September

15 cents

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE

SHOCK TROOPS OF JUSTICE

A great series about the G Men on the Job

William Makin, H. Bedford-Jones, Leland Jamieson,
William MacLeod Raine, Robert Mill

SEPTEMBER 1935 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE 15 cents VOL. 61 No. 5

Shock Troops of Justice

An extraordinary series about the G Men on the job, by the gifted author of the Tiny David stories.

By ROBERT R. MILL

ROBERT R. MILL was born in Petersburg, Va., son of an Episcopal clergyman, and direct descendant of John Stuart Mill. Educated at the Gilman Country School, Baltimore, and at Franklin & Marshall, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Started as cub reporter on the Philadelphia Press. Next stop, the New York American. Then the Los Angeles Examiner. East again to the Baltimore Evening Sun, the Syracuse Herald, the New York Evening Post, followed by removal to the Adirondacks, and the life of a fiction-writer.

"Covered" the Ruth Snyder-Judd Gray trial, Miami hurricane, Lindbergh's flight to Paris, and the kidnaping of his son; both Auburn Prison riots, and more than one hundred more or less famous murder-trials.

Result: Friendships that include, among others: J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, and Major John Warner, Superintendent of New York State Police. Also, hundreds of other law-enforcement officials less known but equally esteemed.

And on the other side of the fence, such luminaries as Jack "Legs" Diamond, Vannie Higgins, Little Augie Pisano, Arthur (Dutch Schultz) Flegenheimer, and Steve (toughest of them all) Pawlak—many of whom should be listed with an asterisk and the notation: "Deceased; Cause, lead poisoning."

Served as quartermaster on Chesapeake Bay steamer. Qualified as airplane pilot with the old Gates' Flying Circus. Has done the actual work of prison guard, policeman, State trooper and Department of Justice Agent—all for realism.

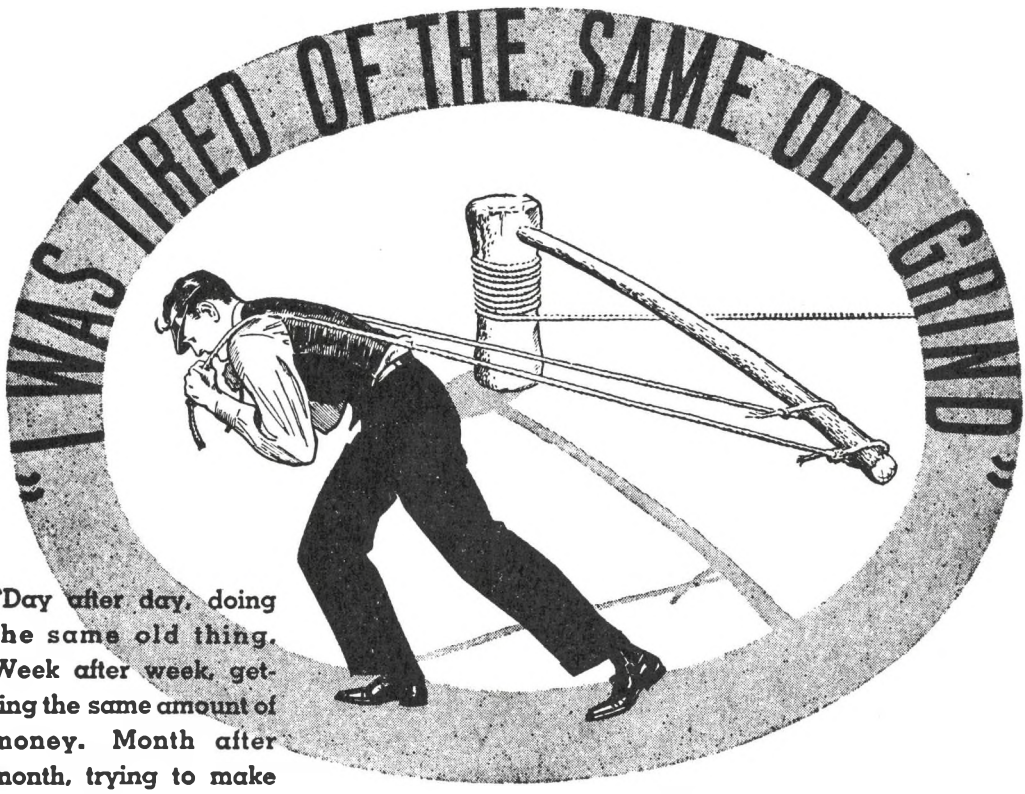
Believe the "G Man" is the super-policeman, and hope to help the people of the United States see him as he really is, and give him the laurels he already has won.

THERE is a new star in the firmament of law-enforcement. You are asked to meet him here in the pages of BLUE BOOK. We are presenting Special Agent James Ashby, of the Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice.

With this introduction goes the sincere wish that you will like and admire him as much as I do. He, his comrades and the man who commands them, represent my *beau ideal* of a law-enforcement officer. And I happen to subscribe to the belief that an honest, fearless, capable and intelligent policeman ranks close to the top on any list of the world's most valuable citizens.

I first met Special Agent Ashby in the offices of J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Bureau of Investigation. Mr. Hoover, incidentally, has made of this organization something in which every American should take pride. Special Agent Ashby is typical of the men commanded by Mr. Hoover. For that reason he ceases to be a mere character of fiction, and becomes a symbol of one of the most important eras in the history of law enforcement.

Prohibition spawned a monster of crime. Repeal deprived that monster of its sustenance, and turned it loose to prey upon all of us. Every man, every woman and every child in America paid tribute to it. And as it fed upon us, its appetite became ever more voracious. The police of the cities were powerless to combat the monster. Some were honest but incompetent. Others were efficient but dishonest. Still others, both honest and efficient, were made impotent by grafting politicians. But whatever the cause may have been, it is an unchallenged fact that for long months and years the underworld held a decided advantage in the constant war between police and evildoers. *(Please turn to page 4)*



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"Then I decided the only thing to do was to fit myself for a better job. That's exactly what I did. I enrolled for an I. C. S. Course, and before I was even through it, I had a better job!"

(Signed) W. A. H——, Philadelphia, Pa.

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BLUE BOOK

SEPTEMBER, 1935 MAGAZINE VOL. 61, NO. 5

Memorable Short Stories

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Cover Design Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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THERE is material for a novel in every person's life. It has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of the five best of these received each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, $50 or more.

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

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

Next Month—

TARZAN

—Comes back to you!

Shock Troops of Justice

(Continued from inside cover)

That was the stage upon which the "G Man" walked. Admittedly it was a situation rich in opportunities. Equally obvious is the fact that here was a test designed to try the strength of any law-enforcement agency.

The result is history, chapters of which were written in the smoke that curled from blazing guns. The saga opened amid derisive chuckles from old-time, pavement-pounding policemen, who hated these new things that spelled the doom of their kind.

"Hoover's schoolboys!" they scoffed.

GANGLAND hated the "schoolboys" too. But it feared them. It rubbed its eyes with amazement when it learned that with these men there was no such a thing as "a fix." Then—given grudgingly and slowly—came respect.

Today complete victory, if not an established fact, is well within the range of vision. Sporadic outbreaks have replaced what a few months before was an ever-surging wave of crime, the like of which the world never before witnessed. That fact entitles the special agent to walk in the paths of the frontiersman, the explorer, the soldier and other epic characters of history.

The very nature of his work, however, has made of the special agent a romantic figure of mystery. He walks alone, shuns publicity and remains a man apart. Mr. Hoover was asked for data to furnish the basis for fiction stories that would serve to show the real and the human side of the special agent and his work. His response was prompt and cordial:

"Come down and see for yourself just what we are doing."

That invitation was accepted. I had the run of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice. Mr. Hoover mapped out a plan whereby it was possible for me to obtain a general idea of every phase of the activities of the organization.

But that was only the beginning.

The course was retraced. At each step the writer was permitted to do actual work, under the guidance of experts, which made him familiar with that particular branch of the Bureau's activities.

This was punctuated by frequent conferences with Clyde Tolson, Assistant Director of the Bureau. There various situations were outlined. Those within the realm of possibility were developed. Those that were not were discarded. There were surprisingly few of the latter. Here, as brief, laconic reports from agents in the field indicated, truth really is even stranger than fiction.

Then back to what is the greatest crime-laboratory in the world: Browsing about in the great fingerprint collection, numbering more than two million; making a search under the direction of Mr. L. C. Schilder, the man who knows more than any other about finger-

prints, and who has refused rich offers from the outside world because he is held here by love of the game. The thrill that came when a search, with considerable assistance from Mr. Schilder, revealed that a man held in a distant city for a minor crime was one of the nation's leading criminals.

Standing beside chemists to see the miracles they have developed in making latent prints visible. Sitting spellbound for hours before an almost human machine that separates from a huge class all possible prints that might match those of a certain suspect—doing the work of dozens of men, and serving as an effectual barrier against the collection's ever getting so large as to be unmanageable.

Pausing with other scientists who have developed various brands of bad medicine for the gentry of gangland. Some of their discoveries are deep, dark secrets; and if gangland knew them, it would tremble. They never rest, these men of science. One goal gained, they move on, keeping constantly ahead of the criminal.

Chats with agents who have figured in cases that are household words. Practical demonstrations of their work in rooms fitted up to represent scenes of crimes! Dummy corpses, red paint for blood, false clues to trap the unwary, be he a new agent on probation, or an ace returning for his periodical sessions of instruction in order that he may keep abreast of the men of science who labor unremittingly for him.

Visits to the ranges where agents are being turned into super-marksmen. Watching flaming tracer-bullets from machine-guns tear their way through the heart of a lifelike dummy.

Then back to a desk went the writer, to draw up test problems,—based upon the assumption that he was an agent in the field,—and taking them to the various departments of the laboratory for a practical demonstration of the manner in which the records, the collected data and the magic of the men of science would aid him.

Through it all one impression was paramount: These men are as far removed from the cop of tradition as the North Pole is from the South. They are trained technicians doing various jobs of work, and doing them remarkably well. The fact that their work means the solution of a crime is always secondary to their pride in their craft, a pride that always makes them give their best. They are here, almost to a man, because their hearts and souls are wrapped up in their work. The way their faces light up when they speak of it proves that.

WITH this as a background, I sat at a desk with Mr. Hoover, hoping to obtain the finishing touches for the picture. He was under terrific strain. Out on the Pacific Coast, madmen, undaunted by the fate of others of their kind, had kidnaped a boy. The hunt was being directed by this man, who scorns sleep or rest as he throws himself whole-heartedly into every difficult case.

We spoke of the stories that were to be written.

"That's it," he agreed. "Take the crêpe whiskers off us."

The Department of Justice has no use for the bunk with which some fiction, the stage and the screen have invested detective work.

"We aren't gunmen and killers," Mr. Hoover continued. "We can shoot straight and fast, but we only shoot first when it is necessary in order to save our own lives."

He paused to receive a telephone report from an agent working in the West. He turned from the telephone to explain an order he had given.

"On a kidnaping case our first job is to bring about the safe return of the victim. The capture of the criminals is always secondary to that."

I looked at the man who heads the greatest law-enforcement agency in the world. His eyes were glowing with sympathy. While heartbroken parents watched over an empty bed, this super-policeman would bide his time, governed by the natural dictates of the heart of a man. Only when the occupant of the bed returned, would he become a policeman, a relentless hunter of men.

When that change comes about, he will go at his task dispassionately, fearlessly and expertly. The kidnapers will represent "X" in an equation that must be solved.

NOW the picture of Special Agent James Ashby was almost complete. It needed only a touch of the crusader, which all these men have. That is what drives them into the service. It is what holds them there. It was the power that motivated the men whose names now appear on a tablet which bears the inscription, *"Killed in Line of Duty."*

Looking at the man before the desk, it was very easy to supply that touch. Then Special Agent Ashby came to life. He was as real as the man at the desk. The G Men all helped to give him to me. I shall try to pass him along to you.

I hope he never dons crêpe whiskers. I hope he will cause Mr. Tolson to feel that his patient explanations were not wasted. When Ashby makes use of the crime laboratory, I hope Mr. Schilder will feel proud of his pupil. I hope Ashby will be ever faithful to the traditions established by the men whose names appear on the tablet. I hope his fellow G Men will see in him the admiration and affection I have for them.

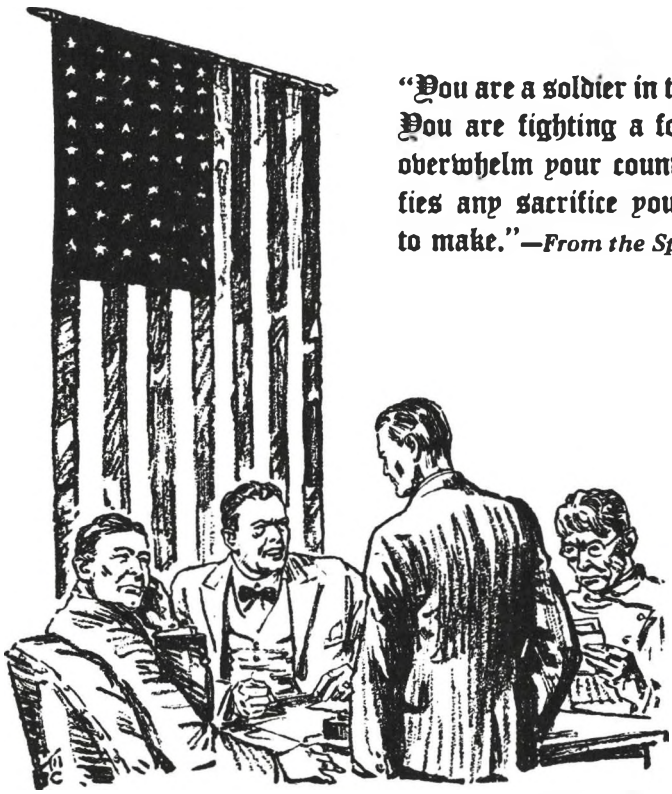
But more than all that, I hope that you, Ashby's employers, will get to really know him and like him.

Mr. Hoover acted as his spokesman:

"All the decent people of the United States are our employers. The only reward we ask is your loyal support and understanding."

These stories are written with the sincere hope that they may play at least a small part in bringing that about. Now let Special Agent James Ashby speak for himself.

Robert R. Mill, Washington, D. C.



"You are a soldier in the front-line trenches. You are fighting a force that threatens to overwhelm your country. That fact justifies any sacrifice you may be called upon to make."—*From the Special Agent's text-book.*

I—"ALL IN THE CARDS"—the first of a remarkable series of detective stories based on the work of the Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, by the author of the Tiny David series.

Shock Troops

By ROBERT R. MILL

KITTENS SHOVAT, overlord of the underworld in the city of Portmont, smiled graciously upon his two henchmen, Big-tooth Joe and Baltimore Pete. It was a warm smile, but like its owner's soft voice, his slow movements and his extravagant flights of sentiment,—qualities that had earned for him the name of Kittens,—it was deceptive.

The fourth occupant of the garish living-room of a penthouse apartment in the most exclusive section of the city, shuddered when she saw that smile. She was known by the rather descriptive name of Streamline. The lease of the apartment was made out in her name. She, in turn, was the property of Kittens—thereby giving that gentleman at least some claim to the penthouse, in which he appeared very much at home.

Kittens was dividing the contents of a plate of stew into two more or less equal portions. The larger, as was fit and proper, was designed for himself. The lesser portion was destined for Big-tooth, whose gross face beamed in anticipation.

Kittens was at his best in the rôle of host. A carefully manicured finger indicated the stew.

"Streamline made it herself." There was pardonable pride in the assertion. "Likes to cook my favorite dishes. Domestic as hell."

The possessor of these virtues stood before a window in the far corner of the room. Baltimore Pete was at her elbow. They appeared engrossed in the view of the river that was spread out far below the apartment.

Outwardly, all was sweetness and light among those present. Kittens even went to some pains to explain to Big-tooth just why the other occupants of the room were not included at the festive board.

Streamline, it appeared, was a bit off her feed. That, apparently, worried Kittens. It was just as well he had not seen the size of the repast, furnished by room-service, that she had enjoyed previous to his arrival. Baltimore, on the other hand, had a late dinner-engagement. The leer that accompanied that statement indicated that his company would be feminine. And all this meant more food for Kittens and Big-tooth, a fact that caused them obvious satisfaction.

