a restocked Springfield of beautiful finish and balance.

The Ojibway sat up in the berth and aimed the arm at some object on the far side of the cabin, trying the sights. He slid the breech-bolt open and shut. He patted the dark walnut of the stock.

"Captain Graham," said Matt with sudden decision, "I'm going up to the house and try to get to Gaulding, before he brings the war into our camp. If we could make him a prisoner, keep him out of the way, perhaps the Eskimos could be handled without bloodshed. Don't you think it worth a try?"

"Perhaps—but it's mighty dangerous! Gaulding is as crafty as a fox, as strong as a polar bear, and as relentless as a wolf. One slip on your part, and he's got the whole game in his hands."

"Where's Gaulding's room?"

"At the far end of the house—downstairs."

"How can I get into the house without giving warning I'm coming?"

"Through the window of my room, at the back of the house. If he should hear you, he'd think it was me moving about—that is, if he hasn't discovered my absence. But you can never reach the house without being discovered, lad. The dogs will spot you."

"I think I've got that figured, Captain. Call Snow Fawn, will you?"

Captain Graham stepped to the foot of the companionway stairs and whistled softly. The girl came down.

"Now tell her I'd like to hear her howl like a wolf."

The Captain looked his surprise, but did as Matt directed.

Snow Fawn, mistaking the thing for some sort of a joke, flashed Blue Beaver a coy smile, shrugged her graceful shoulders and tipped back her head. Her dark throat swelled like a mockingbird's, and from her lips came the long-drawn, sobbing, moaning, mating call of the female wolf. The imitation was so perfect, its cadence so indescribably wild, that the back of Matt Dennison's neck prickled.

"Good!" exclaimed Matt. "Now, Captain, tell her to go ashore, make a big circle around the buildings, get over somewhere along the big fence, and howl like that just once. Every dog will dash out there to see what's up. The dogs know her; they won't harm her. While they are out there, I'll get to the house."

Captain Graham explained to Snow Fawn, gave her instructions. She turned toward the stairway. They heard her *muck-lucks* pad swiftly across the deck overhead, and she was gone.

Matt picked up his rifle and pulled on his mittens. "Well, gentlemen, the show begins. If anything goes wrong and they try to board the schooner here, why, you've got three rifles."

The Captain shoved his automatic into Matt's hand. "Here, take it. It's a better tool for close-in stuff than a rifle."

"Thanks!" said Matt, and dropped the pistol in a pocket.

He reached the house safely. Not a dog was in sight, and evidently Snow Fawn had done her part well. He hugged the wall of the building where the shadows were deep and worked his way around to the back. He found the window of Captain Graham's room. Light showed past the edges of its drawn shade. Stooping, he slid his rifle beneath the light snow at the side of the underpinning, out of sight of anyone who might chance to pass. Then with the pistol gripped tightly in a nervous fist, he tried the window. The sash slid up without noise, and Matt stepped quietly in.

A shaded lamp on a reading table flooded a clutter of books and magazines that lay beneath it with a circle of yellow light. The rest of the room was in half-shadow. Matt saw shelves of books on the wall, a big easy-chair by the table, a couch in a corner with a dark fur robe of some kind thrown across it. A coal fire glowed ruddily through the isinglassed front of a stove. A comfortable den—this of the old captain.

For five breathless minutes Matt stood motionless and listened. Not a sound. Then, from beyond the closed door, came the sharp rustle of stiff paper.

Moving with great caution Matt tiptoed to the door, knelt and peered through the keyhole.

Seated at a table in the next room was Gaulding. The man was facing Matt, head bowed, intent on a map of some kind.

Matt raised a foot and let it fall on the floor, slowly, as does a man when he paces about. Gaulding raised his head, glanced indifferently at the door, and went on with his study.

"Doesn't mistrust a thing!" gloated Matt. "Well, here goes!"

He took a long breath, turned the key, and stepped through into the other room.

GAULDING did not raise his head. Matt walked slowly toward the table, pistol at ready. Gaulding's eyes remained fixed on the map.

Matt reached the table, leaned against it, and without a word reached across and stuck the automatic into Gaulding's face.

For an instant Gaulding's eyes lifted no higher than the pistol's muzzle. He regarded it curiously, almost contemplatively. Then suddenly he tipped back his head and looked up into Matt's face.

A flash of the most malignant fury that Matt had ever seen registered contorted Gaulding's face. It disappeared instantly. Gaulding relaxed and laughed.

"You sure take a lot of killing, don't you, Mathew Dennison?" he asked coolly.

"You—you know me?" Matt gasped.

"Why shouldn't I? I saw your picture at your uncle's when I went down to the States to bring in the plane. Besides, I got a pretty good slant at you down there on the Albany."

"So it was you, then?"

"Of course it was me! Who did you think 'twas, Clegg? Haw-haw, that's rich!"

"You're very frank with your admission, Gaulding."

"Why shouldn't I be? They'll never be used against me. You'll never leave here alive! I've fumbled the deal twice in your case, but this time you've played into my hand. Arthur Clegg, his pilot, Captain Graham, and yourself—tomorrow it's curtains for all of you. We're not down in the States, you know, Dennison."

Gaulding slumped lower in his chair, slid indolently down until he could look

directly up at Matt. One would have assumed from his posture that he was making himself comfortable for a long talk.

"Know anything about Buenos Aires?" he inquired irrelevantly. "I've read that there are many beautiful señoritas there."

"That's got nothing to do with the present situation, Gaulding. Now you—"

Gaulding's long lands came slowly to the edge of the table. Nervous fingers began a slow drumming on the polished oak.

"Oh, yes, it has!" he interrupted. "That's where I'm going after I arrange matters here to my own liking."

As Gaulding talked, his long legs slowly straightened. In the shadows beneath the table his feet crept forward inch by inch until they were extended past Matt's heels. Now the toes turned slowly in, hooked, tensed like steel.

"That's plenty from you, Gaulding!" snapped Matt. "I didn't come here to discuss travel! Get onto your feet, and do it quick!"

"As you say," smiled Gaulding—and with a lightning lunge drove the table against Matt's thighs. At the same instant his toes caught Matt's heels and snapped them in under the table.

MATT, perfectly back-heeled, hit the floor with a crash. His gun gyrated into a far corner. Gaulding, flirting the heavy table aside with a sweep of his hand, was upon him in a lunging dive.

Instinctively one of Matt's feet lifted, caught Gaulding in the stomach. His hands gripped Gaulding's shirt at the shoulders. He put every ounce of his strength into a lifting drive of his back and thigh. Gaulding, for all of his bulk, sailed over Matt's head and crashed head foremost against the wall. Matt was on his feet instantly, following up his advantage.

The fall did not seem to harm Gaulding in the least. He regained his feet with the litheness of a panther. Unruffled, his face still wreathed in that same amazing serenity, he leaped to meet Matt.

Matt fainted with his left, side-stepped, and drove a sizzling right hook to Gaulding's cheek. Gaulding's head snapped back with the force of the blow, but he recovered instantly and swung a flashing foot for Matt's groin. Matt twisted his body and the kick landed harmlessly on his hip.

The foulness of the thing angered Matt, and closing with Gaulding, he ripped a half dozen short-arm blows to the man's midriff.

Gaulding grunted and flung long arms about Matt's body, but before they could secure a hold, Matt realized his mistake, lifted a jarring uppercut to Gaulding's chin, and slid out of the clinch.

They sparred for an opening. Matt sized his man. Although Gaulding's face still remained calm and untroubled, his breath was coming rather sharply. "Soft," thought Matt, "but dangerous! I'll let him lick himself—wear himself down, then I'll smear him."

But this Gaulding refused to do. Realizing at once that Matt was the better boxer, he contented with covering up as he could, and seeking to grapple with his younger antagonist. Gaulding had much confidence in his own strength. Slowly, relentlessly he followed Matt about the room.

It did not take Matt long to discover that he could never win by running-away tactics. Sooner or later he knew Gaulding would secure his hold, and he had no desire to match his strength against those hummocky muscles that slid and writhed beneath the man's shirt.

Matt cut loose with everything he had. He threw a rain of punches into that dark sphinxlike face. He hooked; he jabbed. He lashed the whole strength of his body into straight-from-the-shoulder blows that rocked Gaulding and started the blood trickling in streams from his mouth and nose; but still the man came on. Three times Gaulding drove Matt into a corner of the room and fastened hungry hands upon him. Three times, by clever foot-work and desperate slugging Matt beat his way again to the open floor.

THE fight became a nightmare to Matt Dennison. His outdoor life had put him in the best of physical condition, and he was in no great distress from his exertions; yet the impotency of his efforts was getting under his skin. A dozen times he had landed blows on Gaulding's jaw that should have dropped him, yet the blows seemed hardly to daze him. "Iron jaw," thought Matt, and shifted his attack to the body.