Between rapid movements with spoon and fork, Kittens' laugh boomed out in the room. His companions made an obvious effort to match his jovial mood. But there was a feeling of constraint that would not be downed.

One reason for it was the absence of Dizzy Duckout. They noted it without comment, because Kittens was a stickler for form, of a certain sort. When Kittens volunteered the information that Dizzy was not present because he had not been invited, the tension grew rather than lessened. . . .

The last few months had provided ample material for unrest. Three jobs had gone sour—very sour: The gang kicked in handsomely, and the splendor of the president's funeral brought tears of pride to the eyes of his widow. They also made regular pilgrimages to the hospital to see the treasurer, but their words of comfort lacked the ring of sincerity. When, and if, he recovered, a Federal grand jury had first call on his services.

JUST last week they had decided that the rather indiscreet Mrs. Hallory, a member of the Edgewood Park branch of the family, looked like a pushover for a neat bit of blackmailing. Gee-gee Hutuna, who was intrusted with the job, had the bad fortune to call on a day when another one of Mr. Hoover's F. B. I. men—he seemed to have an unlimited number of them—was pinch-hitting for the regular butler. Gee-gee's case was still pending, but there was every indication that he would reside in Atlanta for some time; and this was very bad, because Gee-gee had a marked aversion to hot weather.

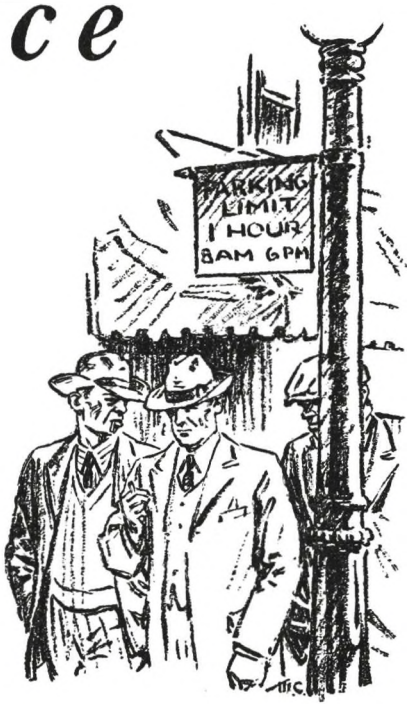
These facts were known to all present, and they rankled in their minds. The absence of Dizzy, which could only

of Justice

Illustrated by
Monte Crews

There had been the Weymouth snatch job. It looked like a pipe, but when Four-eye Latto picked up the boy on his way home from school, three grim-faced young men had materialized from behind a hedge. Four-eye made the mistake of trading shots with them. The autopsy report showed Four-eye's weight to be two pounds above normal—said excessive poundage being caused by the presence of certain foreign objects identified as lead.

Two weeks later the Pastime Protective Association, one of the subsidiaries of the gang, folded up abruptly when its president and its treasurer attempted to show a reluctant client the errors of his ways by hi-jacking one of his trucks. It so happened that a companion of the men behind the hedge—the gang called them "G Men," or "Hoover's schoolboys"—was substituting for the driver.



The special agent felt a metal barrel pressed against his side. "Stand still!" growled Dizzy. "Don't move your hands!"

Modest little thing! Kittens liked the way that she turned aside to put the bill away.

mean that he was under a cloud of some sort, added to their uneasiness. That unrest persisted despite the booming laugh of Kittens and the smooth course of what outwardly had every appearance of a friendly social gathering. And the tension was increased by the next development.

Kittens and Big-tooth ceased their attack upon the stew, but the gang leader made no effort to draw the other two occupants of the room into the intimate group about the table. On the contrary, he began to talk to Big-tooth in a low tone. But, either by accident or design, fragments of his statements carried to the pair at the window.

Even Streamline, who regarded the tabloids as heavy reading, heard enough to realize that on next Thursday morning the gang planned to rob the First National Bank of Portmont.

That information conveyed, Kittens became even more genial. But it was wasted effort. They were too much engrossed in their thoughts. They all were in a tough spot.

Big-tooth had been given a prominent part in the job planned. That might or might not mean that he was in high favor at the moment. His standing with Kittens, however, was not what worried him most. Three jobs had gone sour. If this one traveled the same way, he, Big-tooth, went with it. There was a worried frown upon his coarse face.

Baltimore had been given no part in the job planned. That was not unusual, for he had a good "front," and acted as the contact man for the mob with the outside world. But he had been allowed, apparently by accident, to hear the details of the plan.

Those details included an arrangement whereby the other active participants in the robbery would know just what they were embarking on only a few hours before the start of the job. Therefore, if things went wrong, the choice of a passenger for a one-way ride would be a comparatively simple matter.

Many members of the gang had known the plans of one or more of the three sour jobs, but only five persons had known the plans of all three. Two of these, Kittens eliminated at the start:

There was himself. He smiled grimly. A guy doesn't nail down his own coffin, does he? There was Streamline. She was a good twist; in the past, she hadn't talked. She was getting more than she ever had. Why should she leak now? Take two from five, and you have three, in any man's language. Kittens' smile became more sinister as he thought of the spot he had put those three in.

Dizzy was out, for the simple reason that he had nothing to tell. Big-tooth, if he was a wrong one, was confronted with the prospect of bringing about his own downfall.

That put the issue rather squarely up to one Baltimore Pete, and that was right where Kittens wanted it to be. Kittens liked Baltimore. He had trusted him. He had been regular enough. He wasn't a dick. You don't meet dicks where Kittens had met Baltimore. But there was something about him that Kittens never had been able to understand. No use worrying about it, though. This next job would tell the story. If Baltimore was regular—swell! If he was sour —out, like a light! Kittens assumed an expression of mock sorrow at the very thought of that eventuality. Then the practical side of his nature triumphed. A guy had to keep his garden weeded, didn't he?

Kittens ceased the laborious process of thinking, and turned to his guests.

"Sorry you birds can't stick around longer." Neither had shown any signs of leaving, but now they did. "Drop in again. Me and Streamline is always glad to see you. How about it, baby?"

The girl nodded.

"I'll be seein' you," she told the departing guests.

"Swell feed," muttered Big-tooth.

"Been a pleasure," murmured Baltimore Pete.

The door closed.

"Baltimore," declared Streamline, "is always a gen'leman."

HE who was known to Kittens Shovat and his henchmen as Baltimore Pete sat alone in a room. It was a tawdry room, one in keeping with the tastes of a

person who wore the cheap, flashy clothes affected by its occupant.

Less than a mile from this room was the Portmont field office of the Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice. There this same young man was known as Special Agent James Ashby. His friends—almost everybody who knew him fell in that listing—knew him as Duke. That name was prompted by his love for the fine and beautiful things in life.

Many times during the last months Duke Ashby had longed for the haven offered by that office, or one similar to it. Never had the longing been more intense than now. A long, hard and dangerous assignment was nearing the end. And the ever-present threat of death was more than doubled during the closing hours of the game.

MONTHS before, Ashby had been called before the Director in Washington.

"We want Kittens Shovat and every member of his mob," declared that official. "We want them on charges that will put them out of circulation for all time. We have Shovat now, but he will be back in Portmont before long. His mob is marking time until he gets there. Then there will be plenty of trouble."

"Yes sir," said Ashby.

There was a long silence.

"It won't be easy," warned the Director.

Duke Ashby was staring at the flag hanging on the wall behind his chief.

"Yes sir," he said quietly. "I would like to try."

Then they had called in Carl Sherman, head of the great laboratory of crime that is housed on the seventh floor of the Department of Justice Building. Good old Carl! He looked for all the world like a master sculptor, in his spotless white smock: a kind, scholarly face; the long, tapering fingers of an artist—nothing about him to suggest the man-hunter.

Carl had consulted his *modus operandi* cards. Innocent bits of pasteboard, they appeared to be. But upon them there was recorded more data concerning Kittens and his men than they would have been able to furnish about themselves: Their past history, beginning almost from birth. Their likes and dislikes. Their strong points, and their weaknesses. The crimes proved against them, and the ones of which they were suspected. The methods they had used to commit those crimes. Their associates and their friends—receivers of stolen goods, gunsmiths, renegade doctors and lawyers, policemen and even judges believed to be in league with them. All this and more was listed on the cards.

Sherman studied them for a full half-hour. Then he suggested a plan. His eyes begged Duke Ashby for forgiveness. He was very fond of Ashby. . . .

Three days later, in a certain city in the Midwest, two special agents arraigned a prisoner in open court. A Federal judge, who believed he was disposing of a routine case, listened while the prisoner mumbled a plea of guilty to a minor violation of the narcotic laws. The jurist displayed mild surprise when one of the Federal men pointed out that the prisoner was a first offender, and expressed the belief that the minimum sentence would serve the ends of justice. Later the judge recalled that special agents are not assigned to narcotic cases, but he dismissed the thought. It had been quite regular.

The doors of a Federal prison closed upon a man now known as Baltimore Pete. It was the beginning of a nightmare for Duke Ashby: Monotony, filth, degradation, foul language, and even fouler thoughts all around him—everything that was the antithesis of his normal life.

Duke Ashby, the elegant, gritted his teeth and bore it. Books saved his sanity. Over and over, as he tossed on his bunk at night, he repeated a paragraph from the book of instructions that is given new special agents:

You are a soldier in the front-line trenches. You are fighting a force that threatens to overwhelm your country. That fact justifies any sacrifice you may be called upon to make.

And all this had a purpose. In a newer and more comfortable wing of the prison was Kittens Shovat, pampered favorite of guards and warden, serving the last few months of a comparatively light sentence for income-tax evasion.

The two men met in the yard. Kittens was attracted to Baltimore Pete. He made a request to the warden.

That official, all unaware of the part fate had given him, ordered the man wearing convict gray from choice to act as a sort of body-servant to the other man, who had violated almost every law of God or man, but who was paying only for the crime of having failed to share the profits from those crimes with his government.

Duke Ashby's sense of humor made it possible for him to swallow this added humiliation. And the assignment fitted in well with his plans. The acquaintanceship of the two men developed into friendship. They had an additional bond in the fact that their release dates fell within the same week.

Kittens went first.

"What are you going to do when you're sprung?" he asked.

An expressive shrug of the shoulders was the answer.

Kittens, lord of the prison, and moving on to a vaster kingdom, cast a crumb to this humble retainer.

"Look me up," he ordered. "May be able to do something for you."

That was the moment Carl Sherman had visualized from the cards months before. From then on, it had been up to Duke Ashby. And he had done his work well. Outwardly serving the gang, he had brought about the three "sour jobs," which had taken a heavy toll from the mob. Now only a few of the big shots remained.

Big-tooth and Ukulele Sam, the latter the head of the strong-arm element, would meet their Waterloo in the coming bank job. That left only Dizzy Duckout—who was under a cloud because Kittens was not sure of the source of the grief—and Kittens himself.

In the gloom of the balcony, Inspector Harris leveled a rifle—and Ukulele Sam fell, a bullet through his head.

Kittens would take no part in the actual robbery of the bank. He never soiled his plump hands with work. He was the brains, the thinker. And as such he was the hardest game to bag.

Ashby had heard enough to implicate the gang chief in this and a goodly number of other crimes. But his testimony would be hearsay, the unsupported word of one man. Numerous defense witnesses would deny it. A conviction, doubtful at best, would be followed by a light sentence. That was not what the Director had ordered. He wanted Kittens Shovat eliminated, thoroughly eliminated; and he wanted that more than anything else.

Expediency prompted Ashby to allow the bank job to go through without a hitch, bide his time, and devote all his future energy to landing Kittens. But you don't stand by and allow bank robberies to take place—not if you are a special agent of the Department of Justice.

He, Ashby, was under grave suspicion. That was to be expected. The "souring" of the bank job not only would make the attainment of his real goal virtually impossible, but it would just about mean signing his own death-warrant. And he didn't want to die. His nerves, frayed by weeks of tension, flashed wild signals to his brain:

Chuck the job. . . . Fly to the safety of the local field office. . . . Turn in a report saying exposure was inevitable.

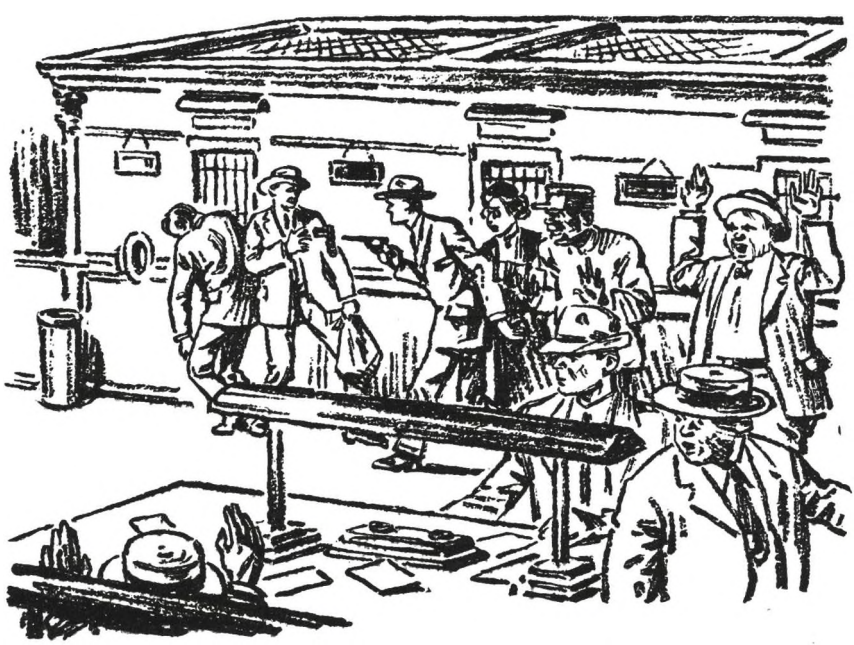
He fought the wild impulses back. But he did long to be at the side of good old Carl Sherman; they could talk it over. But that was impossible; he had only one-way communication with his comrades, and even that was dangerous.

Resolutely Ashby picked up a pen and began to write. In brief, laconic sentences he outlined the plan to rob the First National Bank of Portmont. He listed the men who would participate, and described them. There was no hint of his own plight. There was no mention of the fact that when this job went "sour," it would scream aloud the fact he was a spy. There was no request for protection. If you are a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, you stand on your own feet, take your own grief, and hope for the best.

He mailed the letter in the main post-office building, five blocks away. The street was dark, lonely and sinister. Only one other person besides himself was abroad. That other person remained a vague, shadowy form that stayed in his rear and beyond his range of vision.

Death had stalked his footsteps for months. Now it was drawing very near. Duke Ashby shrugged his shoulders as he unlocked the door of his room. Almost anything was better than this damnable waiting. . . .

Kittens Shovat prided himself that he left nothing to chance. On the morning



of Wednesday, just twenty-four hours before the scheduled bank-robbery, he summoned Dizzy Duckout to the regal presence.

They met in Streamline's apartment. Dizzy came to the rendezvous with grave misgivings. Underworld rumor had informed him that there had been a conference of the powers that be, and that he had not been included in that conference. From the same source he had gathered that a big job was in the wind. Nothing more definite than that could be obtained, but that had been quite sufficient to warn Dizzy that all was not well for Mr. Duckout.

His misgivings quickly vanished when Streamline admitted him to the presence of his chief. Kittens nodded cordially. His thumb indicated Streamline, who was putting on an expensive coat.

Dizzy swelled with pride. This could mean only one thing. Instead of being out in the cold, he was to be admitted to confidences so important that Kittens was unwilling to unfold them before Streamline.

The lady in question paused before the two men.

"You told me to go buy-buy," she suggested.

"Sure," said Kittens. "Go by-by."

"I thought you said 'buy-buy,'" Streamline insinuated.

Kittens chuckled complacently. Clever little twist! Always pulling deep stuff. Lots of guys wouldn't get her. But he was quick on the up-take.

"You heard right," he declared. He offered a bill, which was accepted eagerly, and quickly stowed in that place which tradition and fact have established as the depository most patronized by the Streamlines. Kittens' smile grew broader. Modest little thing! He liked the way that she turned aside to put the bill away in its hiding-place.

"Be seeing you," said Streamline.