A half dozen smashes to Gaulding's heart region, and Matt knew he had found the man's vulnerable point. Gaulding grunted with the impact of each blow. His advance slowed. Some of the serenity left his face. He suddenly swept up a chair and whirled it straight at Matt's head.

Matt ducked. The chair splintered

against the wall behind him, but before he could recover Gaulding was upon him.

Matt found himself jammed up against the wall in a corner. Hands were at his throat, hands with fingers that gripped and drove into the flesh of his throat like the talons of an eagle. His lungs were suffering for air. Vainly he beat at Gaulding's triumphant face, but the man's reach was so much greater than his own that his blows could not land. Objects swam uncertainly before Matt's eyes, his knees set up a sudden trembling. He must break that terrible strangling hold. Break it—break it! He threw his shoulders back against the wall for support, jack-knifed his body with a sudden convulsion, and drove both feet against Gaulding's chest.

Every fiber of Matt's healthy young body loaned its strength to that desperate thrust. For a moment Gaulding's grip held; then, slowly, leaving bloody furrows behind them, his fingers slipped from Matt's throat and he staggered back. Matt gulped a lungful of live-giving air and twisted out of the corner as Gaulding rushed him again.

Groggily Matt fled before Gaulding's berserker charges until once more he felt the strength flow back to his legs, his arms. With strength came a cool, deadly ferocity that surprised even himself. Gaulding would pay for those marks on his throat, pay for those dogs he had murdered down there on the Albany, pay for all! Deliberately he maneuvered the man into the position he wanted. He threw a swift left feint at Gaulding's face. Gaulding raised his guard. *Thut!* Matt's right landed with sledge-hammer force over Gaulding's heart.

Gaulding's mouth fell open, and his hands fell to his sides. His eyes rolled up under their lids. He swayed on his feet.

As Matt slipped to the side, he half sensed the movement of a swift shadow behind him, but disregarding it he set himself for a knock-out and started a terrific swing for Gaulding's jaw.

Pung!

A comet exploded inside Matt's head. Then blackness.

A PIPE-ORGAN was playing somewhere, playing over and over a monotonous repetition of a half dozen notes.

No, not a pipe-organ. Human voices—a chant! Matt Dennison opened his eyes.

An overturned table. A smashed chair. Scattered books. A hanging lamp, its yel-

low flame burning dim with the last oil of its reservoir. Ah! The fight!—Gaulding!

Matt sat up. His head hurt fiercely. A dizzying sickness seized upon him. He succumbed to racking nausea.

"Some one crowned me—got me from behind," he thought. "Wonder what that chanting means?" He raised his eyes to a window. Daylight showed wanly through the frosted panes. Daylight—Clegg and his pilot were to be executed at daybreak!

Weakly, and with a growing fear gripping his heart, Matt struggled to his feet. He started to walk to the window, stumbled and fell. He did not try to rise again, but crawled frantically to the window and scratched a peephole in the frost of a pane.

Down by the Eskimos' cabins, surrounded by eight or ten parka-clad figures, stood Arthur Clegg and Ira Woodsome. Their arms were bound tightly behind them. Around their throats were looped walrus hide seal-lines—two to each man. Eskimos, two of them on opposite sides of each prisoner, held the end of these lines in their mittened hands. The other Eskimos circled the prisoners slowly, stamping grotesquely in time to their weird chant.

Outside the circle Aku-Ni, the headman, leaned indolently upon a seal-spear. Matt knew that the four executioners were but waiting his word. Then they would throw their weight upon the seal-lines, the nooses would tighten, and Arthur Clegg and his pilot would die a horrible death.

For an instant Matt shifted his gaze toward the schooner. From behind a corner of the deck-house a rifle spat thin flame. Four dim figures crouched by the pilings of the wharf returned the fire. Matt made out one of these four to be Gaulding. He paused no longer, but pulling himself to his feet by the window-sill, ran staggering for the room of Captain Graham.

He made the window by which he had entered the house, flung up the sash and tumbled out into the snow. He pawed for the rifle that he had left beneath the snow, found it, and brushing the snow from it as he ran, turned the corner of the house.

The chant had ceased. Aku-Ni, spear raised at arm's-length above his head, stood ready to give the death-signal. The men at the end of the lines were braced expectantly, the lines wrapped about a thigh that they might the better throw their weight upon them. With their eyes fixed on Aku-Ni, they waited for the spear to fall.

MATT threw himself to a knee, trained his sights on one of Clegg's executioners and squeezed the trigger. The Eskimo slumped in a heap. A jerk of the loading lever, another report, and the Eskimo on the other side of Clegg dropped the line with a howl and grabbed at his leg.

Aku-Ni, the headman, stood transfixed with surprise, but Woodsome's executioners, not to be denied their grisly work, laid back on the seal-lines. Matt dropped one of them with his next shot, and the other, with no counter-pull acting against him, fell backward into the snow dragging Woodsome down with him. Clegg, now free with the exception of his hands, was upon the fallen Eskimo instantly. His heavily booted toe struck the man just under the ear, and he lay still.

The other Eskimo, demoralized by the abundance of sudden death in their midst, broke and ran, stringing out toward the stream at the head of the basin. Not so Aku-Ni! Gaulding had offered him many rifles and blankets for the death of Clegg—sledge-loads of sugar, strange canned fruits and meats, if he would help at the killing of the foxes. To Aku-Ni it was the golden opportunity of a lifetime. With a wolf-like snarl he sprang at Clegg with his seal-spear.

Clegg ducked and dodged the chief's thrusts, working away to the side as he did so. It was evident to Matt that Clegg was deliberately leading Aku-Ni away from the prostrate Woodsome. Matt tried to line his sights on Aku-Ni, but the men were moving so rapidly that it was impossible. He tried a snap shot—and missed. Clegg turned and raced toward Matt. Aku-Ni followed, protected from Matt's fire by Clegg's body.

For all of his bound arms and the seal-lines that dragged from his throat, Clegg was outrunning the headman. Aku-Ni too realized that he was no match for Clegg's speed. Then it was that Matt saw the Eskimo suddenly stoop in his stride, scoop up one of the trailing lines, and brace himself. The thin walrus hide thong twanged with sudden tension. Clegg, jerked off his feet by the shock, fell on his back, partially stunned. Aku-Ni was upon him instantly. Grinning horribly, he raised the spear for a savage two-handed thrust.

Matt's fore-sight blurred against the background of Aku-Ni's deerskin parka. The rifle barked. The spear-haft splintered and flew out of his hands. Aku-Ni spun sharply. Clegg scrambled to his feet.

More by luck than by good marksmanship, Matt's bullets had shattered one of Aku-Ni's wrists.

The headman glanced at his wrist, gripped it with his other hand and made off at a lumbering run. Instead of following his men, who were now well out beyond the frozen basin, he turned toward the wharf where Gaulding and his men were busy pumping bullets at the schooner.

Matt ran down the slope to Clegg, reached for his hunting-knife to cut Clegg's bonds. The knife was gone from its sheath, probably taken by some one while he lay unconscious in the house. So also was his cartridge belt. He recovered Aku-Ni's shattered seal-spear and with the keen edge of its blade sawed through the babiche thongs that held Clegg's arms. Together they raced to where Woodsome lay writhing in the snow and loosened the nooses about his throat.

Ira Woodsome sat up, swore, grabbed up Matt's rifle, and training it on the running Aku-Ni's back, pulled. The hammer clicked on an empty chamber. The weapon was of the "half-magazine" variety, holding but five cartridges, and Matt's bullet that had broken Aku-Ni's wrist had been his last.

Thus it was that the three of them had to stand and helplessly watch the drama being enacted out there by the schooner.

FROM where Gaulding was crouched under the bank, it had been impossible for him to see the fight that had taken place by the cabins. He had heard the shooting, to be sure, but had mistaken it for some of the Eskimos letting off their trade-guns in celebration of a successful strangling bee. Now that was over, Aku-Ni and his men should be with him soon to help him take the schooner.

Those two rifles aboard the craft, the one by the corner of the deck-house, and the other that barked with the report of a high-powered weapon from one of the cabin deadlights, had searched out one of the three Eskimos and had piled him in an inert heap there by the pilings of the wharf. The man behind the deck-house Gaulding knew to be Captain Graham, for once the old man had exposed the officer's cap he habitually wore. But the other—that shooting from the cabin deadlight, could that be the girl—Aku-Ni's daughter? Strange that Gaulding never knew she could handle a rifle!

But the old Captain must be wiped out—even at the expense of losing Snow Fawn, and to get to the Captain that rifle in the deadlight must be silenced. Reluctantly Gaulding emptied his rifle at the circular aperture in the schooner's side.