Dizzy managed a cordial smile, which was no light achievement, because he had absolutely no use for Streamline. And that lady, as he well knew, had even less use for Dizzy.

WHEN the door had closed behind her, Kittens wasted no time on preliminaries. "I got a job of work for you," he told Dizzy.

Mr. Duckout nodded. Kittens drew closer. For a full ten minutes they whispered together. Then the gang chief spoke aloud:

"Who was you thinking of taking?"

Dizzy pondered.

"Peg-leg could drive the car, and Izzy might come in handy. It aint no job to need no army."

Kittens nodded. A wave of his hand signified that the interview was ended.

"I'll be looking for you."

A slow, evil smile crossed Dizzy's face.

"I'll have the package for you," he promised.

A WORRIED frown was visible upon Carl Sherman's face as he sat at his desk on the seventh floor of the Department of Justice Building in Washington. Before him was the letter Duke Ashby had sent to the field office in Portmont, outlining the plan to rob the First National Bank in that city. Beside the letter were the *modus operandi* cards dealing with the past exploits of Kittens Shovat and his men. A second perusal of the cards caused the frown upon Sherman's face to deepen.

Then he glanced at the clock, and made a quick decision. Picking up the letter and the cards, he made his way to the office of the Director. He was admitted at once, and he wasted no time.

"I would like a leave of absence for three days, to take effect at once."

He had an ace in the hole if this was not granted.

"Request denied," snapped the Director. "You have too much work on hand."

Sherman prepared to play the ace, but the twinkle in the eyes of the Director halted him.

"You are detached from duty here," declared the chief. "Get the first plane for Portmont. Inspector Harris has been informed that you will take over until this bank job is cleaned up."

His official manner vanished. His worried frown matched the one on the face of the scientist.

"Don't you think I realized it too?" he asked. "He is in a tough spot, but he won't leave it. Do what you can for him, Carl."

"I'll do my best," said Sherman. . . .

Duke Ashby, clad in the raiment of Baltimore Pete, and with table manners appropriate to that gentleman, was finishing his coffee when Dizzy Duckout, check in hand, and bound for the cashier, spied him and paused at the table.

The two men exchanged greetings. Ashby stood up. Quite naturally they fell into step.

"Match you for them," Dizzy offered, when they reached the cashier.

Two coins spun in the air. Dizzy lost.

"Just a fall-guy," he grinned, as he paid the two checks.

On the street before the restaurant they paused.

"What's doing?" asked Dizzy. There was almost pathetic eagerness in his voice as he asked the question.

Duke Ashby shrugged his shoulders. He almost pitied this human rat, upon whom the suspicions of his kind also rested.

"Nothing, by me," he answered.

Dizzy showed a disposition to tarry. That was easily explained. Left out of the confidences of the gang, he was about to make a desperate attempt to pump Baltimore Pete. Duke Ashby, thinking for Baltimore Pete, decided that would not be advisable.

"Be seeing you," he said.

"Yeah!" A note of menace crept into Dizzy's formerly servile voice. The skirt of his coat brushed against Ashby. The special agent felt a metal barrel, separated only by cloth, pressed against his side.

"Stand still!" growled Dizzy. "Don't move your hands!"

A figure Ashby recognized as Izzy appeared around the corner, and came to a halt at his side.

"Hello," said Izzy in a conversational tone.

A second revolver was pressed against Duke Ashby. A car, with Peg-leg at the wheel, drew to the curb. There had been nothing to attract attention; and the street, for the moment, was deserted.

"Climb in!" ordered Izzy. "One peep out of you, and you get the works right here!"

Duke Ashby thought fast. He knew Dizzy, whose dark eyes were clouded with the smoke caused by narcotics; and when he was in that condition the threat was no idle one. The special agent entered the car. Dizzy and Izzy sat on either side of him. The pressure of their revolvers was not relaxed.

The car drew away.

"Roll to the floor!" Dizzy ordered.

Ashby obeyed. They worked quickly and efficiently. His legs and hands were bound. Strips of adhesive tape sealed his mouth.

THE car headed south. The driver slowed down for each crossing. At other corners he was delayed by the traffic-lights. Ashby tried to keep track of the blocks. His heart told him it was a futile effort, but training could not be overcome lightly.

Now the car was running clear on a paved road in the country. The old Brookside Road, Ashby surmised. Then a turn, apparently to the right, and numerous bumps as the automobile traveled an unimproved road.

DUKE ASHBY knew his destination now: he was not surprised when the car halted, and he was led into a cabin, in the main room of which sat Kittens Shovat.

"Take the muzzle off him," ordered the gang leader.

They tore at the strips of adhesive, and Ashby clenched his teeth in order to still a cry of pain. Dizzy and Izzy stepped aside, their task completed.

Kittens' dark face was livid with rage. His gentle manner and soft tone of voice were gone. There was nothing to suggest a kitten at that moment. There was none of the sentiment he so often displayed. The stark soul of a killer was stripped naked as he glared at Ashby.

"All right, Baltimore," he murmured. His voice was silken and dangerous. "A little bird peeps to me that you're a Federal dick. Maybe the little bird is wrong. Maybe he aint. We get the answer by this time tomorrow."

He moved toward the special agent.

"You stay here until then. If the bird handed me a bum peep, there aint no skin off your elbow. But if the bird had the lowdown on you—"

Kittens Shovat hauled off and struck the defenseless man in the face.

"That will seem like a love-tap to what's got your name on it. I always was curious about them schoolboys. This will be my chance to pull one apart, and see what makes him tick."

Duke Ashby shook his head to dissipate the effects of the blow. He spoke slowly, calmly:

'You got me wrong, Kittens. Some guy sure has given you a bum steer. Me a Fed! Me a dick!" He used all his courage and will-power to give the appearance of mirth. The end was very near now, but he would carry on. He found grim irony in the thought that his name would completely fill the tablet in the main office, above which was the caption: *"Killed in Line of Duty."*

"I am laughing, Kittens," he said. "And this time tomorrow you will be

laughing with me." He jerked his head toward his bound hands. "Meanwhile, how about a cigarette?"

CARL SHERMAN, clad in a conventional business suit, stood at a customer's desk near the main entrance of the First National Bank of Portmont, apparently engrossed in the task of making out a deposit slip. He was nervous. He frankly admitted it to himself. Dread fear clutched at his heart. And in a few minutes he would need steady nerves and a clear head, more than ever before during his long years as agent, agent-in-charge, inspector and then head of the great laboratory of crime. He would need all that and more, if a man he loved as a brother was to have even a gambling chance of remaining alive. . . .

For twelve hours special agents had been searching the city for an underworld character known as Baltimore Pete. Their discreet efforts produced no results. Early today, acting upon orders from Sherman, the agents brought their search into the open. The underworld was combed. An agent posing as an employee of the electric-light company penetrated the apartment occupied by Streamline. Still no results. Baltimore Pete apparently had vanished.

Two hours ago Sherman had reluctantly abandoned the search. He needed his men here. The failure of the search made necessary a last-minute change in plans, thereby giving Duke Ashby at least a thin chance. Sherman hoped his men knew their parts. There hadn't been much time.

A thought flashed through his mind as he glanced at a clock. Perhaps news of the search for Baltimore Pete had reached the gang, and the bank job would be dropped. Sherman hoped so devoutly; for that too might give Ashby an additional lease on life. But as he looked at the door, he saw that hope was doomed of fulfilment.

Four men, apparently unknown to each other, entered. One of them—Sherman recognized him as Ukulele Sam—stood in the line before the cage of the paying teller. The second man of the four stood in line behind him. The other two men took commanding positions in the center of the floor.

Sherman folded up the slip upon which he was writing, and walked slowly toward the door. The two men in the center of the floor paid no attention to him. Sherman dropped to one knee, and began to tie a dragging shoelace. One of the men glanced at him, but made no move. He was waiting for the signal.

Sherman recognized that man as Big-tooth Joe.

Ukulele Sam reached the window and put a check before the teller. Sherman, still struggling with the lace, watched out of the corner of his eye. The teller was Special Agent Steel.

Steel examined the check. Scrawled upon it were the words:

"Hand over all your cash. Press the alarm, and you'll die the minute the gong sounds. Make it fast."

The man behind Ukulele stepped forward. In one hand he held a revolver. A canvas sack was in the other hand.

The two men in the center of the floor drew revolvers.

"Up with your hands, everybody!" roared Big-tooth. He turned, and covered Sherman with the gun. "Get back in here!" he shouted.

Sherman obeyed, walking slowly, his hands raised above his head. He wanted to remain as near the door as possible.

WITH an expression of fear and bewilderment upon his face, Agent Steel began to scoop up currency, while out of sight from the floor of the bank, Agent Connor slipped behind a telephone switchboard vacated by a nervous girl operator.

Above the bank floor ran a balcony. The lights in the dome of the building were not on, and the balcony was shrouded in darkness. In the gloom of the balcony, Inspector Harris leveled a rifle and took careful aim. The crack of that rifle started action so fast that the eye could hardly follow it.

Ukulele Sam fell as a bullet crashed through the back of his head. The man with the sack took two steps forward, traded shots with a special agent who had been standing in the line before the window, and fell with a bullet in his heart.

Big-tooth and his companion sprinted toward the door, firing as they ran. A rain of bullets followed them. One man went down, literally riddled with lead. But Big-tooth, by some miracle, reached the door unharmed. He darted through it. A quick glance told him the car planted for the get-away was nowhere in sight. He mingled with the crowd, walked slowly, and turned into a side-street.

Inside the bank, amid the turmoil, two men stood at the door.

"O. K., Chief," said Special Agent Montgomery.

Carl Sherman stepped to the street. Agent Montgomery swung the huge doors shut. He turned a massive key and pocketed it. He snapped a time-lock. Then he faced the excited crowd.

"Be calm, everybody," he called. "There is no danger now. The men you see with guns are agents of the Department of Justice."

FROM the radio set that stood on a table in the cabin there emerged the sugary voices of a girl and a youth, introduced to the world at large as the "Lovey Doveys."

Kittens Shovat gave a grimace of disgust. Right now he had very little use for sentiment. He was enthroned in the most comfortable chair in the place, awaiting the result of an experiment. The lives of several of his henchmen were bound up in that experiment. But that interested him far less than the bearing the outcome would have on his future operations. He puffed on a long black cigar, eyed the revolver he had placed on the table within easy reach, and waited.

Dizzy and Izzy also waited. The former was a bundle of nerves, a killing-machine that thirsted for action. The latter resembled a statue.

Special Agent Ashby sat in a chair not far from the gang leader. His legs and arms were tied to the chair, but his hands were free, and he puffed at a cigarette with every appearance of indifference. Now that the zero hour was close at hand, a strange calm had enveloped him. He had visualized a scene much like this ever since he joined the service.

The dulcet tones of the girl and the youth trailed away to silence, and the strident voice of the announcer boomed forth from the loud-speaker:

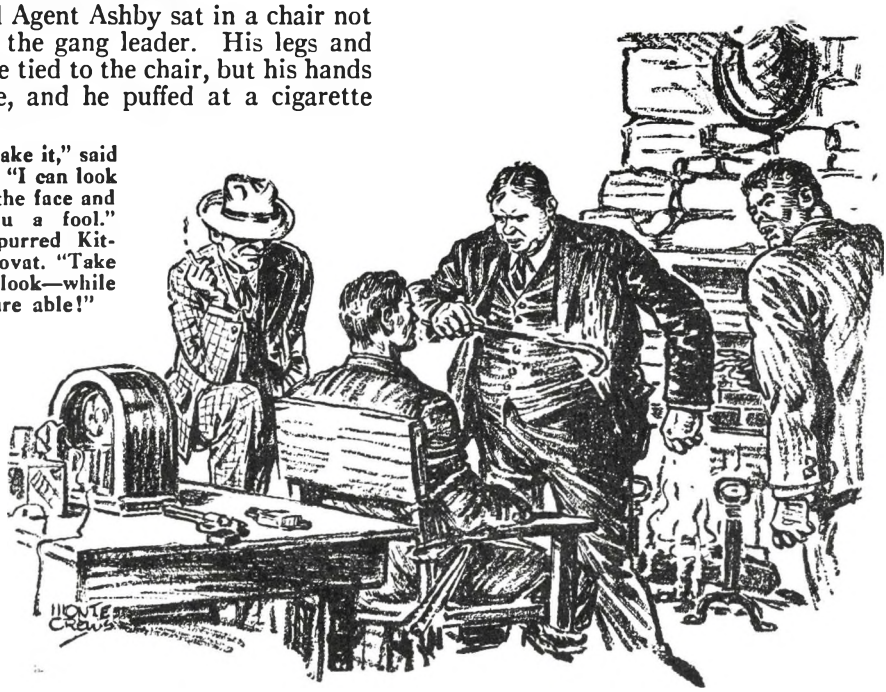
"We interrupt our regular program to bring you a special news bulletin. Portmont police headquarters has received a report that bandits looted the First National Bank. Radio cars and emergency crews have been dispatched to the scene. No details are available. There will be later bulletins."

The four men strained forward in their chairs. The very air of the room was charged with suspense. But only the meaningless songs of the "Lovey Doveys" came from the radio set.

A young woman with "Helpful Hints to Housewives" followed. The four men learned that if they took half a cup of hot water, one-half cup of corn syrup, two cakes of chocolate, stirred it and brought it to a boil, they would have a delicious chocolate sauce. "And is it good!"

"Nerts!" said Mr. Shovat.

The next fifteen minutes were occupied by a gentleman introduced as "The Voice of Knowledge." He earnestly entreated young women in the business



"I can take it," said Ashby. "I can look you in the face and call you a fool." "So!" purred Kittens Shovat. "Take a good look—while you are able!"

world not to regard an office as a matrimonial bureau.

Mr. Shovat's comment would not look well in print. Then came the excited voice of the announcer:

"Another special news bulletin! Police who rushed to the First National Bank were confronted with locked doors. They were unable to gain entrance. Just a moment, please."

A long, poignant silence.

"Police Headquarters telephoned the institution, and were answered by a man who said he was a special agent of the Department of Justice. He said he was in conference with an official of the bank when the robbery was staged. The bandits gathered up all the currency in sight, and made their escape, locking patrons and employees in the bank. The amount of the loot has not been determined."

Then the announcer was replaced by a gentleman who urged farmers to go the limit in tree-planting. Some of the tension in the room vanished. An expression of disappointment crossed the thin face of Dizzy Duckout. Izzy remained impersonal. Kittens Shovat glanced at the man he knew as Baltimore Pete somewhat more kindly. His ever-ready sentiment welled to the surface. Perhaps he had made a mistake. If so, he was willing to atone, and to atone handsomely.

DUKE ASHBY heard the news-bulletin with unbelieving ears. Something had slipped up. He was honest enough to admit he was glad the bank robbery had gone through without interruption. No normal man wants to die. He addressed his remark to Kittens:

"That kind of washes out that bunk about me being a Fed."

"We bring you another special bulletin," boomed the radio. "Persons near the First National Bank report they heard the sound of heavy firing at the time of the robbery. This conflicts with the report that the robbery was staged smoothly and successfully."

"Maybe," said Kittens Shovat, in answer to Ashby. "And maybe not."

They heard sage words regarding the proper care of fur coats in summer. They listened to a comedian, who admitted that he was funny. Then the announcer returned, his voice vibrant:

"Another special news bulletin. Chalk up another smashing victory for your Uncle Samuel's G Men. Bandits, who entered the First National Bank of Portmont this morning, found grim G Men, posing as tellers and customers, all ready for them. Other G Men on the outside disposed of the car and driver stationed there for the get-away. The G Men on the inside swung the time-locks on the doors shut, and greeted the demand for money with bullets. The bandits returned the fire. When the shooting ceased, not a bandit remained alive. One G Man received a slight flesh-wound. Patrons and employees escaped without injuries. It was a bad day for bank bandits."

A CLOUD, invisible but potent, settled down upon the room. Dizzy Duckout licked his thin lips with his tongue in anticipation. Some of Izzy's apathy vanished. Kittens Shovat was a purring, menacing agency of destruction. Duke Ashby slumped in his chair, a condemned man to whom hope had been offered, only to be snatched away.

"So!" purred Kittens.