There were no answering shots. Gaulding believed he had wounded the girl—perhaps killed her. Oh, well, there'd be more girls in Buenos Aires—and prettier. Where was Aku-Ni and his seal-eaters, anyhow? Why didn't they come? To the devil with them! If two Eskimos and himself couldn't rush the schooner and put that lone old man out of commission, they were poor sticks! Gaulding shouted to the two men crouched beside him, and together they sprang out onto the ice. Dodging as they ran, they made for the plank gangway.

From the cabins Matt, Clegg and Woodsome saw the charge. They saw Captain Graham leap from the shelter of the deck-house to the head of the gangway, heard his rifle crack, again and again, with the regularity of clockwork—saw Aku-Ni reach the bank, slide down to the ice and race after Gaulding, heard him yell.

GAULDING heard Aku-Ni too, and casting a glance over his shoulder as he ran, saw the headman running toward him. He shifted his course, dodged in under the bilge of the schooner out of range of the Captain's rifle and waited for Aku-Ni to come up. As he did so, one of the Eskimos running at his side went down with a bullet through his head. The other Eskimo kept on, leaped up the gangway, rifle clubbed, ready to smash the Captain to the deck; as he reached deck level, Captain Graham shot him squarely through the middle, but with the vitality of a polar bear he staggered forward and dashed his rifle-butt into the old man's face. The two men slumped to the deck together.

Aku-Ni reached Gaulding, held up his bleeding wrist for him to see, motioned with his other hand back toward the cabins, and began speaking rapidly, evidently telling him of the miscarriage of the execution.

Gaulding cried out strangely, glanced toward the cabins, saw Matt, Clegg, and the pilot watching him. Then, with calm deliberation, he sent three bullets through Aku-Ni's body, turned and made for the foot of the gangway.

But Gaulding was destined to never reach the deck of the schooner. From somewhere Snow Fawn had witnessed the

brutal shooting of her father and sprang to avenge him. The watching men on shore saw her small fur-clad form swing over the schooner's rail, hang for an instant, then drop directly in Gaulding's path. They caught the sinister glint of a knife in her hand as she leaped forward to meet her father's murderer.

Gaulding paused, looked at the girl, and divining her purpose, laid down his rifle with a laugh and prepared to meet her. Snow Fawn reached him and flung herself upon him with the fury of a cat. Gaulding caught her knife-wrist, twisted her arm cruelly. Snow Fawn screamed. The knife fell into the snow.

Gaulding held the girl close against him, smothering her efforts with his great arms. For an instant he watched the three men who were now running toward him; then gathering the girl up in his arms, he started in a swift run across the ice toward the hangar at the west end of the basin.

"Stop him!" yelled Clegg. "He's making for his plane. If he reaches the ship and gets into the air, he'll cut this whole place to pieces with that machine-gun!"

Matt sprinted to where Gaulding had dropped his rifle in the snow, picked it up and tried to train it on Gaulding's running figure.

"Don't hit the girl!" yelled Clegg.

Matt lowered the rifle's muzzle, caught a flash of Gaulding's legs through the sights, and pulled. The arm was empty!

From behind and above Matt came the crashing report of a rifle. Snow flew from beneath Gaulding's feet.

MATT whirled. There on the deck by the schooner's rail knelt Blue Beaver. His hair and one side of his face was covered with clotted blood. His blazing eyes, half closed in the intensity of concentration, were fixed on the running Gaulding. Slowly he slid the breech-bolt.

Gaulding was a good two hundred yards away by now, running in a zigzag manner, presenting a difficult shot. As Matt's gaze swung back to him, Gaulding threw the girl on his back as he would have a bundle of camp duffe and held her there despite her struggles, using her as a shield against Blue Beaver's bullets.

Matt looked back at the Ojibway. Blue Beaver unhurriedly and with as much precision as if he had been competing in a prize shoot on a range, was adjusting his rifle-sights.

Gaulding was nearing the far shore and the hangar now. Twenty yards more, and he would be around the corner of the building and out of the Indian's sight.

Blue Beaver had laid the rifle across the rail, adjusted the sling-strap to his arm, nestled his blood-stained cheek against the stock. For seemingly hours he followed Gaulding's dodging form with the rifle muzzle. Then Matt, who was watching Gaulding intently now, saw the man's knees suddenly buckle, saw him pitch headlong, saw both him and the girl plunge in a tangled heap into the snow. The crashing report of the Ojibway's rifle was echoed eerily back to him from the buildings on the ridge.

Matt ran toward the huddled forms of Snow Fawn and Gaulding.

Clegg sprang up the gangway and knelt by the side of Captain Graham.

Blue Beaver, his lips forming soundless supplication to his savage gods that his bullet had not carried double death, gripped his rifle with tense anxiety and watched Snow Fawn's figure for some sign of life.

One glance at Gaulding as Matt reached him, and he knew that the man had died instantly. He dropped on his knees by Snow Fawn's side and raised her dark head in his arms. Blood was oozing slowly from beneath the edge of her parka hood, staining her throat with sinister red. Her eyes were open, luminous and staring. She lay limp in Matt's arms.

WITH gentle fingers Matt pushed back the hood of the girl's parka. Her cheek and the side of her throat were a gore of blood. He fumbled for a handkerchief and wiped it away. Then he laughed aloud in his relief.

Blue Beaver's bullet had passed through Snow Fawn's parka hood from the rear, clipped the lobe of her ear, leaving a piece of flesh the size of a kernel of corn dangling by a shred of skin, then had passed on to kill Gaulding. The fall had completely knocked the breath from the girl. Otherwise she was uninjured.

Even now she was stirring in Matt's arms, regaining her breath with painful gasps. Another half minute, and she was on her feet, arms lifted above her head, crying out something in her own tongue, showing her dusky lover back there aboard the schooner that she was yet alive and that the old world still promised much.

Blue Beaver took one long look; then a wild yell of exultation and victory burst from his throat.

BACK aboard the schooner Matt found Captain Graham on his feet. The old man was swearing and spitting blood.

"Damned rough dentistry, I call it!" he grimaced. "Those teeth have been bothering me for some time, but I didn't suppose I'd have 'em knocked out with a rifle-butt!"

Matt crossed the deck to Clegg and held out a hand. "Arthur Clegg," he asked, "will you shake hands with a fool conclusion-jumper?"

"Will I!" Clegg's grip was like steel. "Matt Dennison, I'm proud to have you as a friend—and as a business partner. You've inherited your uncle's interest in that theater at Grand Rapids he and I owned together, you know. Tomorrow you and I will take Gaulding's plane—or rather yours and the Captain's plane—and make for the States. We'll leave Ira here with the Captain till you have attended to the necessary legalities down there; then I will bring you back, if you want to come."

"Thanks! I'll come back. This fox ranch looks good to me. And besides, I want to be here when the Canadian authorities investigate this mix-up, which they'll be bound to do as a matter of form, I suppose."

Blue Beaver, who was fussing over Snow Fawn, trying to stanch the bleeding of her torn ear, turned his head.

"Dat show-house, Matt. You gitum?"

Matt glanced at Clegg and grinned. "It looks that way, Beaver. Part of it."

"Huh!" grunted the Ojibway, dabbing industriously with a handkerchief. "Me likum see the purty lights of dat show-house. Me likum hear dat purty moosic. An'"—with a sidelong, sheepish glance at Snow Fawn, whom he knew was not understanding a word he was saying—"me likum see dat flock of purty white squaws dance."

Clegg roared and slapped his thigh.

"You shall see just that, Blue Beaver!" he promised. "You and Snow Fawn shall go down with Matt and me in the plane. You can have that leg attended to. You may be married—a regular wedding with all the fixings. And to celebrate your wedding properly, you and your bride may take in as many shows as you please—from the best box in the house!"

THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

By **Mary
Irwin**

*The simple story
of an eyewitness
and participant
in a strange
event.*



The Easter Rebellion

EASTER Monday, April 24th, 1916, was a glorious spring day, and although many homes had been made desolate by the Great War, most of the folks in Dublin, Ireland, had made plans to enjoy what is perhaps their favorite holiday. Many, indeed, had already left the city, as banks, offices and most of the business houses had been closed since the Thursday previous, and would not be opened until the following Tuesday. Trains laden with happy excited children and their parents had left early to spend the day at some of their favorite resorts. The holiday spirit was in the air—no one dreamed of trouble.

Then there came a veritable bolt from the blue.

At that time I was in charge of a school in Dublin, where there were fifty little boys, whose ages ranged from ten to twelve years. I was assisted in their management by an excellent assistant matron, a very fine young master, who was not eligible to join up, much to his disappointment,

and a cook who did us good service during that never-to-be-forgotten Easter Week.

On that morning, as we had just finished breakfast, a lady who lived near called, and I could see that she was greatly agitated. She said she had come to warn me not to let the boys out, that a number of Sinn Feiners, with De Valera at their head, had taken possession of Boland's Bakery Mills (about two blocks away), others of them had taken other points of vantage, and that Dublin was in a state of siege. At first I did not realize the seriousness of the situation, but it was very soon brought home to me, when bullets came flying from the direction of Boland's Mills, smashing the windows at the top of the house where the boys' bedrooms were situated.

WHEN we saw there was real danger, we called a council of war. We decided that the boys could not occupy their bedrooms, and that as we did not know how long this state of affairs might last, we should have to be very careful of the food

we had. As we had only got in supplies to last us until Tuesday, when we expected the stores to be open, we had not very much in reserve.

The boys then went up the stairs, crept into their bedrooms on all fours, and carried down their beds and bedding to the mess-room. This room being on the ground floor and at the back of the house, we felt was quite safe. I shall never forget the delight of the little fellows as they carried out our order, for they felt they were in a real story-book adventure. The weather fortunately was very fine, so we all went out to the garden, which was quite safe, for a terrace of six cottages protected us at the back, and the school building at the front.

We sat around on the lawn, and spent the time as we had frequently done, working for our soldiers at the front. We had a roll of honor of our own old boys, with three hundred names, fourteen of whom had made the great sacrifice.

At their own request we had taught our boys to knit, and every spare moment was spent in making scarves and mittens for which there were appeals every day. As we sat there busily employed, we soon found that we were attacked from the rear, for bullets came flying over our heads, smashing the windows in the bedrooms and schoolrooms.

The boys, quite unafraid, were interested in watching the bullets striking the walls and smashing the windows; they would shout out from time to time—"Oh, look, look, there's one into the big schoolroom—there's another, and another into your bedroom!" They never seemed to think of danger.

SO Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday passed, and we were all quite contented with our oatmeal porridge, although it is not very appetizing minus milk or sugar. For dinner we had what the boys called "rebellion stew" made with some potatoes, and anything in the shape of a vegetable that grew in our garden. On Wednesday morning as they were at breakfast, I said: "I'm sorry, lads," but they called out, "It's all right, ma'am, it's all right."

But they did not know what we older folks did, that we were slowly but surely getting to the bottom of our supplies and that I had nothing in the larder but a very small supply of oatmeal that would give us all a little supper, and very little breakfast

next morning. I confess I had a sinking at my heart, as I looked at the brave little fellows and wondered whatever I could do to feed them.

I slept little that night—they slept the sleep of children who never trouble about the future, nor could they see from their bedrooms on the ground floor, what we saw from our rooms on the second floor.

Added to the fear of starvation was the more terrible one of fire. We could see the lurid glare from burning houses that were at no great distance from us, and wonder how soon the fire might reach us.

THE next morning, about seven o'clock, before I was up, a bullet came whizzing into my bedroom, went right over my head and penetrated the wall that separated my room from the cook's bedroom. We measured afterward and found the hole was about six inches from the pillow. Had I been standing up, I should have stopped that bullet.

We spent that morning in the garden as usual—bullets were not so numerous, but the sound of big guns was appalling. I remember one little fellow, a merry-faced youngster of ten, just dancing over to me and exclaiming:

"Oh, ma'am, wont we have an awful lot to tell our grandchildren?"

That afternoon a message was brought me that there was a man in the hall wanted to see me. The man was an old pupil of the school, and when he saw us he fairly broke down, for knowing that we were in a very dangerous position, he had feared the worst. We all gathered around him and listened breathlessly as he told us of the deplorable state of the city, the fires that had been raging, the number of buildings that had been destroyed. He said that things were quieter now, and that there was a gunboat in the river. This accounted for the awful sound of firing in the morning.

As he started to leave, a thought flashed into my mind. No one but the cook and myself knew that we were in such dire straits for food, but I told him. I asked him if he would call on his way home, at a grocery store just a few doors down the street, tell the grocer how I was situated and ask him to send me a sack of meal or flour or anything.

I was not kept long in suspense, for in about five minutes I saw my friend return with a messenger from the store, and—oh

The Easter Rebellion

joy, shall I ever forget it—a big sack of meal on his back!

AS the man put down the meal, he said: “Mr. M. hasn’t another bit in the house.” I took that with a good grain of salt. However, I tipped the man liberally, for I knew he had run a risk in coming to us. As he was going down the hall-door steps, he hesitated, then turned back and said to me:

“Look here, ma’am, Mr. M. has lots, but he has it hid away for fear of the looters.”

I then told him to ask Mr. M. if he could send me anything else for we were surely tired of oatmeal porridge and that I would pay him well when this was all over. Another time of suspense, and this time the man returned with—shall I ever forget it? A whole side of bacon, a large ham, three pounds of real butter, not margarine, three dozen eggs, and six tins of condensed milk. We made no delay in preparing a good dinner, and surely, we all, old and young, enjoyed it.

And then we thought of the poor folks who lived in the cottages at the back, and wondered how they had fared. We ventured to open the back gate, and soon discovered that they had had a very bad time. The Sinn Feiners had at the very beginning turned off the gas, and as those poor people usually cooked with gas, and had no coal, even those who had meal flour and potatoes in their houses, were starving. We shared our good things with them, and better still, as I had plenty of coal, I was able to supply this need, so they were all right. We found that there were two little girls very ill, so we were glad to be able to give them the condensed milk. Both children recovered, and the mother of one was deeply grateful, as she believed we had saved the child’s life.

On the following Sunday, as we were all sitting in the garden, a Red Cross nurse, a friend of ours, came running in and shouting, “They have surrendered, and are coming down the street with De Valera at their head, carrying a white flag!” We all rushed out into the street and saw De Valera and about eighty young fellows coming toward us from the direction of Bolland’s Mills. They looked as if they had spent a terrible week.

We all watched as they laid down their arms, and marched away with a number of soldiers and so ended for us the Easter Rebellion.

Circle 8 and Diamond S

By **Jim Lewis**

A savage battle in a range war is described by a young man who felt the first bullet.

MY home was in Joplin, Missouri, and I had started working in the coal mines around there before I was fifteen. By the time I was eighteen I thought I knew just about all that there was to know, and burned with the desire to see the world. My ambition at that time was to be known as a “tough customer.” The coal miners whom I had been used to associating with were a pretty rough class of men, but the real “toughs” were men who came across the line from Oklahoma—so to Oklahoma I went.

I got a job on a cattle ranch working for a man by the name of Timmons. Not being an experienced cow-hand, I was kept busy about the barns and outbuildings. That did not fit in with my ideas at all, so every chance I got I practiced twirling a rope, riding steers, and not too fractious horses. The old hands had a great deal of sport with me. They used me at the wrong end of practical jokes, and made sport of my ambition to be hard. That hurt my pride, and I secretly swore that I would “show them.” The worst of it was that it did not look as though I would have a chance to show what a real “he man” I was. I found that the principal reason the punchers carried pistols on the range was to help in their work, and that the heavy old six-gun which I carried low on my thigh with a cord about my leg, only helped to make me the butt of more jokes. Of course as we sat about the bunkhouse of an evening there were tales aplenty of gun fights, and what not. I heard of shooting



scrapes old Timmons had been in, and of what a cool dead-shot he was. That I could hardly believe—Timmons with his mild blue eyes, and slow inoffensive draw!

But the whole summer went by and nothing happened. I was about to give up in disgust, when suddenly I came face to face with what I had been looking for.

NOW, Wiggins, who owned a ranch about forty miles distant was known to be a cattle-rustler. He was known to be a cattle-thief just as today some men are known by the police to be holdup men or burglars. But to get proof—that was another matter! I had heard a good deal about Wiggins during the summer. Feeling against him was strong over the whole country, but more especially with Timmons whose brand, a Diamond S, was most easily worked over into Wiggins', which was a Circle 8.

Wiggins was not in the fall round-up in which we were concerned, but worked in with four or five ranchers on the other side of the small range of hills across which he lived. The cattle there had been corraled at Wiggins' place, and the morning after we finished cutting and sorting from the round-up in which we had taken part we rode over to get what of Timmons' stuff had been caught there. The whole outfit went, which seemed rather unnecessary to bring home some thirty or forty "critters." There were, if I remember rightly, eleven of us hands and old Timmons himself.