The door was thrown open. Big-tooth Joe, his eyes bloodshot, his clothing disheveled, his hands trembling, and his breath coming in labored gasps, staggered into the room.

"It was a frame!" he cried. "The joint was loaded with Feds!" He leaned against a chair. "They got Ukulele! They got—"

"But they didn't get you." Kittens' eyes were veiled. His voice was even more feline. "Lucky, aint you?"

The ugly inference struck Big-tooth for the first time. Never too quick at thinking, he had accepted his luck without question and rushed headlong to the only haven he knew, the hide-out of the gang.

"Say—" he protested.

"You say it," Kittens warned. "We like bed-time stories. We been getting a lot of them over that squawker." His smile was a horrible thing. "Some guys would say that your luck was tailor-made, because the Feds didn't want to lose their little Bright-eyes. But us, now —we got open minds."

Duke Ashby, watching a second miracle unfold before his eyes, sought to sow even more seeds of suspicion and distrust.

"How come you got away so clean?" he demanded. "Those babies aint dumb. Maybe you could beat it out of the joint when the bang-bang started, but how come you got by the birds outside?"

It was an unfortunate play. He realized it as soon as he uttered the words, for it served to attract the attention of Kittens to himself.

"Um," said the gang leader. He glanced at the logs burning in an open fireplace. "The finger is on both you birds. Maybe one of you is in the clear. Maybe not. But by God, I know how to find out."

He advanced to the fireplace, seized a poker and thrust it among the glowing embers. He stood watching the iron heat. The point of the poker was white-hot when he picked it up by the handle, advanced upon Ashby, and stood over the helpless man.

"What you got to say?" he demanded.

Duke Ashby thought fast. You could die only once; and after all, one way was much like the other. But it would be nice to go out under your true colors.

"Just this, rat!" he said. "I am James Ashby, a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice."

He rather enjoyed their amazement.

"You owe all your grief to me. You have a lot more grief coming from other men just like me. You can get rid of one or two of us, but others will fight for the chance to take up our work. Only fools like you would think you can beat us. Get it over with, Kittens. I can take it. I can look you full in the face, and call you a fool."

"So!" purred Kittens Shovat. "Take a good look—while you are able!"

The point of the poker went up until it was on the level with Duke Ashby's right eye.

"They'll get you for this, Kittens," said Duke Ashby. "I feel sorry for you when they do."

The point of the poker traveled forward, and tiny sparks danced before Duke Ashby's eyes. The crack of a revolver, which sounded from the open door, seemed to him to be the hot metal searing its way through his flesh.

KITTENS SHOVAT'S body stiffened, swayed backward, and then fell face-forward. The poker rolled from his fingers. A voice cried:

"Throw up your hands, everybody!"

Duke Ashby came back to the present with a start. He recognized that voice. Carl Sherman advanced into the room. Three special agents were with him. This must be a dream!

"Frisk them, and put the cuffs on them."

No; the voice and the man were real!

"Carl! How in God's name—"

The man with the scholarly face was bending over him, cutting his bonds.

"Take it easy, Duke. The Director sent me after you. I was afraid it was too late. We let Big-tooth get away, hoping he would lead us to Kittens, and you. We sealed up the bank and gave out false reports as long as we could, hoping that would keep you alive till we got here." A faint smile appeared on the finely cut features. "Apparently it worked." The smile was replaced by a look of reverence. "And for that, thank God!"

Duke Ashby leaned back weakly. A warm glow enveloped him. Tears welled in his eyes, and he was unashamed as they rolled down his cheeks. The Director! Good old Carl Sherman! These other men, who, though they would be the first to scoff at sentiment, had dedicated their lives to an ideal.

NOW the nightmare of a masquerade was ended. Washington would be a pleasant place: The streets would be bright with flowers, and the air would be heavy with the perfume of magnolias. Pert little Government stenographers would be walking amid the flowers. There would be a place at the table of Carl Sherman for him, the wanderer. There was a room, always waiting. There were baby fingers to twine themselves about his heart. All this was good. He had been away so long.

He looked up at the man standing before him, the worker of miracles. Hardly anything this man might do would surprise him. But this savored of black magic.

"How did you know, Carl?"

Carl Sherman smiled.

"You wouldn't tell us, but three bad jobs were bound to draw suspicion your way. Five years ago, when Shovat suspected a member of his gang, he planned a job in the presence of that man, kidnaped him the day of the crime, and killed him when the crime was unsuccessful."

The smile was broader.

"The police couldn't prove it, but it was common gossip in the underworld, and we learned of it."

He was a man of science now, dealing with established facts.

"The *modus operandi* of these rats is always the same. All that we had to do was turn to the cards."

The Gorge of

The famous Intelligence officer known as the Red Wolf of Arabia tries to head off a war in Abyssinia—and plays a ten-to-one shot with his life at stake.

Illustrated by
John F. Clymer

"AND now, Al Ared, we will look at the maps."

"Truly, I am all attention, Josef Abuna."

There was a rustle of parchment; and on a low table beneath a dim oil lamp, brown hands spread a map of Abyssinia.

The thin man in the Arab burnous leaned forward eagerly. Paul Rodgers, an Anglo-American known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia because of his daring ventures in the Intelligence service, was in Harrar, the old slave town of Abyssinia. Outside, the white houses glistened in the moonlight like a huddle of sugar cubes. The tense silence of Africa, torn at moments by the howl of a hyena, shrouded everything. Only in this heavily walled room was the mutter of two men and the rustle of a map.

"Here is the frontier between Abyssinia and the Italians," pointed the man who called himself Josef Abuna. "A debatable frontier, which has not yet been fixed. It is wild, desolate country used only by hunting beasts and Arab slave-raiders."

"It is as I thought," nodded the man in Arab disguise.

"This same territory," went on Josef Abuna, speaking in Arabic, "is difficult to control. My royal master Ras Tafari, King of Kings, and Lion of Judah, has often thought of sending an army into its fastnesses to conquer it thoroughly."

"But the army would be massacred, eh?" nodded Rodgers.

"Exactly," flashed the other with a grim smile. "The tribesmen there are cruel and treacherous. Their only trade is in black cargoes—slaves. A few Arabs have penetrated there, bought their merchandise and made their way along the old slave trails back to the coast. But the traffic is continued at the whim of one woman. That woman is the ruler of those cruel tribesmen."

"And her name?"

The lips of the half-caste at his side formed the words:

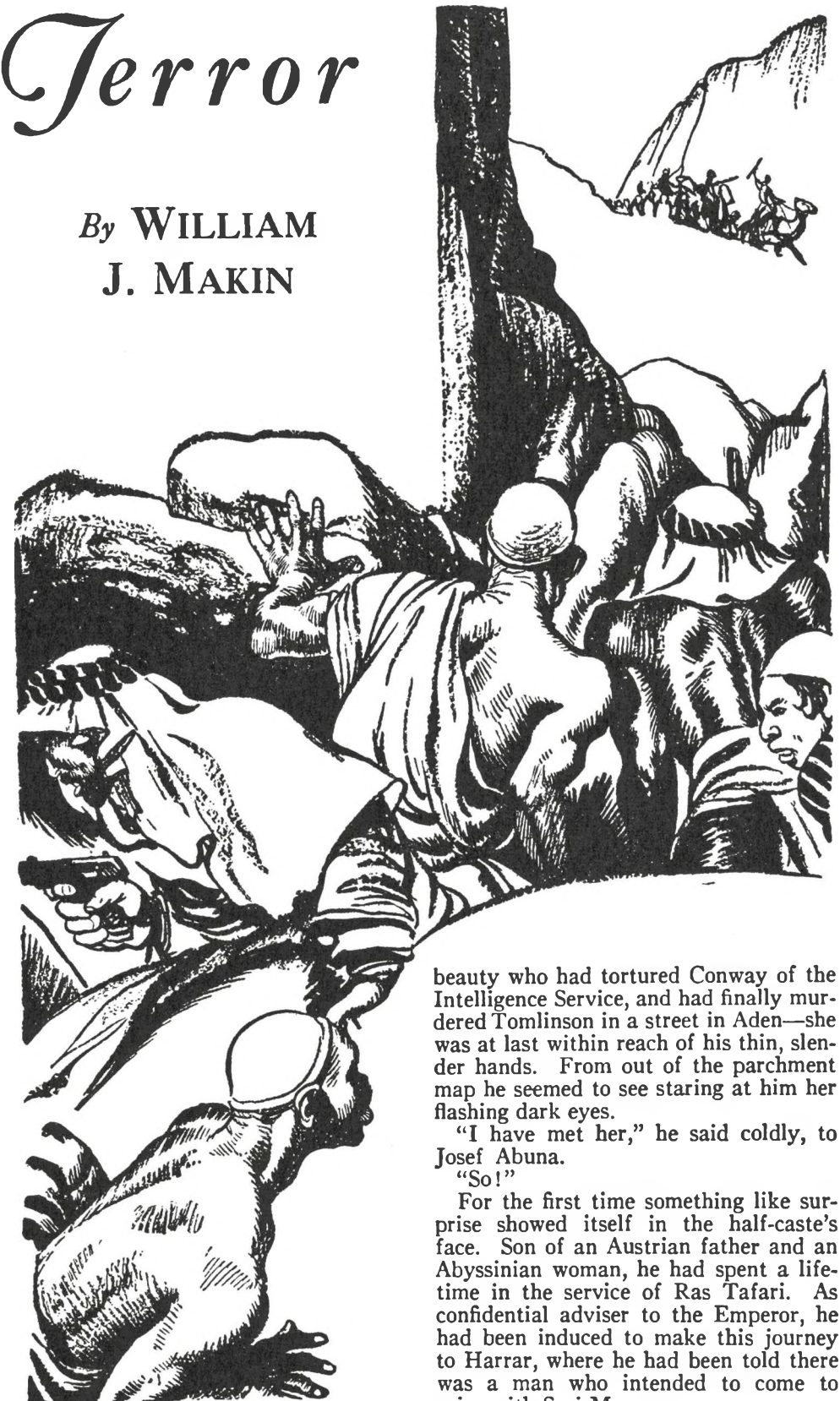
"Sari Mansur."

The steely eyes of the Intelligence officer narrowed. The woman who had escaped him in Aden, she who called herself the Queen of Sheba, the brown

"Get behind the boulders!" shouted Rodgers. . . . "If you dare to stir from there, I'll shoot you!"

Terror

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN



beauty who had tortured Conway of the Intelligence Service, and had finally murdered Tomlinson in a street in Aden—she was at last within reach of his thin, slender hands. From out of the parchment map he seemed to see staring at him her flashing dark eyes.

"I have met her," he said coldly, to Josef Abuna.

"So!"

For the first time something like surprise showed itself in the half-caste's face. Son of an Austrian father and an Abyssinian woman, he had spent a lifetime in the service of Ras Tafari. As confidential adviser to the Emperor, he had been induced to make this journey to Harrar, where he had been told there was a man who intended to come to grips with Sari Mansur.

At this first meeting with a thin-faced man in Arab burnous, he had not, so far, been impressed. The English were a strange race, and the three other men they had sent to deal with this powerful woman ruler had all met cruel deaths. The pertinacity of sending a fourth man surprised him. But any help in the present desperate situation was to be accepted.

"She is a dangerous woman," he ventured warningly.

"So I understand," nodded Red Rodgers casually.

"And it will need an army to conquer her."

"I am alone," murmured the man in the burnous. "He who fights alone, has much to win and only himself to lose," he added, quoting an Arabic proverb.

The half-caste shrugged his shoulders.

"It is Sari Mansur who intends to provoke the Italians to attack and invade Abyssinia," he said. "As you have no doubt heard, she desires to see the overthrow of Ras Tafari, and will then claim the throne for herself."

"And what are her chances?" asked Rodgers bluntly.

The half-caste sighed. "As long as she is alive—excellent," he admitted.

Rodgers lighted a cigarette and stared fixedly at the map.

"Tell me what your spies report," he requested at last.

AGAIN the brown finger dabbed at the map, a smear of perspiration telling of the excitement within the envoy.

"It seems certain that a month from today the tribesmen of Sari Mansur will make a raid upon one of the Italian outposts. It will be an incident surely leading to war between Italy and Abyssinia."

"And cannot you prevent the—er—incident?" asked Red Rodgers dryly.

The half-caste shook his head.

"I have already pointed out the folly of attempting to invade this territory."

"You have airplanes?"

"Three. But bombing in such a district would be futile."

"Could you move a small army south from Addis Ababa, to a point where you possess a strategic advantage?"

Once again Josef Abuna showed surprise.

"Yes," he admitted. "There is a rocky gorge between the mountains here, fifty miles south of Harrar, in which an army moving toward us could be massacred from the heights above. But the point is obvious; it is known to the tribesmen. They would not be such fools as to enter that gorge and place themselves at our mercy."

And the finger of the half-caste rose from the map.

"Nevertheless," said the Red Wolf quietly, "I would suggest that a month from today you have troops with machine-guns occupying those heights. Maybe the rebels will enter the gorge."

"But I tell you," protested Josef Abuna, "that on that day they will attack the Italian outposts."

"Maybe they will change their minds," smiled Rodgers.

"These tribesmen are not fools. And Sari Mansur has the wisdom of her ancestor the Queen of Sheba," warned the half-caste.

"If Sari Mansur enters that gorge, I suppose her army would follow?"

"True, but—"

"Therefore it must be done. Have I your promise that your army will be posted there?"

THE half-caste had the impression that he was dealing with a madman. With a gesture he humored him.

"In the name of my master, the King of Kings, I promise."

"Good! Please leave the map; I shall need it. By the way, what do you call that gorge?"

"Burassa—the Gorge of Terror."

Red Rodgers nodded.

"A fitting name! And now, Josef Abuna, you had better return to the capital and make your preparations. Our rendezvous is the Gorge of Terror, a month from today."

With a skeptical smile, the half-caste rose.

"And you?" he asked, sarcasm in his voice.

Rodgers affected not to notice.

"I am going into the country of Sari Mansur," he said grimly. "If I do not bring this woman and her tribesmen into the gorge, then you will know I am dead."

Josef Abuna held out a brown hand.

"Good-by," he said softly.

"Till we meet," replied the Red Wolf, touching the hand quickly, Arab-fashion.

Two minutes later the confidential adviser to the King of Kings was shuffling, a dark shadow, through the sandy streets of Harrar.

"A miracle-worker—or a madman," he muttered. . . . "A madman," he decided.

This finality was in his mind as he was helped into the saddle by a group of horsemen waiting for him outside the town. They moved swiftly in the moonlight toward the railroad, forty miles away.

RED RODGERS still sat in the thickly walled room of that house in Harrar where for the past three days he had been ensconced as Al Ared, an Arab merchant. His gaze was still on the map, but a quiet shuffle of feet caused him to look up. It was Abdul, the half-naked Arab boy, about ten years old, who entered. He, who had seen Tomlinson die, had attached himself with doglike devotion to his new master.

"Gabrie, the Galla merchant, is here, My Lord," murmured the boy.

Rodgers nodded.

"Bring him before me!"

A few seconds later, and a coffee-colored Galla wrapped closely in a dirty white shamma stood before Paul Rodgers. He bowed low, and then lifted his head to display a pair of uneasy eyes shifting about the room.

"Is the business done, Gabrie?" asked Rodgers.

The Galla man cringed and upturned his palms.

"A dangerous business, Al Ared. It is not easy. There are lashings and imprisonment for the man who is found out. So the King of Kings has decreed."

"I asked for three slaves," said Rodgers bluntly. "Have you brought them?"

"I searched the byways of Harrar," whined the man, "but no one dares talk of slaves now. As for selling them—a man imperils his life in such a business."

"Nevertheless, it *is* business," said Rodgers, lighting another cigarette. "I am prepared to buy, and you are willing to sell. The price was agreed upon, and all your whining tales of peril will not get you another thaler. The slaves! Where are they?"

"They await your pleasure, Lord," sighed the Abyssinian, defeated in his haggling.

He clapped his hands.

Slowly, three black men shuffled into the room. In their hangdog dejected appearance a century of slavery was represented. Sudanese, from the swamps, judged Rodgers after a glance at their long legs. Arab-fashion, he criticized their physique:

"Pah! They are skinny, and with rice bellies. What could those shoulders carry, Gabrie? Nothing heavier than a couple of dead jackals. I ask for men, Gabrie, and you bring me charred sticks."