Starting at sun-up we arrived at Wiggins' place shortly after noon. Young and

inexperienced though I was, I could feel something was going to happen. It seemed to be in the air. Wiggins had cut Timmons' stuff into a small side corral; about thirty head. But Timmons was not satisfied, and we rode among Wiggins' cattle, supposedly looking for Diamond S brands, but actually for worked-over brands. Wiggins kept about fifteen hands, and they all stayed about the corrals watching us, some pretending to help. Wiggins himself sat his horse in motionless unconcern. If there were any expression on his face, at all, it was one of sarcastic indifference. It was the first time I had seen him, and I was greatly pleased, because he looked like what I figured a man with his reputation should look like. His reputation of being a cold-blooded killer had been well earned.

The trouble finally started over a scrawny old cow not worth five dollars. Her brand at any distance was unmistakably Wiggins', but it had a messy, and suspiciously new look. The calf following her wore a clean-cut Circle 8. Timmons proposed to rope the critter and examine the brand at closer range. Wiggins, in a cold level voice, told Timmons to keep his hands off. Timmons replied that he had a right to examine the brand. He spoke in a slow mild drawl, but there was the feeling of pent-up power behind his words that reminded me of a dam about to burst. It made my spine creep.

There was dead silence for a few moments which seemed like hours, and during it there took place a shifting about of us

men. Whether intentionally or not I do not know, but without apparent effort Wiggins' men were lined up on either side of him facing us, and we of the Diamond S had formed into an uneven line facing them.

Some things impress themselves on one's memory. I remember glancing at the faces across from me. They wore a calm, almost indifferent expression. Altogether too calm. I don't know how I looked, but I do know that my heart was pounding in my ears until I was sure every man there could hear it. And the heavy gun at my hip seemed miles away, so far I was sure I could never reach it.

As though in a dream I heard Wiggins and Timmons speak to each other once or twice, but I cannot remember what they said.

And then Wiggins said: "I'll shoot the man who puts a rope on that cow!"

A moment's silence: then I heard, as though from a great distance:

"Lewis, rope that cow."

It is likely that any of the old hands would have obeyed the command, for if there is real loyalty it can be found among the cow-hands to their outfit. Still I think Timmons knew what he was doing when he called on me.

SUBCONSCIOUSLY my determination to "show them" probably influenced my movements. Principally, though, I was too "scared" to think, and any command would have been a relief.

The old cow had moseyed off munching dry grass, all unconscious of her sudden importance. As though in a dream I roused my hypnotized limbs, and found myself trotting after her.

As my rope dropped over her head, there was a deafening report, and at the same time something jarred me and burnt at the back of my hip like a lighted cigarette on bare skin. There was another explosion close on the heels of the first and then bedlam broke loose. Thinking back, it sounded like, when as a small boy, I used to set off a bunch of firecrackers all at once.

When I returned to the group of men, it was all over—I suddenly felt sick and I doubt if it was the wound in my hip which caused it. There were several men stretched motionless on the ground. Others were doubled up with pain. Some were slumped forward in their saddles, and one I noticed sitting bolt upright on his horse

with a fixed stare in his eyes, an empty gun in his right hand, and his left pressed tight against his breast. Several of the horses had been hit; some had bolted, and some were down gushing blood. Here and there could be heard a smothered moan.

One of Wiggins' men, a rough-looking individual with a growth of black whiskers and an empty gun in his right hand, asked me in a kindly voice: "Are you hit bad, lad?"

I touched my hip.

"Can you ride for a doctor?" he asked.

I nodded and rode off, glad to get away.

WHEN I got back after a fifteen-mile ride, the last half of it in the dust of the young doctor as he rode with his coat tails sailing out behind, things were in some kind of order. Distant neighbors had arrived, and with the help of those not too badly hurt had carried the wounded into the shade of a shed, and were doing what they could to stop the bleeding.

That was all I noticed at the time, for as I swung to the ground everything went black, my right foot seemed to slip in the boot half full of blood, my legs doubled up, and I sank to the ground. I had told the doctor that I was not hurt, and in the excitement he had taken my word for it.

Back again at the ranch I learned some of what I had not seen of the affair. When Wiggins had said what he would do he must have figured that no one, unless it were Timmons himself, would call him. Otherwise he certainly made a mistake. For while he was drawing down on me, Timmons had a clean chance at him. Timmons, of course, took it. He shot Wiggins, and killed him. In what followed, only two men out of the twenty-seven were unhurt; eight of Wiggins' outfit were dead or died of their wounds, and five of our men, men I had worked, slept, and eaten with all summer would ride the range no more. Timmons himself was brought home unconscious with ten wounds in his body. No one expected him to live; but he did—though it was a year before he again mounted a horse, and then as an old man.

As for myself, before my wound was healed—in fact, on the third day—I rode north. It did not matter that the raw wound hurt; I rode day and night, I was so glad to get away.

I went back next spring, though, and whatever the change, the boys did not make sport of me any more.

A vivid picture of one crowded hour during the Great War.

By
**Captain
H. C.
Barnes,
Jr.**



The Night Patrol

THE leading of combat patrols in time of war is exciting work. During the World War, for a part of the time while I was at the front, I was in command of the scout platoon of my battalion, and was mixed up with patrol operations of some kind almost every night.

About the middle of July we were sent into the battle line near St. Die. On our first night in I sent out a patrol on the right, and on the next night one on the left. Based on the reports of these patrols, I decided to send out another, and make a vigorous effort to take prisoners. The brigade and division commanders were at that time calling for prisoners in order to secure information concerning the troops opposed to us.

The German lines at that point were about three hundred yards away, so I decided to conduct a daylight reconnaissance between the lines in order to learn the character of the ground. Accordingly I started out one afternoon with three other men. We prowled around for an hour or so looking things over, and had just started back, when we came upon a comparatively clear space about a hundred yards square. I

stopped, and gasped in amazement. It was a German outpost—well concealed, heavily wired, extending from their main line to a point almost under the nose of one of our positions. The cleverness and audacity of establishing and maintaining such a position compelled my admiration.

In the midst of these thoughts I heard a noise in the enemy trench. I watched, and through an opening in the trees I saw three German soldiers pass not thirty feet from us. That decided me. There was the ideal spot for us to try to get into their lines. It was close to our advanced positions, and the trees and undergrowth afforded good concealment.

I looked the ground over carefully. To my left the German trench ran toward our lines. To the right it extended toward their lines, disappearing for a few yards into a depression in the ground, and reappearing a few yards farther on. The whole position was thickly surrounded with barbed wire, and I could see that we were to have considerable difficulty getting into it. If I could find a passage in the wire in the immediate vicinity, so much the better.

After careful observation I decided that there must surely be one in the depression in the ground to the right. That part of the entanglement was not to be seen from where I was, so the passage, if there were one there, was admirably concealed. Anyway, passage or no, I decided to try to get through at that point because of the protection offered by the dip in the ground.

WE returned to our lines and I set about my preparations. I determined upon a patrol of twenty-five, selected the men I wanted, and notified all front-line units of my intentions.

At nine o'clock we started out, and approached the enemy position cautiously. Once there, I turned to direct the placing of my men. Suddenly, and with no word of command, we all dropped to the ground. Right in front of us, coming out of the depression in the ground where I intended to try to get through the barbed wire, and silhouetted beautifully against the moonlit sky, what should I see but a German patrol. I had been concerned about the location of the passage in the wire, and here it was, shown to me as clearly as though a sign-board pointed the way.

I let the enemy patrol go by, and then altered my plans slightly. It would not do to go right on into their lines, because of the possibility of their returning and piling in on top of us. If we were to be successful, we had to get in quietly, grab off our prisoners, and get out as fast as we could. I decided, therefore, to lie in wait for the Germans in hopes that they would return. When they should get within about twenty yards of us, we would rush them, shoot them up, take two or three prisoners—and be gone before they could appreciate what had happened.

I COMPLETED the placing of my men, issued my instructions, and lay down to wait. After an hour I gave it up. The Boches had apparently been patrolling inside their outer line of wire, and had re-entered their line at some other point. We could gain nothing by waiting any longer. Taking five men I started toward the point where they had first appeared. We found it necessary to cut our way through about five feet of the outer entanglement before we struck the passage, but once in it we started crawling cautiously along the ground. It was nearly eleven-thirty then—summer time, with just enough of a moon to enable us to see.

After we had progressed about fifty feet, we were through the wire, and very close to the enemy trench. Suddenly I heard voices from within—German voices. My heart skipped a couple of beats right then. I was only about twenty feet from what, by its appearance, was a listening post. Here at last was our chance. I looked back and saw, to my surprise, the

man next behind me, over thirty feet away. He apparently had failed at one time to see me when I moved ahead, and did not then wish to risk disclosing our presence by trying to catch up. I knew that my men could wait until I called for them, so I decided to enter the German trench alone.