"Supposing," she said softly, "I demand that you stay here and amuse me?" She moved nearer to him. But the Arab answered bluntly: "I am here for slaves."

"Lord, I have done my best," protested the Galla merchant. "A little food and rest will work wonders with them, Al Ared, I promise you. Does not the second one show promise of strength? Look again at him, Lord!"

The three miserable negroes hunched their shoulders, and in their nakedness shivered against each other. With a contemptuous gesture, Rodgers drew a bag of Maria Theresa dollars from his burnous and tossed it onto the table. The chink of it stirred the greedy gleam in the eyes of the Abyssinian.

"Take your money," said Red Rodgers "and get out! And do not babble of this business in the coffee-houses."

The Abyssinian grinned, and clawed the money.

"My life depends upon silence," he said. "What will you do with these three slaves, Al Ared?"

"That is now *my* business," said Paul Rodgers, and a nod to Abdul was a signal for the merchant to be hustled out of the house.

The Intelligence officer looked at the map and then at the three cringing negroes. In their grouped posture they suggested a sculptor's study in black dejection.

"This, then, is my army!" sighed the Red Wolf. "With three miserable black slaves, I am to confront the Queen of Sheba, and her powerful followers! They believe I am mad. Perhaps I am. But only madmen achieve great success."

Immobile, the three black slaves waited.

"Sit down!" commanded the Red Wolf. "I am going to tell you why I bought you."

With wonder in their sad, liquid eyes, the three slaves squatted on the floor.

SARI MANSUR, garbed in Abyssinian white, reclined upon a luxurious divan in the spacious room of a castle stronghold.

That castle, built long centuries before by the Crusaders, was perched on precipitous cliffs whose beetling sides frowned upon a twisted heap of smaller hills and defiles that made up one of the most mysterious areas in Abyssinia.

From the stone towers of the castle, this beautiful woman who claimed descent from the Queen of Sheba could gaze many miles toward the east, where the desert sands of Italian Somaliland spread away like a vast yellow sea. In the far south lay the swamps of the Sudan and the hot deserts of Kenya—all rich slave-raiding areas.

But Sari Mansur was bored. She yawned in the face of a dark-skinned Abyssinian who bowed before her.

"What is it, Talif? I am tired of listening to the disputes of these children of mine."

The Abyssinian straightened himself.

"It is a dirty, disreputable Arab—*aiee,* but he is dirty!—who has come through the great desert and reached our stronghold. He would do business in slaves."

Sari Mansur showed signs of interest in her flashing eyes. Instinctively her hand went to the nape of her neck, where the dark, glossy hair drooped in a coil.

"He must indeed be a remarkable man who has managed to reach the castle alive. But why does this Arab talk of slaves?"

Something like a grin crossed the face of the Abyssinian.

"He has seen some of our merchandise in Mecca. The fame of your black cargoes, great queen, has crossed the Red Sea and is told in the narrow streets that surround the Holy Kaab of the Muslims."

"We sell because we need money, and yet more money," said Sari Mansur, her rich lips parted greedily. "Has this adventurous Arab the money wherewith to buy?"

The Abyssinian shrugged his shoulders.

"He seems but a poor fool, great queen. Behind him trail three miserable half-starved slaves. *Aiee,* but they are not worth keeping alive. A miserable merchant, indeed, this Arab."

"His name?"

"He calls himself Al Ared."

Sari Mansur stretched her beautiful brown arms.

"I will see this Al Ared, Talif," she said. "Bring him to me."

"And his three slaves?"

She wrinkled her face in disgust.

"*Aach,* no! I hate to look upon miserable bodies. They are better dead. The Arab himself. Quickly, Talif!"

The Abyssinian bowed himself out. Silently the stage-setting against which Sari Mansur posed herself came into being. Four huge Abyssinian guards wearing the royal uniform of lion-manes as headgear, and with brown fists touching the hilt of gold-decorated scimitars, took up their position behind the reclining woman. Somewhere in the distance a gong thundered sonorously. A curtain was lifted aside, and the lithe, raggedly clad figure of the Arab trader entered the room.

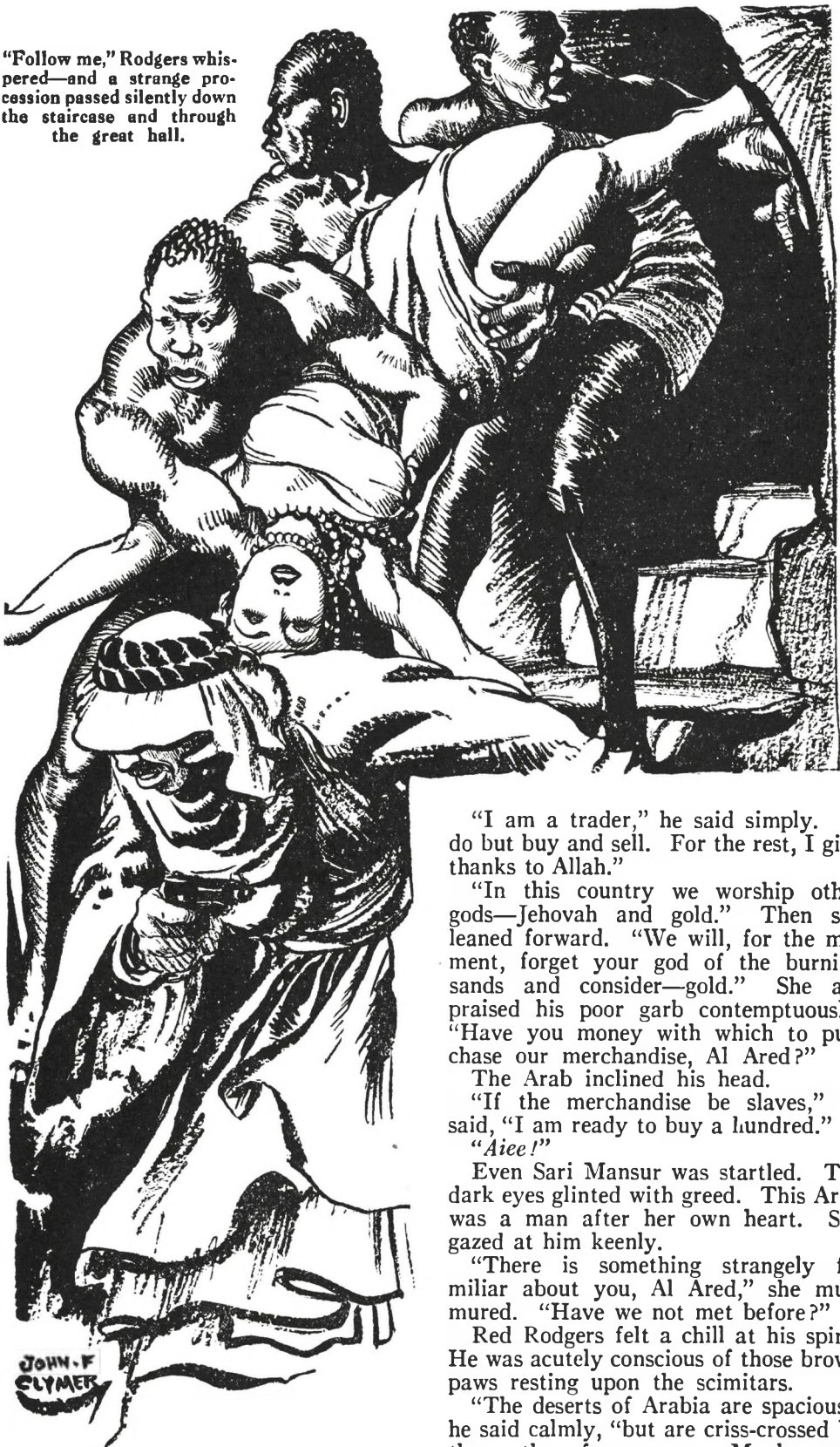
From heavy-lidded eyes Sari Mansur regarded him. Was there a slight suspicion of arrogance in the barefooted stride of the Arab toward her? Arabs cringed only at the word of Allah. Instinctively, Sari Mansur drew the silken shamma about her slim form. This trader was still travel-stained, and the hood of the burnous shadowed his face.

"So you are Al Ared, the man who has crossed the burning sands, and climbed to our fastnesses!" she murmured. "Few of your tribe have essayed such an adventure and lived to tell of it."

A GRIM smile crossed the lean face within the hood of the burnous.

"Who could resist such an adventure," he replied, "when the fame of the beautiful woman known as the Queen of Sheba is told in the coffee-houses of Mecca?"

"For an Arab, you have a flatterer's tongue," she smiled.



"Follow me," Rodgers whispered—and a strange procession passed silently down the staircase and through the great hall.

"I am a trader," he said simply. "I do but buy and sell. For the rest, I give thanks to Allah."

"In this country we worship other gods—Jehovah and gold." Then she leaned forward. "We will, for the moment, forget your god of the burning sands and consider—gold." She appraised his poor garb contemptuously. "Have you money with which to purchase our merchandise, Al Ared?"

The Arab inclined his head.

"If the merchandise be slaves," he said, "I am ready to buy a hundred."

"*Aiee!*"

Even Sari Mansur was startled. The dark eyes glinted with greed. This Arab was a man after her own heart. She gazed at him keenly.

"There is something strangely familiar about you, Al Ared," she murmured. "Have we not met before?"

Red Rodgers felt a chill at his spine. He was acutely conscious of those brown paws resting upon the scimitars.

"The deserts of Arabia are spacious," he said calmly, "but are criss-crossed by the paths of caravans. Maybe your

beautiful eyes once glimpsed, from the back of a camel, a humble trader who passed by."

She shook her head, a puzzled expression still in her eyes.

"Once in history a Queen of Sheba left this place to journey through the deserts of Arabia to meet the mighty Solomon. Once—" she muttered.

The Arab smiled.

"Today it is more fitting that Solomon should journey to visit the Queen of Sheba," he replied.

"For an Arab, you talk strangely."

"I have read the books of history," he said. "For the rest, the stars above the black tents teach one wisdom."

She rose, stretching her slim body, wrapped in its silken shamma.

"I would hear more of that wisdom taught you by the stars," she said languidly. "I shall expect you to drink coffee and listen to music with me tonight. We are not ungrateful to those who risk their lives to visit us—and who bring gold with them. Till later, Al Ared."

And with a slow grace she moved across the room to a curtained doorway. Yet even as one of the guards drew aside the curtain, she turned to look once again at the strange Arab trader. His head was bowed humbly. She left him, the puzzled expression still in her eyes. . . .

Fifteen minutes later, the Red Wolf of Arabia sat within the dark shadows of his black tent, while three half-starved negro slaves squatted at his feet and gazed at him with doglike devotion. Beside Red Rodgers crouched the boy Abdul. And to the whispered Arabic words from the disguised Intelligence officer, the slaves nodded their woolly pates.

Something like the satisfied twist of revenge was on the boyish lips of Abdul.

THE fires of the stronghold were tumbling into white ash. The blackness of the night still enfolded the precipitous cliffs; but within an hour or two the sky would take on that same ashy whiteness of the dying fires. It would be the rebirth of day.

In the defiles, hyenas howled loudly, like lost souls. Occasionally there came the hoarse bark of a prowling leopard. Guards nodded and dozed. It was the hour when old men die, and the vitality has gone out of humanity. Only the beasts were alert.

Yet within one room of the castle torches still flared, and a woman with velvet brown arms stood enticingly before a man. And the man was speaking.

"Sheba still has a queen worthy of its riches," he said. "I have eaten and drunk with beauty at my side. I have been stirred by your dancers, and my ears filled with the wild music of your players. Could a man desire more?"

"Many men have desired more," she said softly.

HER nearness was tantalizing—those dark slumbrous eyes and the rich redness of her lips. Paul Rodgers had but to close his eyes, and he was back in the swooning atmosphere of the garden of the Residency at Aden. There, for one brief moment, he had weakened. . . . When his eyes had opened, he had looked into the face of Death. He steeled himself now against another such moment.

"Allah is great and merciful," he muttered mechanically, "but it is surely unwise for a miserable slave-dealer to dare beyond the stars."

Sari Mansur laughed easily.

"Yet you have talked to me this night of the wisdom that comes to those who look upon the glittering diamonds of the sky," she enticed. "Can you not be stirred by the sight of a woman's face unveiled?"

"The beauty of women is always veiled in my country," sighed the Arab. "Even the desert sands hide the riches that lie beneath. A mirage is all that Allah vouchsafes us."

Once again that puzzled expression came to her eyes.

"You talk like a poet," she murmured, "and yet come from a harsh land that breeds only fighters."

"And slave-dealers," he interposed.

"Is it not writ in your books," she went on, "that Scheherazade saved her

life and that of the virgin daughters of Moslems by relating strange stories to the cruel king?"

Rodgers nodded.

"It is so writ in the book known to Arabs as *Kitab Alf Laylah wa Laylah.*"

She smiled.

"Then I am a cruel queen, and I am moved by a man who talks like a poet. Supposing I demand that you stay here and amuse me?"

She moved even nearer to him.

But the Arab answered bluntly:

"I came here for slaves."

"And I also demand slaves," she said, stretching forth those brown arms. Already her lips were pouting toward his. The slim, jeweled fingers were about to lock themselves behind him. And then, with the nearness of the man, her expression changed. A gleam of fear, followed swiftly by rage, came to her dark eyes. The jeweled fingers fell back and clenched themselves.

"*So!*" she whispered. "Al Ared is—"

Casually he twitched back the burnous from his head.

"Paul Rodgers—at your service."

For a moment she stared at him. Then a cruel twist came to her lips.

"The Arab trader who has dared the burning sands to reach my stronghold is even more adventurous, more foolhardy than I thought." She backed away to where a gong stood in a corner of the room and picked up the hammer which lay beside it. "Why have you come?"

He moved toward her, an inscrutable smile on his lean, sunburnt face.

"As I have told you," he said quietly. "For slaves."

"I will show you—several," she hissed, raising her hand to strike the gong.

Simultaneously he pounced, and twisted the hammer from her hand.

"There is no need," he said, his grip like steel. "I want only one slave—you!"

And as the rich red lips parted to scream, he clapped over them a pad of sweetish-smelling stuff against which she struggled and fought in vain.

FOR some minutes that silent tense struggle continued. Then there was silence. A torch crackled noisily. Rodgers stood gazing upon the limp form in silken shamma that lay upon a couch.

He padded quietly to the curtained doorway. Standing there, mute, were the three scraggy slaves. Beside them, trussed securely, and gagged, were two guards. One of the slaves held a gleaming scimitar in his hand.

Rodgers nodded in the direction of the prone figure on the couch.

"Take her!" he whispered in Arabic. "And follow me."

A strange procession passed silently down the staircase and through the great hall of the castle. Occasionally they passed a guard who snored softly. Rodgers held an automatic pistol in his hand, and crept in advance of the procession. The slaves breathed heavily beneath their burden.

At last the cold wind of dawn whipped their faces. Somewhere in the distance a cock crowed.

"Abdul!" called Rodgers softly.

A boyish figure emerged from the darkness, a string of camels shuffling behind him.

"Hurry!" urged the Intelligence officer.

The limp figure of Sari Mansur was hoisted to the saddle of a camel. A cloth was draped over her. Red Rodgers, the slaves and Abdul mounted.

"*Aiee!* But that was easy, master," grinned Abdul.

Rodgers shrugged his shoulders. For he realized that the adventure was only just beginning.

"MASTER, I can go no further!" groaned the slave.

He swayed in the saddle. His black face, drawn with fatigue and smeared with the dust of the desert, revealed only the glazed eyes of an utterly weary man.

Rodgers pushed his camel alongside and caught the swaying figure with his arm.

"A rope, Abdul!" he commanded.

An equally tired Arab boy thrust a length of rope into those sinewy hands. Mercilessly, and despite the wincing and groans from the slave, he lashed the man securely to the saddle.

"Let us camp here, master," pleaded Abdul. "We have ridden our camels for five days without sleep for anyone."

"There is an army only a few hours behind us," pointed out the Intelligence officer.

"*Aiee!* That is true, master," nodded Abdul. "But it would be easy for us to turn from the path, destroy our trail, and escape them in the desert beyond."

Rodgers tightened his lips.