I slid along the ground until I had passed the listening post, and was approaching the communicating trench in rear. In front of me the side of the trench had been blown in, leaving a gaping hole. I dropped into it, and was just about to step into the trench, when I heard some one coming. I crouched back into the shadows, and waited. Three Germans went by, not four feet away—without seeing me. Talk about excitement—and my job only begun!

After they had passed from hearing, I stepped into the trench, and started toward the listening post. Just before I reached it, I heard some one coming behind me. I certainly was in a fine fix then. With two or three men in the listening post, and one or two behind me, believe me it was no place for a nervous man! There was, as I saw it, but one thing to do—to go on into the listening post, and then call to my men.

I stepped out of the trench into the open bay which formed the listening post, and found myself confronted with two Germans. They were looking over the parapet, totally unaware of my presence. Another ticklish position—and one which required delicate and prompt action. I did not want to fire on the two in front of me. I wanted them as prisoners, alive. But, how was I to make them turn around? I knew no German, and I rather felt that they would know neither English nor French. I had to work fast, for there was that other man behind me, coming closer all the time. I obeyed that impulse. I called out softly, in good old American, "Hey!" Could anything have been more ridiculous? Yet it was effective. They turned around, looked at me, and apparently got the surprise of their lives. I handed them a real hot one then. I wanted them to put up their hands, so I said, "*Kamerad?*"

THE one nearest to me put up his hands. The other became excited, and started to run. He had taken only a couple of steps, when I fired. A forty-five-caliber pistol hits pretty hard, and that poor fellow went down as if he had been struck by lightning. The other then took it into his

head to get away, but I caught hold of him, and called to my men.

Right then and there things began to happen. My shot had stirred the enemy up, and they were shouting and yelling all over the place, trying to find out what had happened. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion, and I felt a blow on the right side. My leg gave away under me, and I fell to the ground, losing hold of my prisoner. The German who had come up behind me, seeing what was going on, had thrown a grenade into the listening post. I had felt reasonably sure that he would not do that because of the danger of hitting one of his own men, but I had guessed wrong. I can't imagine why he used a grenade, but suffice to say, he did. Moreover, it was a friendly one too—for the German I was holding. Not a scratch did he get, but a good-sized chunk had hit me in the right hip, knocking me down.

Just as I went down, the first of my men jumped into the trench, and with his rifle at his hip fired at the German who had broken away from me. He fell by the side of the first one. The next of my men gave his attention to the man who had thrown the grenade, finishing him with one shot.

ALL this time I had been trying, without much success, to get on my feet. One of the men finally helped me up onto the fire step of the trench, where I sat watching proceedings. By that time all five of my men were in the listening post with me, and were fully engaged with the enemy. I told them to shoot at anything that looked as if it might be an enemy, and they set about their work as gleefully as a bunch of small boys throwing rocks at a bottle. Can anyone wonder why soldiering is such fine business? To see men act as mine did then is worth, a thousand times over, all

of the grief and trouble you have to go through at other times. It brings to my mind a passage in Scott's "Answer:"

"One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."

After about twenty minutes the German fire, which had developed from all near-by points in their lines—rifles, pistols, machine-guns, grenades, flares—began to die down, and I decided that it was time for us to get out. They were probably organizing to attack us in force—to give us the bum's rush, as it were. Inasmuch as I had failed to accomplish my mission, to get prisoners, my next job was to get my men out. Up until then I was the only one who had been hit.

I had myself pushed up onto the parapet, and I ordered the men out. We started back, and in about fifteen minutes reached the main part of the patrol, fortunately with no further casualties. A short while later we were back in our own lines, having been out altogether about three hours.

A Medical Corps man put a first-aid dressing on me, and I was packed off on a stretcher to the field hospital; but before leaving, I made out my report. In it, among other things, I stated that I estimated the Germans were holding the position we had been in with about twenty men.

Imagine my consternation, when I learned a few days later that a deserter from the German regiment in front of us, upon being questioned by our intelligence officers, had said that there were from fifty to sixty in there.

And I had gone in with five men—and we had all come out!

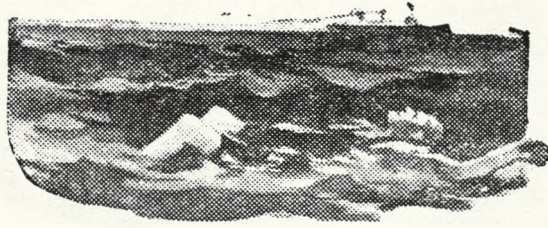
And I had thought the excitement was all over!

Whew!

Boy, howdy!

TARZAN IS COMING!

Next month begins Edgar Rice Burroughs' fascinating story of the most thrilling adventures even Tarzan ever lived through. Don't miss this unique and inimitable joy—in the next, the October, issue of The Blue Book Magazine, on sale at all news-stands September 1st.



The Flaming Ship

By C. L. LA RUE

Wherein a tanker catches fire and the radio operator sticks to his post till he has to leap through the flames into the sea.

ONE sultry day in July we were lounging about the lower bridge deck, doing our best to keep cool, under the sweltering heat of the tropical sun. The ship, the *Mary Alden*, of New York, was an old oil-tanker, carrying a cargo of refined oil products from Galveston, Texas, to the Orient.

The Panama Canal was two days astern of us, so we were right in the hottest kind of weather. The sun was almost directly overhead, and the water was dead calm. We all thought of Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner." It was not at all hard to believe that rather fantastic story, out there in the blinding sunlight reflecting from the dead grayish water.

Except for a few words spoken now and then, a deathlike stillness prevailed. The only sound was the wash of water under our bow, or an occasional clang of a steel door down below. We were loafing along, in every sense of the word.

By we, I mean the captain, the first mate, the chief engineer and myself, the wireless operator. We were out on the deck for the simple reason that our rooms were like ovens, despite the electric fans. They could not blow cool air, as there was no cool air to be blown. On the deck, shaded by the bridge above us, we got the benefit of what little breeze was stirred by the progress of the ship. There was not a cat's-paw playing elsewhere.

As my watches consisted of the first fif-

teen minutes of every hour, I had forty-five minutes in which to loaf with the rest on the deck. The mate was stretched out in my hammock, the skipper and the chief were in deck chairs, while I was leaning over the rail watching a school of porpoises sporting around the bow. I was debating whether or not I would have ambition enough to try and harpoon one of the beautiful fishes, and decided that I would spare their lives.

Supper was at six, and at six-thirty P. M., while sitting with my head-phones on, listening to the desultory traffic going over the air from various ships and shore stations near and far, I heard my own call-letters. Tuning the ship sending them in until they were quite loud, I listened:

"KDUB KDUB KDUB DE KFTN KFTN KFTN". . . . It was my kid brother Tommy up ahead of us, on the *John Alden*, an oil tanker of the same line as our ship. Tommy was on his first trip out as an operator, and as all junior operators are, he was enthusiastic as possible. Nothing pleased him so much as to have me call him, if only to pass the time of day. Many is the time we violated the international laws against superfluous signals over the air by calling each other just to chew the rag. We had an arrangement whereby each would lower the power and the wave-length of his set until we were down out of reach of other stations unless they tuned for us. Then we passed many

an hour talking back and forth. It was the only way we had to pass the time, and it gave Tommy the practice he needed.

THUS the day passed, finally, and I turned in at my usual time, ten o'clock, after ascertaining that there was nothing in the line of radiograms at any of the shore-stations in the range of my apparatus. It was good to roll into my soft bunk and sleep, and forget the heat and the monotony which was wearing on my nerves.

It seemed that I had hardly closed my eyes when I was awake and standing in the middle of my little room. There was a horrible feeling of panic gripping me. I could not make it out. My ears rang terrifically, and the whole room was lit up with an unearthly red light. There was a roaring, hissing sound outside, and I ran to the door and yanked it open. A blast of withering heat struck me with the force of a sledge-hammer!

Then full understanding of our predicament struck me, and left my body chilled and cold. I was gripped by sheer stark terror!

In the Pacific ocean, five or six hundred miles from land, afire, and a cargo of gasoline, benzine and refined oils! The whole after end of the vessel was one solid mass of flames! In the forward holds was stored gasoline. Thousands of gallons! Could we get away before it exploded?

With a start I realized that the seconds were flying by, and they might mean life or death for the whole ship's crew! I reached for the speaking tube to the bridge and blew into it. There was no response. A second blow brought no results, and I knew that something was wrong on the bridge, so made a flying dash out the door and around the corner to escape the heat. In a few seconds I burst in through the door of the wheelhouse, to find the second mate, who was on watch, just arising from the floor and trying to realize what had happened. The captain tore in through the door at my heels, and he was followed by the first mate.

"The whole damned after end exploded," the mate was sobbing. "We're done for! Let's get away before the gasoline in the forehold goes too!

"Sparks, here's our position. For God's sake, see what you can do. Make it fast, because we're leaving right away—this whole vessel will be a furnace in another three or four minutes!" With this the cap-

tain handed me a scrap of paper, on which he had scribbled the latitude and longitude in which we were.

How I got back to the radio-shack I do not know. I wore nothing but my pajamas, and they were all but burned off me. My feet were burned on the steel deck, which had grown as hot as a frying pan on top of a stove. But I made it.

There was a terrible dread in my heart as I threw the starting switch of my set.

Had the engine-room dynamo perchance gone dead? But no! There was a click, and then a hum, increasing to a shrill whine as the motor-generator increased its speed. Throwing on full power, and not bothering to listen in to see if there was any other operator sending on the air, I pressed down my key, while I adjusted the set to throw out the broadest wave she would throw, on the highest power I could get from her.

AS I pressed down the key, there was a crackling roar; then I settled down to business, sending as I had never sent before. Summoning every atom of skill I had to make the letters perfectly clear and distinct, in spite of my shaking hand, I sent our position hurtling out into the night air, following it by our ship's call-letters, with her name, and finishing off by giving the trouble, explosion and fire.

The fire was roaring outside my door so loud that I could hardly hear my own set. It made the signals sound very diminutive and weak to me. My thoughts were racing: "If only she lasts until I get this off! If only she lasts!"

The whistle was shrieking "Abandon ship," and it flashed on my mind that the boats were going. Desperately, I stopped sending, and clapping the phones over my ears, I strained every nerve to hear whether or not some one had picked up my call and was answering.

An involuntary sob escaped me as I heard a rapid-fire snappy operator calling me over and over again. It was a navy ship, but he was well down toward the canal. It would take him too long to reach us.

But just then the land station at San Pedro took up the call, and I heard him send it hurtling through the air. All along the coast ships and stations came to life, and the frantic call for help was sent echoing and re-echoing up and down the Pacific coast and through near-by waters!

A last a ship called me, saying it was the passenger liner *John C. Rawlins*—only seventy miles away, coming at full speed.

No sooner had I caught this, and realized that it meant we would be picked up soon, than there was a terrific crash outside. My heart dropped a few notches lower, if possible, for I thought it was the dreaded gasoline in the forehold that had let go. Instead it was the after-mast, which had fallen across the bridge, and carried away a corner of my radio room.

My set was out of commission—and the boats had gone and left me! I could do no more aboard the ship, so there was only one thing left for me to do. I jerked the door of the radio-room open and the heat from the after part of the vessel drove me back inside. No escape that way! I rushed into my stateroom adjoining the radio-shack, and yanked that door open. The heat was almost as bad here, but I made it. The deck was red-hot underfoot, and I was barefooted, so I abandoned caution and took a running dive clear over the rail.

Too late I saw that I was diving into a floating mass of burning oil. The heat from it seared my face and head, but it was over in a second, and I was into the water underneath it, going down, and down and down. One thought stayed uppermost in my mind: I must swim under water until I cleared that mess, or I would never come through! I swam until my head seemed at the bursting-point. My lungs were filled with white-hot irons, and I could hold out no longer, I came up—and, thank God, the air that rushed into my lungs was clean and pure!

Now I had but to reach one of the boats, and I would be safe.

BUT there was no boat to be seen. They had pulled away from the ship, fearing that expected explosion of the forehold. Tears came to my eyes, and fear again took possession of me. Abandoned, and swimming, four hundred miles from shore—in shark-infested water! I yelled at the top of my voice, trying to make them hear me over the roar of the fire astern.

Realizing this was futile, I drew myself as far out of the water as possible and waved my arms over my head, hoping that in the glare of the fire some one in the boats would see me and pull in to pick me up. Then I swam—swam as I had never swum before. It would be so easy to put my

head under the water and take a deep breath, but life was sweet! I thought of Ann, the little girl ashore—thought of Tommy ahead of us! I couldn't go out while there was a chance of seeing them again!

Then, in my ringing ears, there was something, saying over and over again the old cheer that used to pulse through the air when in high-school, I played football. It was: "The old fight, the old fight, the old fight!" over and over again. It kept time for my rapidly weakening strokes. My arms were like lead, and I turned on my back to float awhile and rest them. As I turned, I saw between the glare of the fire and my eyes a sinister black triangle moving across the water at a fast clip. Horror once more took hold of me.

Sharks! Something bumped me from behind, and my nerves were so far gone that I shrieked, and turned on my face again, prepared to fight to the finish. A shark could kill me, but he would never do it without a scrap! There, in front of me, was a lifeboat. The men had seen me, and had come! My relief was so great that I had not the strength to pull myself out of the water. The men in the boat hauled me aboard, and an ugly click of jaws and a swirl in the water as I left it showed that the shark did not fancy being cheated of his dinner. Then I fainted.

WHEN I awoke and opened my eyes, I looked up at the clean whiteness of a ship's room. I was in a soft clean bed, no bunk—a real bed, with white counterpanes same as my room aboard the *Mary Alden*. I thought it had all been a terrible dream, and when I turned my head, I knew it was a dream, for there standing beside my bed, holding my wrist, was a beautiful golden-haired girl. She looked at me with a pair of wonderful blue eyes and my heart turned somersaults. When she smiled, I was perfectly satisfied to be dead, if this was heaven! It sure seemed like it to me!

She was dressed in the uniform of a nurse, which led me to believe that I was in a hospital. I could feel the vibration of a ship under me, so I decided we had been picked up by the *Rawlins*, and this was her sick-bay, with nurse and everything. Seagoing certainly is not what it used to be!

"Is this the *Rawlins*, and are you a nurse?" I managed to ask, although my face was pretty well swathed with ban-

dages, which I had not noticed before. My head ached, and my mouth felt dry as the Sahara Desert.

"Yes, this is the *Rawlins*, and I am the nurse on watch just now; your boats were picked up, and practically everyone was saved," the vision replied. "Now try to sleep, and don't talk."

HOW could I refrain from talking? There never was anyone, sailor or landsman, who would not be perfectly delighted to be burned if she could nurse him, I told her, but she only laughed and said she would have to leave if I talked any more. Wise girl, she knew that I would give an arm rather than have her leave just then.

As I lay in my bunk, I could see the sun shining through a deadlight over my head. Could hear the swift rush of the water as it went by outside the hull, and realized that it was indeed good to be alive! The little nurse moved softly about the room. I turned my head to follow her movements, and saw a bed like mine across the room, on the pillow of which lay a tousled head which I recognized as the chief's. He looked my way, and with a grin on his face asked how I was.

"Fine, Chief, and how's yourself? What happened, anyway?"

"Here, here! You boys will have to stop this talking or I'll have one of you taken out!"—from our nurse.

Naturally we piped down for the time being. I felt drowsy, and fell asleep. When I woke up again, the sun was still shining, and the nurse was once more taking my pulse. Once more she smiled at me, and once more I was in heaven. But this time I felt much refreshed, and looking across for the Chief again, saw that his bunk was empty.

"Where is the Chief gone, Nurse?"

"He went out yesterday afternoon. You've been asleep ever since yesterday morning."

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

"Since Monday morning; today is Friday," was the answer that stunned me.

SHE refused to answer any more questions, and I slept until late in the afternoon. Then I was awakened by a man in uniform, the ship's doctor. He was a very cheery sort of a man, and his visit made me feel much better. When he was gone, I felt as though I would like to take a walk, but the nurse would not hear of it.

The days passed swiftly, and the skipper and mate of the *Alden* came in several times to see me. They all seemed to think I had done something fine in sticking to the set, and only laughed when I told them I was too scared to do anything else.

Three days before we reached New York again, I was allowed to stand up. The nurse made me stay in a wheel chair, but allowed me the run of the little hospital-room.

The next day I took a short walk on the deck, and the whole crew of the *Alden* came to me on the deck of the *Rawlins* and shook hands. It was good to be greeted by the old crew, and I was sure glad to see them all. They all insisted on believing that I had done something fine, and stubbornly refused to listen to my side of the story.

But when I went back, the little blonde nurse came and stood beside me, and said: "Well, how does it feel to be a hero?"

AT first I didn't understand, and then it came to me that she had swallowed the same thing the men of the *Alden* had. I was explaining it, telling her that I could not do anything else, when suddenly she stooped over and kissed me. After that I would like to be a hero always if there were such a reward! I had always thought "this hero stuff is the bunk"—but now! Never again would I say so!

The next day we landed in New York, I could walk, so I went ashore and applied at the radio-office for another ship. There was no other thing I could do. The steamship company paid us off, and I collected a small amount of insurance on my lost outfit, enough to get me a new one.