"I do not wish to lose those who pursue us, Abdul," he said.

"But that is madness, master," protested the boy. "It would be so easy.

You are cunning with desert craft, and yet you deliberately leave a trail so that the avengers of Sari Mansur can follow."

"So that they can follow," repeated the Red Wolf. "That is my plan."

"Even so, we are not men of iron," grumbled Abdul. "Our flesh is weak after such a terrible journey. And our camels are dying."

Rodgers himself spoke with the weariness of complete fatigue.

"Shall it be told in the coffee-houses of Aden, my Abdul, that you lacked the strength of this woman?"

And he nodded his head in the direction of the woman bound firmly to the back of her camel. . . . To protect her from the burning dust of the desert, a veil swathed the lower part of her face. Yet the red-rimmed eyes, weary from the forced rides across the desert, still blazed with fury.

"Death, a horrible death, will come to you, whatever you decide," said her muffled voice.

A grim smile crossed the face of Paul Rodgers.

"Thank you, Sari Mansur," he murmured. "That will hearten my men to a last effort. Follow me!"

And he urged his camel forward. The swaying procession of a woman, three slaves and a boy followed.

THE sun beat down mercilessly. The camels themselves staggered. Their coats were mangy and their supercilious mouths dry of saliva. The three slaves were like charred sticks propped in the saddles of the camels.

Ever since they left the stronghold of Sari Mansur with the self-styled Queen of Sheba as their captive, the little procession had ridden without rest or sleep through one of the worst deserts of Africa. When a man faltered, Rodgers had lashed him with strange oaths. The white man knew that they were all nearing the end. His tired eyes gazed unceasingly at the horizon, mocked by mirages. Somewhere ahead lay the goal he was seeking—Burassa, the Gorge of Terror.

Deliberately he had left a trail for the warriors of Sari Mansur to follow. Again and again he had led the camels into deep sand, and multiplied their tracks so that it seemed an army was riding away with the captive queen. And he knew now that an army was following. Abandoning their projected attack upon the Italian outpost, the warriors of Sari Mansur, mounted on camels and horses, were pounding after this miserable procession, determined upon revenge.

In itself an achievement, decided Red Rodgers with tired satisfaction. But not yet a complete success: a symphony that required the final crescendo! Humming strange music to himself, he urged the slowing pistons of his camel's legs through the dust and heat.

There came a gasp and a moan from behind him. The camel bearing the tired slave had tumbled into the sand. The beast was finished. The negro lay unconscious over the mangy beast.

RODGERS was about to utter a command, when he realized its futility. If one of his men got down into the sand, he would not have the energy to climb back again into the saddle. Without hesitation, therefore, he slipped down from his own saddle, and swayed toward the prone negro. The others sat stiffly, watching him.

With sore and blunted fingers, he struggled with the rope tying the slave to the saddle. Freed, the black body rolled in the sand. The dying camel twisted its head and looked with glazing eyes at the scene. With a gesture of despair, Rodgers drew the automatic pistol from his robe, placed it to the ear of the beast and fired.

The report rang out loudly in that brilliant, palpitating sunshine. The camel gave a convulsive jerk, then lay still. Then, with a tremendous effort, Rodgers dragged the unconscious slave to his own camel, pushed the man into the saddle, and climbed there himself. Unmoved from their postures of despair, the others watched him.

Suddenly the desert seemed to echo that pistol-shot. From behind them came the report of a rifle. Then another. A bullet whined through the air. Rodgers glanced back. Black dots bobbed up from the distance: men on horseback.

"Ride, damn you!" croaked Rodgers, lashing at his camel. "They've gained on us."

He lashed also at the camel carrying Sari Mansur. For a moment he caught the gleam of triumph in her eyes. Already she visualized the torture of this strange adventurer who had dared to cross her path after she had dealt with the other white men.

"The end is near," she screamed triumphantly.

Paul Rodgers wiped the perspiration from his eyes. He gazed once more into the distant mirages. They seemed to lift, to be drawn aside like a magic curtain. A brown bulk with jagged peaks was stretched there. Mountains!

"The end is near!" he shouted joyfully, and pointed.

Camels and men staggered forward. The shots behind increased. The pursuers were galloping confidently toward the escaping band. . . .

For two hours that desperate ride continued. Men and beasts plodded along mechanically. They neither knew nor cared where they were going. Only a madman with begrimed face and hand brandishing a pistol seemed to have a definite object. He shouted, cajoled and swore. Men and beasts made a final effort.

Suddenly it seemed the mountains were upon them. A rocky ravine with red, precipitous cliffs closed in on them. Boulders strewed their path. The pads of the camels slithered over stones. A black shadow where the mountain peak cut the sun spread enticingly before them:

The Gorge of Terror!

BUT was it? In that mad, delirious moment, Rodgers doubted whether he had found the gorge wherein he had so lightly promised, four weeks previously, to hold rendezvous with the half-caste Josef Abuna, and the Abyssinian army. And what was the promise of a half-caste worth? Was this the day? The hour? Bewildered by these torturing questions, Paul Rodgers lashed his camel savagely.

The beast stumbled, and pitched him forward. Blood streamed from a wound in his head. The others stopped. They swayed from their saddles. They had gone far enough. They huddled together like men who knew they were doomed.

"Get behind the boulders!" shouted Rodgers.

He leaped for the camel that was turning and lurching away toward the pursuers. In the saddle was Sari Mansur. His hand clutched her draperies and brought her to the ground. She struggled and kicked. Savagely he flung her behind a boulder.

"If you dare to stir from there, I'll shoot you!" he said.

The glint in his eyes told her he meant it. It was a madman who strode about, flinging a revolver to Abdul, and another to a slave. Three guns against an army! It was laughable.

Sari Mansur cackled her savage joy.

Even as they crouched, the bullets began to whine along the ravine. Stone splinters spurted past Rodgers. He fired uselessly, into the empty, sunlit air. Not a single pursuer could be seen. Only could this little group of desperate fugitives sense that an army, the cruel relentless army of Sari Mansur, was closing in upon them.

AGAIN and again Red Rodgers fired, without result. He was shooting at phantoms in the sunshine. A few yards away lay Sari Mansur, smiling evilly. It was now only a matter of minutes. Despairingly, Rodgers looked up at those precipitous cliffs. Not a living thing disturbed their aloofness. They frowned down upon these men fighting to the death.

At last! A squirming form could be discerned, wriggling toward a boulder.

Rodgers fired, but failed to hit. With bleeding fingers he reloaded his automatic, and watched other forms wriggle forward. A whole army was now in the gorge.

From behind a boulder came a shout—a war-cry. Sari Mansur shrilled her reply. Tribesmen materialized. They rose from behind boulders, their rifles ready. Scimitars gleamed in the sun, and a black flag waved above them.

With one roar they came forward to the charge. Rodgers emptied his pistol at the nearest figures. And even as he prepared for the end, a shattering roar came from the cliffs above. A hail of lead poured down. The deadly rattle of machine-guns syncopated the whine of death. The roar of triumph from Sari Mansur's army was changed to a howl of terror.

"Josef Abuna, bless him!" sighed the Intelligence officer.

Tribesmen were tumbling headlong over the boulders. No longer were they facing the desperate fugitives. Like frantic sheep, they struggled for the opening of that Gorge of Terror into which they had entered triumphantly ten minutes before. Now their dead were mingled with the boulders.

Rodgers turned to Sari Mansur—but she was no longer there. The boulder behind which she had crouched, hid only a dying slave. Blood streamed from a dagger-wound by his heart.

"The she-devil escaped, master," said the black man with glazing eyes. "I did my best."

And with a queer, helpless smile on his tired face, he died. . . .

Rodgers was still standing over him when Josef Abuna, in gorgeous military uniform, came forward with outstretched hand.

"You are a magician, Al Ared!" he shouted. "You delivered the army of the Queen of Sheba into our hands. *Wah!* But the slaughter was great."

He gazed with savage joy at the dead litter of tribesmen.

Paul Rodgers shook his head sadly.

"But once again I have failed," he sighed. "Another brave man has paid with his life in the struggle with the Queen of Sheba. I shall not forget."

The half-caste looked down at the dead negro.

"Pah! A slave!" he muttered. "It is our only casualty."

Another thrilling exploit of the Red Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.

The Triple Flip

Knives are dangerous playthings but professionals know what not to do with them.

By

LAURENCE JORDAN

Illustrated by Monte Crews

"I'M a knife-thrower," said Pacho. "I throw knives."

Boucher looked up at the long, hawk-nosed man who stood leaning forward, five fingers pushed heavily against Boucher's rickety writing-table.

Boucher ran a small and flexible variety show, extraordinary only for its adaptability. He transported performers, one publicity-man and a secretary. He did not carry tents or properties. If his employees needed properties, they shifted for themselves. They could play in an open-air arena, an auditorium or a barn. This time it was a barn, and Boucher's office was in a hayloft, from which the hay had been only partially cleared.

Although the stairway which led to it was a ladder, Boucher had given himself a cozy homelike feeling by hanging on the wall his mother's picture, a mirror and a card in water-colors which read:

Oh, Home is where I hang my hat
And Home is where the heart is
None e'er spoke truer word than that
Not statesmen, saints, or martyrs.

It was this card at which Pacho, the lanky visitor, now was staring. Boucher said impatiently:

"Well, go on. I'm a busy man."

"I'm a knife-thrower," said Pacho. "I throw knives. I don't talk. You watch."

He stepped back and straightened. He was even taller than he had seemed. His body arched gracefully backward as he unbuttoned his coat and laid bare a belt on which were holstered twenty knives.

Boucher opened his mouth, but Pacho said:

"Don't you talk. You just watch Pacho the knife-wizard put on a free show. How'd you like an extra frame around the picture of that nice old lady there, now?"

"That's Mamma," said Boucher, almost lifting his great weight from the chair in his anxiety. "If you hurt her any, I'll—"

"Keep your shirt on," Pacho said in a tone of authority. Immediately knives began to fly from his hands, so rapidly that neither hand nor knife could be seen to move.

Accurately, marvelously, spikes grew abruptly from the wall, framing the old lady's photograph in a quavering cylinder of knives. Boucher stared, mouth open, but at intervals, at the impact of every third or fourth knife against the wall, he grunted.

When the photograph was completely framed, Pacho stood back, and squinting one eye, looked at his work. Boucher said: "That's pretty good. Maybe I'll hire you, at that. I gotta see the other one first." He took a swig from a bottle on the table before him.

Pacho had never in all his life executed a gesture that was not meant to be dramatic. Now he bent over into a crouch, and crooked his fingers as if they were claws. He looked as if he were a tiger with designs on Boucher's fat body.

"The other one?" he asked. "What other one?"

Boucher looked up, knitting his brows.

"If you gotta know," he said, and added belligerently, "if it's any of your business, Poppy Schenk had two fellows in mind when he quit this job. I guess you're one, but there's another."

Pacho stood up, his anxiety lost for the moment in his interest in professional gossip.

"Tell me," he said, and his voice was wheedling, "what made Poppy quit? He liked the game."

Resentfully, Boucher answered him. He was a big man with a head and a bellow like an ox, but he was easily bullied. Unfortunately, he had a respect for Art. He answered: "Poppy threw a knife into his assistant's cheek. It made a queer squnchy noise. He couldn't get it out of his head. Just had to quit."

Pacho wrinkled up his face. Now he became contemptuous, even bitter.

"Poppy never had the soul of a knife-thrower," he said. "Too much noives. Now, me, I'd never hit a guy; and if I did, I wouldn't give a damn. All in a day's work, if you know what I mean."

Without waiting for an answer he straightened and swung toward the photograph again, picking another knife from his belt.

"I'll show you a thing or two," he said.

"You watch out for Mamma," said Boucher, again in a panic.

PACHO did not answer. Instead he began to discuss the feat he was about to perform.

"This is the triple flip," he said, "an' it's a number I worked out all for myself. Good advertising, if you know what I mean. Now I'm gonna throw this knife," (he shook it by the blade), "so that it turns," (his voice became loud and impersonal as if he were talking

from the stage), "turns and flips three consecutive times, and then describes a semicircle, landing, in a practically vertical position, immediately above the top row!"

As he uttered the word *"row,"* the knife flew from his hand; and Boucher leaned forward with a gasp.

For the knife, exactly as if it had heard Pacho's words and were obeying instructions, revolved in air slowly, almost deliberately; and at the end of each turn, it gave a willful, coquettish flip. And then, after the third turn, it shot forward abruptly, describing, as he had prophesied, a half-circle, to land, very nearly vertically, at the top of the circle of knives surrounding the Lady Boucher's photograph. In spite of himself Boucher said:

"Jeest, that was good!"

Pacho bowed modestly.

"Spanish, aint you?" asked Boucher.

"Hell, no. Irish."

"But your name's Pacho."

"Ever hear of an Irish knife-thrower?" Pacho asked patronizingly. "Name's Pacho O'Brien, but I dropped the last name. Bad business."

"Uh-huh," said Boucher, realizing suddenly that this revelation had made him lose some of his respect for Pacho. "Let's see you do it again. I'll bet you can't do it every time."

"Oh, can't I?"

Proud in his anger, he plucked another knife from his belt. He wrinkled his nose at Boucher, and looked him up and down carefully. Embarrassed, Boucher swigged again at the bottle.

"Now watch careful," said Pacho.

Once more the knife slid from his hand, and executed the same antics in air, this time to land at the bottom of the picture.

BOTH were so intent on watching the acrobatics of the knife, that they did not notice the door opening behind them, or the man who entered and stood leaning against the wall, grimacing and biting his lip. This man was broad, but extremely short. To look at his mild, slightly ugly face, one would not have guessed that he was lithe and muscular; nor to hear his weak, almost feminine voice, could one have guessed the depths of stubbornness hidden in his bitter soul.

It was this voice, querulous but almost venomous, which surprised the other two out of their admiring attention on the knife.

"Showing off, as always, Pacho," said the little man, "and with my trick too! Why don't you get something of your own?"

Automatically Pacho's fists clenched by his sides, and he swung about quickly. Boucher swung about too, but controlled his surprise enough to take a swig from the bottle.

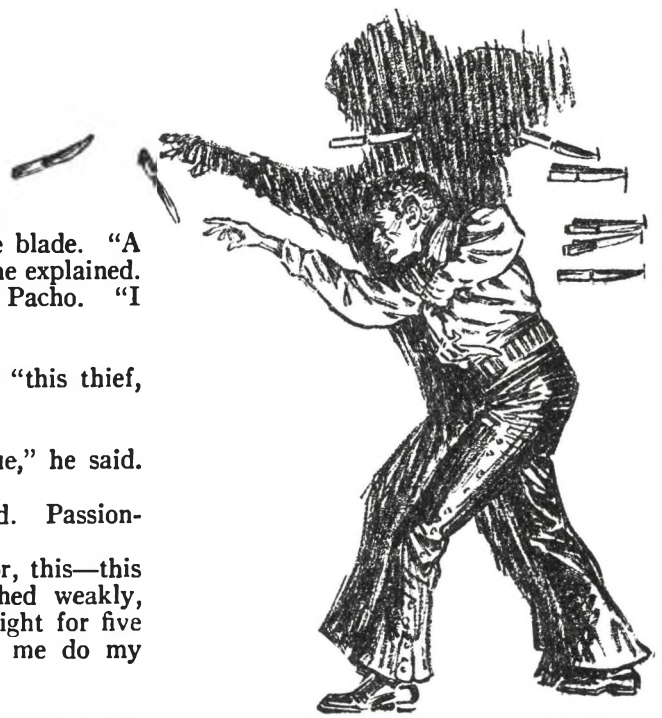
Pacho spoke, his words huskily unintelligible:

"Damn you, Sancho, do you always have to show up?"

"Who's got a better right?" asked Sancho, equally belligerent. He took another step forward, his chubby head thrust forward like a turkey cock's, back arched like a cat's, nostrils distended like an angry mule's.

"You cheap thief," he said, simply, "you're sore because I came in here and caught you showin' off my trick!" He turned to Boucher, who still sat at his desk staring unhappily at these two madmen. "Listen here, Mister," Sancho said, "they was once only one man who could do that there triple flip. That was me. I worked it out all by myself." For a moment he lost himself in the glory of his accomplishment, and smiled gently and happily. "It's a little flip o' the wrist," he said, *"and* a twitch o' the fingers. No good without the twitch. Look—" He too opened his buttoned coat and revealed a beltful of knives. He

"This," said Pacho, "is the halo you'll never have." And— "This," replied Sancho, "is because you give me a pain in the neck; this is because—"



took one in his hand by the blade. "A flip o' the wrist like this—" he explained.

"Come out of it," said Pacho. "I showed him already."

Sancho swung on Boucher.

"Listen, Mister," he said, "this thief, this robber, this bandit—"

Boucher spoke soothingly.

"Better watch your tongue," he said. "It aint safe."

But Sancho paid no heed. Passionately he continued:

"This pirate, this abductor, this—this—this—plagiarist," he finished weakly, "stood in the wings every night for five consecutive nights watchin' me do my triple flip."

"A lie!" said Pacho.

"It aint. Don't think I didn't recognize your sly, cunning, deceitful face out there. I knew you'd lay claim to my masterpiece. I knew you'd steal away my livelihood. I knew—"

"You aint even proved you can do it yet," claimed Boucher.

"Can't do it?" cried Sancho in a fury. "Can't do it? See here."

He elbowed Pacho aside, threw his coat on the floor and put his hands on his hips. Deftly, these hands flew toward his belt. He was hurling knives from his hip without seeming to take aim. And he hurled them directly at the Lady Boucher's picture.

Boucher was too weak to speak. He saw the knives turn in air, leap toward the photograph and finally come to rest just above those which Pacho had thrown.

"Holy Susan!" he said shakily. He took another drink of wine and wondered how he could decide between these two giants.

But the two knife-throwers were paying no attention to him. For now it was Pacho who fell into a fury. He pointed a long shaking finger down at Sancho.

"You call me a thief," he said. "Me, the honestest knife-thrower since Gomez. You call me a thief, after you've not only stole my triple flip, but also stole my best act, my finale and put it on as your own. You low-life, I'd rather be dead than be you, I would!"

But at this point Sancho could bear no more. Snarling, he leaped directly upward and caught Pacho's shoulders with his hands. He wrapped his fat heavy legs about the thin man's stomach as if he were climbing a pole, and started choking him.

Snorting and coughing, Pacho writhed and tried to shake him off, but Sancho clung. Pacho began to sway like an elephant and clutch at the little man; then Pacho swayed a little too far, lost his balance, and was borne to the ground by Sancho's weight. Together, clawing and punching, they rolled on the floor.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Boucher, his respect increasing for these two fiery men. "Gentlemen, come, come!"

THEY paid no heed. Snarling, punching with fists, poking with elbows, battering with knees, the two continued to battle. At last Boucher decided that something had to be done. He took one last long swig from his bottle, draining it. He made a face over the gritty dregs, coughed and got up. Heavily he walked toward the warriors.

"This business has got to stop!"

The two went on fighting.

"I said," Boucher repeated in a louder voice, "this business has got to stop."

The knife-throwers fought on.

Boucher began to shout. What he said this time had its effect.

"If you don't cut it out, neither of you has a chance for the job!"

Immediately the two broke.

Little Sancho, who was straddling the other, preparing to knock his head against the floor, rose to his knees; Pacho pushed himself upward on his elbow.

"Huh?" asked Sancho.

"You heard me!"

"Yeah," said Sancho. He climbed off his adversary and stood on his feet. Painfully and slowly Pacho sat up, then pushed himself to his feet also. Boucher lumbered back to his desk and sat down with a sigh. The knife-throwers, side by side, followed, and stood before him, heads hanging, like two naughty boys afraid of punishment.

Their attitudes strengthened Boucher, and gave him courage. He raised his face, and it was serene and happy. He had a solution.

"Can I write you boys care of the N.V.A.?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Fine," he said, rubbing his hands. "Fine. I can't make no decision yet. How far are we from the big town?"

"Fifty miles," said Pacho.

"Well,"—Boucher bit his thumb-nail for a moment,—"you'll both hear from me one way or the other by tomorrow night."

The two knife-throwers looked at each other hopelessly. There was a certain veiled fraternity in their eyes. Enemies though they were, they were joining in a mutual exasperation toward the stupidity of any and every producer. Without speaking, they both turned and walked solemnly toward the door, but Boucher rose and touched Sancho on the arm.

"Spanish, aint you?" he asked.

"Hell, no," said Sancho with a sneer. "Me name's Mulligan."

IT was unfortunate for both knife-throwers that the accord did not last until they had climbed down the ladder from Boucher's loft. It was more unfortunate that Miss Minnie Sabin, Boucher's secretary, happened to be returning from lunch at the very moment that they resumed hostilities. It was catastrophic that she was by no means an ordinary stenographer. There was a girl with imagination.

For when Pacho turned about and pushed Sancho in the face, thus losing his balance and catapulting both of them on top of the innocent Miss Sabin, she began immediately to plan revenge.

All three picked themselves up out of the sawdust, hay and refuse.

"What are you gentlemen doing, falling on me?" asked Miss Sabin coldly.

"This guy says he invented the triple flip—" began Sancho.

"Really?" said Miss Sabin.

She turned from the two knife-throwers, climbing the ladder as if it were a flight of marble stairs. With one hand she clutched the ladder; with the other she dusted off her dress. She seemed calm and unconcerned, but her heart cried out for vengeance. She walked into the loft, —which called itself an office,—her exterior fairly well cleansed, but her mind heavy with anger.

"See a couple of crazy knife-throwers around?" asked Boucher.

"No," said Miss Minnie, biting a disgusted lip. "I didn't see no knife-throwers. What'd they look like?"

"Doesn't matter," said Boucher, rising painfully to his feet. "Take a letter."

HE stretched, and paced the floor heavily, dictating: "'Dear Sir: You are hired, I am glad to say, and you are to be at the north entrance to the building you visited on Monday next at ten o'clock. Bring your knives and just walk in, unless you have properties. We haven't got space for dressing-rooms.'"

He heaved a sigh.

"Now take another letter," he said. "'Dear Sir: I regret to say that we have made other arrangements and will not be able to use your services.'" He scratched his head. "Tell you, Miss Sabin," he said, "I wanna send one of these to Pacho O'Brien, an' one to Sancho Mulligan. They're both at the N.V.A. I don't give a damn which one gets which. Just send one to each. O.K.?"

"Certainly," said Miss Minnie.

"And now," said Boucher, "I'm goin' out for a while. Been workin' hard this mornin'. See you later, Miss Sabin."

"Sure," said Minnie. . . .

And so, the weary Friday, Saturday and Sunday passed, and at last it became Monday. Pacho O'Brien walked into the north entrance. In its congested wings he discovered acrobats, clowns, an operatic singer, trapezists, trained animals, an Italian comedy pair, and a female impersonator.

Apart, superior, unconcerned, he stood awaiting his call. The acrobats flexed their arms uneasily. The clowns looked gloomy. The operatic singer swallowed hard, and attempted, now and then, a

squeaky and uncertain scale. Pacho was calm; occasionally he fingered the knives at his waist, and was pleased to observe that the female impersonator fingered his curls with less assurance.

The quick-change artist was on the stage. Pacho did not watch him. He was to be next, and when he heard flutters of applause, he swelled to think of the thunder which awaited him.

"Noivous?" asked the lady acrobat, in a friendly voice.

She could do with her body what Pacho could only do with a knife—yet he was condescending when he asked: "And why?"

The lady acrobat fled, and the stage manager raised his voice:

"Knife-thrower! Knife-thrower!"

Preening himself, swelling his chest, Pacho removed his coat. Under it was a silk shirt with flaring sleeves partly covered by a black satin vest. Around his waist was the usual beltful of knives.

Head in air, with long dignified strides, he glided onto the stage. It creaked under him. With a superior eye, he glanced at the audience. It was a full house, benches crowded, people standing at the back. He tossed his head and stared at the ceiling. Then, as he paraded down the stage, he collided with something! It was another man!

Angry, humiliated, he stepped back and looked down at the interloper. Then his face grew purple with disgust.

He was looking into the infuriated face of Sancho Mulligan.

"What the hell are you doing here?" asked Sancho, backing away.

Pacho was backing away also. In his frenzy he forgot the audience, forgot that the curtain was up, forgot that he had a job to hold. He shouted:

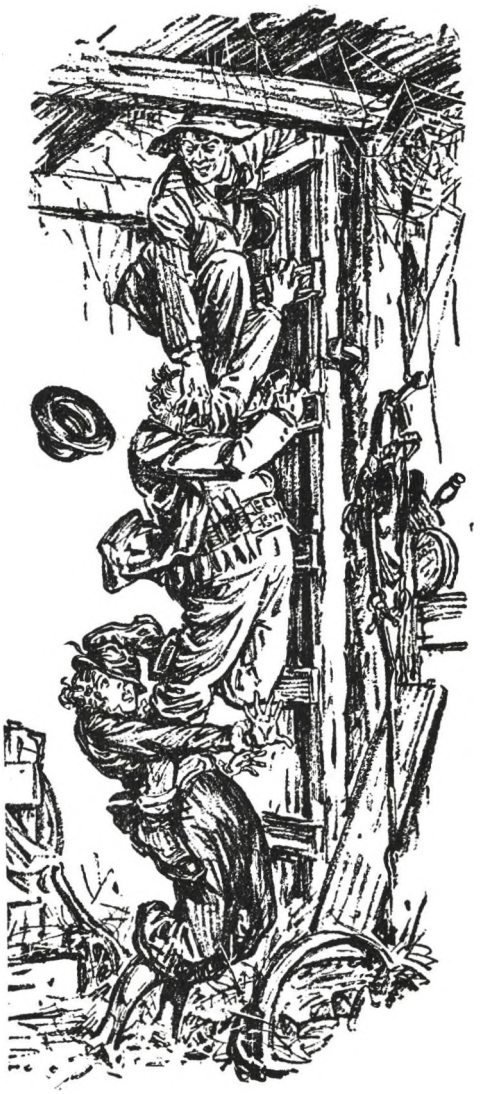
"I was hired here. This is my job. Who let you in?"

Sancho's fat face became tranquil and resigned. His smile became patient, almost angelic. He said:

"I aint gonna speak no more. I'm just goin' on with my act."

THE two were on opposite sides of the stage now, facing each other. Pacho was in a crouching position, tiger-like; but somehow the irascible Sancho stood as if crucified, arms apart, a faint hopeless smile on his face, as if he had borne so much that he could die now without the ability to grow angry.

"Damn!" said Pacho suddenly. "I'll show you."



Pacho pushed Sancho in the face, catapulting both of them on the innocent Miss Sabin.

So quickly that none could see the movement of his hands, he sent three knives flying from his belt. Swiftly they sped through the air, and struck, almost simultaneously, against the far wall; one above Sancho's head, the others beside his either elbow.

This was too much for Sancho. The little man leaped forward, chin pushed forward in anger.

"That's your game!" he screeched. "I always knew you was treacherous an' low; I always knew you was disgustin' and untrustworthy; but I didn't know you was low enough to insult your profession. I don't care about me personal, but to put a feller-artist in the position of an assistant, of—"

Pacho made to start forward, but before he could move, a knife flew from Sancho's belt and pinned him to the wall by his sleeve. He tore himself loose. Another whizzing knife caught the slack of his pants.

"Two can play at that game," said Sancho.

Cursing, Pacho pulled the two knives from the wall; and standing on his toes, poised like a bullfighter, hurled them at the little man.

THE audience, the forgotten audience, gasped as the knives sped toward Sancho, then tittered in relief as they settled themselves neatly in the soles of Sancho's shoes.

"Listen, cheap thief," Sancho shouted. "Tell you what we'll do."

"What'll we do, liar?"

"We'll duel," said Sancho. "You back up against that wall, an' I'll back up against this. Then we'll do our stuff. First one to hit the other agrees to get out of this racket. They aint room for us both."

"O.K.," said Pacho. "This is the end of you."

And by that, he did not mean that Sancho would be hit. In fact, to win the contest he had to be hit himself. But he was going to show up his enemy—and what was a punctured stomach or a slit throat to that?

"Twenty knives apiece," said Pacho. "Ready!"

"This," said Sancho, "is for stealin' my job." A knife whizzed through the air, above Pacho's head, severing a lock of hair.

"This," Pacho replied, "is the halo you'll never have." And three knives described a glittering semicircle over Sancho's head.

"This," Sancho said, "is because you kicked me when we was on the floor; this is because you crabbed my game wit' that gal; this is because you give me a pain in the neck; this—"

He was outlining, neatly and accurately, Pacho's body on the wall.

Pacho took another tack.

"Here's the angel wings you'll never feel—" Two little wings sprouted by Sancho's shoulders. "This is sergeants' epaulets, because y'r so warlike. Here's a pistol-holster so you can go shootin' from ambush. Here's spurs—" With economy of knives, but some artistry, he was dressing Sancho in effigy.

"And this," Sancho growled at last, "is because you stole my triple flip, an' been makin' a livin' on my efforts."

They collided in the middle of the stage, hitting and clawing at each other. Boucher found them rolling locked in murderous embrace. He hailed two stage hands. "Separate 'em," he said—and the muscular overalled men dragged them apart, still struggling.

The audience was near horror. The grunt that came from it was blood-curdling. The knife that Sancho threw turned three times in air, aimed, it seemed, for Pacho's heart. Pacho did not move.

The knife spurted forward in a semi-circle and landed just beneath the tall man's armpit. There was a loud sigh of relief, and a faint flutter of applause; but Pacho was speaking:

"All right. Just so the heavenly saints won't be fooled by your lyin' ways, I'm gonna give you a couple o' horns, stickin' right up through your halo."

HE took a knife in each hand, and flipped them simultaneously. Viciously, like angry birds, they spun in air, just as Sancho's knife had done; then they sped forward as if to pick out Sancho's eyes, but instead they soared—then fell into the wall, one above each of Sancho's pudgy ears.

Both men reached for their belts. There were no more knives.

The riotous applause, shrieks, whistles from the audience were nothing but an annoyance to the two gladiators. They rushed from the walls, leaving neat caricatures of themselves behind them, and collided in the middle of the stage, hitting and clawing at each other.

Boucher's voice from the wings called: "Curtain!"

The curtain fell as Sancho leaped high toward Pacho's throat. The applause continued for five minutes.

BOUCHER found them on the floor, rolling, locked in murderous embrace. He did not speak to them; instead, he hailed two stage hands.

"Separate 'em," he said.

The two muscular overalled men dragged them apart, still struggling.

"Gents," said Boucher, "I want to congratulate you. That there was genius."

The two warriors seated on the floor looked up groggily.

"What was genius?" asked Pacho, confused.

"Your act, of course. If you can put it on every night like that, you're made men. You're in the big jack."

Pacho and Sancho, anger lost in astonishment, exchanged glances and almost smiled.

"Already," Boucher went on, "my boy is writin' a piece of copy about the two battlin', knife-throwin' Spaniards."

"Irishmen," said Sancho.

"Spaniards," said Boucher. "Now get off the stage and make room for the trained goats."

In the wings the two looked at each other sheepishly, uncertain how to effect an armistice. It was Pacho who had the idea.

"If we have a good fight every night, maybe we can get along the rest of the time," he said.

Sancho nodded thoughtfully; then he made the greatest concession of his life.

"You didn't do a bad job with the knives, this evenin'," he said.

"Shake," said Pacho. Then, hesitating, "Say, how did you happen to be here tonight?"

Sancho produced a letter. It was identical with Pacho's. Each had been hired. Each letter was signed: *"Minnie Sabin, Sec'y to Mr. Boucher."*

"Guess we aint got no cause to be sore after what has happened," said Sancho. "We're partners now, aint we?"

"Yeah."

Sancho hesitated, then forged ahead.

"Then would you mind tellin' me where you really did get the triple flip?"

"Well," said Pacho, "now we're pals—well, if you wanna know, I stole it off'n Poppy Schenk."

"I thought so," said Sancho. "So did I."

ARMS and MEN

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Harvé Stein

It was a stirring sight to see that great company of knights come spurring down upon us.

VIII

The Conquering Crossbow

All down the ages, our weapons have saved our lives—or lost them; and these tools of battle have therefore shared mankind's most exciting moments. This latest story of a remarkable series shows how a mechanical contrivance, primitive though it was, made a common soldier the equal of an armored knight.