Six weeks after the explosion I was sitting on the rail of my new ship the *John Harrison*, an oil tanker. We were two days out from the Panama Canal, plowing our way through glassy seas, through heat that seemed to blister the very hide off you. We were outward bound—China bound—heading for the Orient, cherry blossoms, pig-tails, dirty streets, mystery, dirt, squalor—but we were on our way, outward bound, and thrilling to every turn of the propeller! It is good to live, to be at sea, after a few months ashore!

I did not curse the heat now. I thought of the heat in this very spot a short time ago, and was thankful I could feel the heat at all now, instead of lying on the nearest land—four miles straight down!

A blithe adventure which will recall to you the immortal Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

The Aviating PIG



By **L. S. Steward**

AS a youngster I lived in a small town where there was a large Chinese population. They had a quarter of their own, their own cemetery, and carried on ancient customs as practiced in their native land.

On Chinese New Years' thousands of dollars were spent upon elaborate daytime fireworks. Enormous pieces were adroitly fused in such a way, that as they burnt, figures would be released that danced and jiggled to the sputtering of the fuses. A parade, with a dragon three hundred feet long undulated up the main street of the village, Chinese under it furnishing the legs, while two or three richly dressed Chinese in front danced around its head seeking to block its progress.

We kids looked forward to Chinese New Years' with as much delight as we did the Fourth of July, and usually spent the next two or three days in bed with the colic, brought on by gormandizing ginger, coconut, litchi nuts, and so forth, topped off with a bowl of noodle soup swimming in duck grease.

But the Chinese funerals, how we loved to follow along beside the band! Just as many squawks, squeals and the rattle of pans as heard in a jazz band of today.

First would come a Chinaman throwing papers around the street with little holes punched in them that report said the Devil had to jump through before he could reach the deceased. Well, that devil sure had a job on his hands, because we kids soon found that these slips were made of rice paper and made excellent wrappers for the mountain balm, tea and tuley we used to smoke behind the wood-shed. After this satanic handicapper, came the band, then the mourners, the hearse, and behind the hearse a wagon loaded down with food. Now, around this food hinges the fool thing I am trying to get at. I laugh even now as I think of it.

THERE would be a whole roast pig, including the head, a bucket full of boiled rice, and all sorts of Chinese dishes to keep the dead man from starving to death on his journey from here to the hereafter. This food would be placed on an altar in front of a Chinese joss, and a million and one incense punks lit, after which the burial ceremony would take place, the deceased interred, and peace would settle over the scene.

But it was noticed that after a Chinese funeral the free lunches in the saloons went

a-begging, there was a dearth of backdoor requests for a "hand-out" and much celebrating in the "jungles" along the river. The Chinese made a great ado about it, but none of them attempted to guard the food overnight. Perhaps something having to do with their beliefs other than fear.

NOW, I had a chum who was full of original ideas. We had followed the funeral of a well-to-do Chinaman out to the cemetery and were returning to town seated upon the tail end of the wagon which had hauled the enormous amount of food out to the little joss-house. As we jogged along, my chum looked glum.

"Those bums will sure have a feed to-night," he complained.

We kids liked the Chinamen, just as all Chinese like boy children. We would tease them and do most anything in order to get a "chase," but we liked them and sort of took this thing to heart.

Finally my chum slapped himself upon the knee and as though inspired exclaimed.

"Let's you and me dress up as ghosts and scare the daylights out of those bums."

I looked dubious.

"You mean stay out in that cemetery after dark?" I questioned, looking at him in wonder.

"Sure, why not? It'll be dark by eight o'clock, and they'll come soon after."

As I did not reply, but sat pondering this extraordinary suggestion in my mind, he added.

"I'll bet Ming Lee Do will keep us in noodles for a month if we perfect this dead Chink's food for him."

This was an inducement; still, I hesitated, well knowing what was going to come next and fearing it. I was not disappointed.

"Are you afraid?" he turned, and looked at me in that terrible way only one twelve-year-old can look at another, when he puts him on the defensive.

We had taken the "blood oath," as the stain on our knife blades testified. There was but one thing for me to do; I did it.

AFTER supper we raided our mothers' wash-baskets and just before dark two twelve-year-olds could have been seen taking a roundabout way into the Chinese cemetery, white bundles under their arms and an expression on their faces from which a good deal of the original enthusiasm had departed. We did not look at

one another for fear of exposing what lay in our thoughts, but with my chum leading, we crawled around graves and headstones and soon came to the little temple in which the altar and food rested.

This temple was small, not more than ten feet square, made of red brick. There was but one entrance, doorless, but around the sides were many small openings through which the incense-laden smoke poured.

My chum darted around the temple and disappeared inside. It was now almost dark. There were many things in my mind I would have preferred doing, but as company was highly desirable, I quickly followed him.

The altar upon which the joss stood occupied the exact center of the floor-space. Upon the altar and directly in front of the joss was an enormous roast pig—his eyes and mouth half open, paper do-dads fastened to his ears and tail, grease oozing out all over him, while hundreds of punks formed a halo of blue smoke above him. Behind the pig the joss squatted grotesque in the pale glow of whale-oil lamps beside it. Punks were glowing in the dim smoke-filtered light all over the place. On the floor around the altar were dozens of bowls filled with oily Chinese food. In each of the four corners was a minor joss of some kind holding in its folded hands a punk stick two inches thick, blue pungent smoke curling up from the glowing end.

THE whole eerie scene is as vivid in my mind as though thirty years came down to yesterday.

I can see my chum, white-faced, picking his way over the bowls of food and peering into the darkness behind the altar. He beckoned to me, and we squeezed into the narrow space between the altar and rear wall.

We had arrived safely, and should have been content, but our faces dimly seen as we turned and looked at one another, spoke volumes of home and Mother. The place was close and hot, the air hard to breathe and filled with a combination of smells only found in a Chinese joss-house after a celebration.

My chum licked his lips, started to speak, jumped at the sound of his own voice, drew a dirty hand over his forehead and whispered:

"Guess—guess we had better get ready." He took the folded sheet from under his arm.

"Say," I whispered, "you don't think there are real ghosts, do you?"

"Naw, course not," he weakly affirmed. "Do you?" He seemed anxious.

"Naw, course not," replied his familiar, negating the affirmative.

With the sheets folded partly about us, we squatted in that hot and narrow space until the failing light told us that the sun had set. The only sound was a chorus of frogs that intermittently croaked from a pond in the rear of the cemetery. The waiting became torture both physical and mental as our thoughts began to dwell upon our surroundings. Each would start with fear as the other shifted his position. We became two very frightened and miserable boys as the minutes passed and nothing happened. Finally I thought I heard a sound, and standing up peered around the corner of the altar. I could dimly see the outlines of the roast pig. I gasped and reaching down, grabbed my chum by the shoulder.

"It moved," I stammered in an awed whisper.

"Moved?" he croaked, scrambling to his feet. "What moved?"

"The pig," I hoarsely whispered. "I saw it move."

HE glanced at me, eyes as big as saucers, then summoning up his courage, he glanced around his end of the altar. He quickly jerked his head back. Before he could speak, we froze into statues of fear. A terrible gurgling sound came to our ears. We reached for one another and hung on, our teeth chattering. Then an awful choking cough caused us to grow limp, and my knees were ready to sink under me. My chum suddenly stiffened and glanced up, his mouth open, his eyes sticking out of

their sockets. I followed his glance and also stood horror-stricken. That decorated roast pig, pompons on ears and tail, was serenely bobbing through the air toward the open door!

Just then something moist and ice-cold was thrust into the palm of my free hand. An unearthly scream ripped apart the solemn silence of the cemetery. The scream was mine, though I did not know it. Then pandemonium broke loose. Two white-robed figures tore from behind the altar. There was a yelp of brute pain as this one fell headlong over a hairy figure and crashed down upon the bowls of food. The roast pig landed upon his back; somebody stepped on his neck and sent his face into a bowl of greasy soup. A dog yelped, and a fervent voice said from somewhere in the outer darkness:

"Oh, Gawd—I'se sorry!" Then came a swift patter of feet.

I regained my own and jumped for the door. The moon was just coming up. I saw a figure clear the four-foot fence by two feet, a yelping dog at his heels. Another figure about my size was hurdling graves and gravestones in the general direction of town and home, a torn sheet trailing out behind him. With an assortment of Chinese food in my hair, my ears, my eyes, down my neck and sticking to my clothing, I tore after the sheeted figure of my leader. I never caught up with him, although I ran the mile to town in less than nothing flat. . . .

Chinatown was a-buzz the next day. Somebody had speared the sacred pig with a pitchfork and wrecked the little joss-house, while a negro character of the town had left for parts unknown, his mongrel dog at his heels. It is the consensus that he is still running.

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