RUBBING his hands, Martin Burnside swung his desk chair around. He surveyed me over his spectacles, then reached for his pipe. There was an exultant and eager glitter in his eye that told its own story.

"Sit down, sit down; you're just in time," he exclaimed. "Do you know where the Genoese got the weapon they made famous—the crossbow?"

I dropped into a chair. Something, evidently, was up.

Martin Burnside was a fanatic on the question of arms and armor. He devoted his whole life and fortune to the hobby. He was, to use a popular expression, nuts about it.

"Well, I've always supposed they invented the crossbow," I rejoined warily. "One hears of them all through the Middle Ages as the chief exponent of that weapon."

"And of Edison as the chief exponent of electricity; but he didn't invent it," snapped Martin. Plainly, he thought it a very neat come-back. It was. "Did the story of the Grand Company of Catalans ever penetrate through your alleged stratum of education?"

I was not sure, at the moment, whether Catalans referred to a species of shellfish or some branch of the NRA, and admitted it. Martin glowered at me.

"I thought as much! Catalans, my

boy, are a variety of Spaniard; they come from Catalonia. So you never heard of the Grand Company, eh? It's one of the greatest, most heroically incredible sagas of all history. Before the rise of the Genoese sea-power, the Catalans were the prime seamen of the Mediterranean. And they put a quietus on Latin chivalry in the east, as the English did in the west; but with the crossbow."

"And the Genoese," I put in brightly, "took the crossbow from them and developed it, as the English took the long bow from the Welsh?"

"Correct." Martin Burnside struck a match and held it to his pipe. "I presume you are aware that over in Spain, since they kicked out Alfonso, they've pillaged churches and castles and appropriated things right and left?"

"They've done it sporadically for the past hundred years," I assented.

"Well, here's a tragedy for you,"—and Martin really groaned. "You know, my old friend Perkins is over there; he has something to do with the National City branch bank, in Barcelona. I got a package from him, with a brief letter—and what do you think? The Spinola collection of arms and armor, an ancient and famous one, was looted. Perkins got the first crack at it. And what do you think he bought for me?"

"Old Milanese armor?" I guessed, and Martin groaned again.

"No. Good Lord, no! A book and a crossbow. Can you imagine that? A book! A *book!* And a crossbow."

"Where is it, and why?" I demanded.

"Well,"—and Martin conquered his emotion at thought of the lost chances at old armor,—"the book is a Catalan manuscript on vellum, with a modern Spanish translation. It's devilish interesting in itself." He started to rummage around his desk. Then he broke off abruptly. He assumed a lecturer's air and turned to me impressively.

"YOU know, at the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, Greece was a funny place!"

"It still is, by all accounts."

"No levity, confound you! Athens and the Morea were occupied by French and Italian chivalry, from the finest families. They had a whole feudal aristocracy, with the Duke of Athens at the head of the works. Just like things in France at the same time, only more so—like professional Southerners up North, if you get me. The Greeks occupied Constantinople; the Turks were over in Asia Minor; and the Genoese were the big shots in trading and fighting. Get the picture?"

I nodded, and he went on:

"All right. Some genius got a bunch of Catalans together and took 'em to Constantinople to fight for him. They called themselves the Grand Company. The Genoese double-crossed them, and they simply cleaned up on the Genoese by land and sea. The Greek emperor tried the same trick, and they cleaned up on him and did it right. They were hired mercenaries, and if anyone met them on the level, they played the game. But darned few square-shooters existed in those days, I guess. The Catalan company was far from home; they could fight like hell; and they carried their women and children along. So, after licking everyone in sight, they settled down at Gallipoli.

"And for seven years they stayed there, fighting all hands," pursued Martin Burnside, his eye kindling. "They ravaged and desolated the whole country, plundered cities, wiped it bare. Then Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens, hired the bunch to come down and help him get back his shaky dukedom. And what happened?"

I leaned back wearily. "All right, I'll bite. What happened?"

"Well, he hired them for six months, but paid only for two months. In the six months, they conquered thirty castles and put his duchy in good shape. Boy, they were fighters! And there was a reason; it's in the story. The manuscript opens right there, when the six months were up and they tried to collect their pay from the duke. Most of their original leaders were dead or gone home, and these roughnecks had elected new ones."

He flopped out a soggy old vellum book written in Catalan, with a neatly typed script in Spanish. The crossbow, he explained, had not yet arrived from Spain. I knew what he was after. He wanted me to put the story into English.

THAT was a job. Those Catalans had singular expressions. Life in those days was a queer thing, a bloody thing, and a hard thing. The story was written in the first person; and for this reason, perhaps, it had a strange grip on reality.

I found myself actually in the place of this En Berenguer, or Don Berenguer. I was thinking with him, traveling with him, looking at things as he looked at them. Before I had waded deeply through the yarn, I found myself identified with this boy of eighteen who was full man, and who went with his uncle En Roger Deslaur from the camp of the Company to the castle of Penteli. . . .

As I write, I can see En Roger now as we stood before the dais where the lords and ladies sat above the salt. Full six foot three was En Roger, in a gleaming coat of chain mail he had won from a Genoese. . . . I had another from a Saracen slain at Negropont. They looked at us—Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens, a smoothly smiling man; the Bastard of Romania, a knight who excelled all others at jousting; Ser Angelo of Verona, lord of this castle, and other knights. The ladies, too, but chiefly Agnes de la Roche, Countess of Achaia, whose lord was then in Athens. She was a slim fair woman with long braids of golden hair and proud eyes, of the house of Montferrat.

As I met her eyes, I knew that for me no other woman existed.

NOW En Roger, my uncle and the elected captain of the Grand Company, spoke forth.

"My Lord Duke, you contracted with the Company for six months' service. We have given it. We have taken thirty castles and many towns for you. You have paid us for two months, no more; the contract was four onzas per month for each horseman, and one onza for each man afoot, a covenant bound by written letters. We have our wives and families to support. Your neighbors have made peace. For the last time, the Company demands payment."

The Duke smiled at us. "For the last time!" he repeated. "Look you, En Roger: I have chosen five hundred of your best men as my own company; I have given them lands and homes. That is enough. The rest of you can get out, or stay on the gallows."

"With the promised pay, or without it?" asked my uncle En Roger.

The Duke burst into laughter. "As you are, good Catalan! As you are."

"As we are is not as we shall be," said I in anger. Then they all turned their eyes to me; and the Bastard of Romania took up the word.

"Ha, cockerel! A big voice for beardless chin," said he in good humor. "Tell me something. I have heard much of your Grand Company and its bowmen. Are you one?"

"I am," was my curt word.

He nodded thoughtfully.

"And is it true that you have certain rules and discipline for your bowmen?"

The Lady Agnes knew it was no jest. She demanded that I be whipped for my insolence, and Duke Walter summoned men to strip and hold me.

"It is true," said I, mollified by his tone. "No Catalan is considered a master bowman until he knows how to make everything, from beginning to end, of what pertains to a crossbow. He carries his tools in a box—as it were, a traveling workshop. He must be able to renovate a crossbow, know how to put it together, how to make light darts and heavy bolts, how to feather them, how to twist and tie the string. And when he has become master of all this lore, he then learns how to aim at a mark, with elevation and wind-allowance. And then he is set to fight naked against men armed in mail, with a sword alone, until he learns all dexterity."

"And if he learns it not?" asked Duke Walter.

"Then he dies, and another more worthy to belong to the Company replaces him."

"I have heard," said the Countess Agnes, "that you men are not Christians, and that you have Saracen allies."

"Perhaps we are better Christians than some," I replied hotly, "since we hold that Christ and the saints fight with us and hear our prayers. It is true that our almogavars are footmen of Saracen blood, men-at-arms and not bowmen; it is true that we have eighteen hundred Turkish cavalry with the Company. These are all very honorable men, and the almogavars are Christians also."

AT this moment, into the hall came the Lord of Salona, and with him his wife, a most beautiful lady. At sight of her I saw the eyes of my uncle En Roger quicken, and his breath came faster. These two came to the dais, and the Lord of Salona whispered to Duke Walter, who clapped his thigh with joy. Then, turning, the Lord of Salona looked at my uncle En Roger, and spat an oath at him.

"Homeless vagrant! You'll get your pay soon enough, you and your ragged tramps! Twenty thousand men are gathering, and knights are coming from the whole duchy and the principalities of the Morea, and from Thessaly. You base-born churls have long enough dis-

"Very well, Lord of Salona," said my uncle En Roger. "When I sit in your castle, and your lady is my lady, you will look up from the gates of hell and remember your words."

graced the world! Were I the Duke, you'd hang at the castle gate."

"The Grand Company would have another captain tomorrow," said my uncle En Roger, and laughed a little. "Very well, Lord of Salona. When I sit in your castle, and your lady is my lady, you will look up from the gates of hell and remember your words."

At this, there was great laughter among the lords and ladies, and the Bastard of Romania crooked his finger at me.

"And you, cockerel? Hast picked a castle and lady also?"

"That I have," said I. "Yonder lady, the Countess of Achaia, and her castle, which I helped to recapture last year."

At this laughter arose, but the Lady Agnes met my eyes and knew it was no jest. Anger fell upon her. She demanded that I be whipped for my insolence, and the laughter took a cruel turn. Duke Walter summoned men-at-arms to strip and hold me, and brought a scullion from the kitchen to lay on a whip.

My uncle En Roger said nothing, and looked on. I held my peace and submitted, for I had no weapons. Had I fought, they would have slain us both. When the whip had brought blood from my shoulders, the Countess of Achaia struck me in the face—and she was the most beautiful woman upon this earth.

"That for your insolence, varlet!" said she; and Duke Walter commanded that we be dismissed. My uncle drew the mail-shirt on over my hurts, and we went forth and rode away. Only then did he break his silence.

"So this is chivalry and honor among the Franks!" he said grimly. "Well I know, En Berenguer, that you spoke not in jest when you desired that lady."

"Nor you," said I, "when you spoke to the Lord of Salona."

"As to that," he replied, "time will tell."

IT was two days before we regained the camp of the Grand Company. On the way, we fell in with a messenger, sent by those of the Company whom the Duke of Athens had picked for his service. They warned us that a great army was gathering to fall upon us, and that all the knighthood were gathering likewise, every man of them with all their forces. These Catalans who had taken an oath to Duke Walter could not break their oaths to him, but they sent to warn us.

So we brought this word to the Grand Company, who then were camped near Thebes.

Now there were three hundred of us who were knights in the Grand Company, and twelve hundred unmounted, who were all men of Catalonia and Aragon; and some hundred almogavars and eighteen hundred Turkish horse. With us were our women and children,

and all the possessions we had, which were many. So far had we raided and looted, that every man of the Company had proof mail or a good chain shirt, not to mention slaves and gold and other things.

A meeting of the council was held, and other messengers came in with word of the force that Duke Walter was gathering against us. Every man in the whole duchy was pressed into service, not the knights and lords alone, but the serfs and men-at-arms to the last man. Thanks to the battles we had won for him, Duke Walter was at peace with all his neighbors, and many of them sent knights to aid him. His intent now was to rid the world of the Grand Company and take all that we had, which was well worth the taking, for we had despoiled many cities around Byzantium.

SO the council, of which I was one, held solemn meeting, and when mass had been heard, we debated what to do. Three plans lay before us.

We might march out of the duchy and establish ourselves in some place like Salonica and hold it, as we had done for the past seven years at Gallipoli. Thus we would evade the Duke of Athens altogether, although this would be sore hurt to our pride.

We might seize upon Athens or some other of his cities, and war against him. Or last, we might await his force in open battle. The choice was ours, and it was bitter choice, for five hundred of our best knights and men, our very brethren, were now under his standard and marching against us.

The talk lasted long, and none could decide. Then En Pedro de Estenza rose.

"Brethren," said he, "you all know that this is not the greatest peril that has ever befallen the Company. Think back to the time when in Constantinople the emperor slew by treachery our leader En Berenguer, and three hundred of us, and a thousand almogavars; how upon one day he had killed our admiral En Ferran, with all the Catalans and Aragonese in the city; how he massacred our messengers and gathered a host to destroy every man of us. What did we do then?

"We scuttled our ships and trusted in God. We slew twenty thousand Greeks. We took their cities and looted them. We slew the force of Genoese who came against us, and we slew all the forces of Thessaly, those wild pagans. We crossed into Anatolia and slew there. Now I say to you, my brethren, that we have a leader En Roger, and my voice is to leave all decision in his hands. —En Roger, what desire you most in the world?"

Then En Roger, my uncle, stood up, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"My chief desire, brethren," he said, "is to take the Lady of Salona and all the duchy of Athens with her. But this may not be while the Frankish dukes and lords and knights are alive; so it were better to kill them all in the beginning."

Now there was laughter, and a storm of voices arose; but my uncle En Roger bade them be quiet. He was no longer in jesting humor.

"Listen to me, brethren: They are gathering themselves together, every man of them; every lord and knight from near and far. Thus it will be easy for us to slay every man of them and take their wives and castles and lands for ourselves. They trust in mail and horse and spear and arrow, but we trust in the crossbow. It is my word that we sing the hymn of the blessed St. Peter, raise the banner of the Lord King of Aragon and that of St. George, and take post to meet these enemies."

So all of us sang the hymn, and the entire Company joined in the singing, responding with tears in their eyes, while the eighteen hundred Turkish horse looked on and wondered at us. Then the matter was left in the hand of my uncle En Roger, who rode away, and was gone for three days, to find a spot in which to await the enemy.

DURING this time I thought often of the beauteous Countess of Achaia, and the fine castle her lord held in fee from the duke. It was a castle all of stone, built like the castles in France, and the town around it was very fair to see, and the lands were rich and well peopled. When I tell you that Duke Walter could raise up twenty thousand armed men against us out of his duchy, you will see that men did not lack in that day, for it was before the Black Death came to sweep away whole peoples and lay waste everything.

Word came from En Roger to march, with a guide he sent. So we gathered our spoil and wives and children, and marched forth to a beautiful plain near Thebes, where En Roger met us. This was a great plain by the river Cephissos, very level and well-suited to horses, with

higher ground at one side. There En Roger posted the Turkish horse, but the Company he led to a spot where the river lay on one hand, and on the other some swampy ground. In front was boggy marsh, but so well sprouted over with the new spring grass that it looked like most firm ground. Here we camped to await the foe.

WE kept out good and worthy scouts, you may be sure, and our brethren who served the Duke sent word that it had been commanded to slay every man of us and give over our wives and children to be serfs.

This was great and sad news, for never had it been heard of that Christian men should give no quarter to other Christians but destroy them utterly. It is so one should treat pagans and all heathen; but for noble knights and lords so to treat brethren in the faith has not happened in the world.

So now En Roger, my uncle, called the council together, and this matter was talked over. And another matter arose, which was that it might be most perilous for us to attempt to stand against knights and esquires and trained chivalry, with our weapons.

"Better," said one, "to abandon our crossbows and take to the armor and mail, which we have in great store, and hammers wherewith to break armor, and swords. At all this work, God wot, we are well skilled. Our bolts are well enough at sea, and well enough to deal with Greeks and Saracens, but these mailed knights can ride us down ere we can reload."

En Roger smiled, at this.

"So it may be, but I deem otherwise," said he shrewdly. "My intent is to post the Company in two ranks, that one may fire while the other reloads. As to armor, we know well enough that at close quarters an iron-shod bolt can go through any corselet, or any two."

"True," said another. "Yet close quarters may be too close, En Roger. Lances are long; and once let those knights get among us, once let our ranks be broken, and we are lost men."

"We are lost men in any case," said En Roger with some anger, "and I am giving orders here, so let the matter be ended. And now let us discuss this question of no quarter, and of selling our families as serfs and slaves."

On this point we debated long, and finally decided that the sin in this matter would lie, not with us, but with those noble lords who began it. So we resolved and issued notice to all the Company, to give no quarter and take no prisoners, save for one knight of Roussilon and Count Boniface of Negropont, who were greatly beloved by the Company. Now it became certain that, save one knight left in Athens with sickness, every man in the duchy was marching against us, for all men desired greatly to have the plundering of the Company.

While we waited, we provided the women with arms, and ourselves with a mighty store of heavy quarrels, well shod with pointed iron for the piercing of mail. The almogavars also we armed with crossbows, but with the Turkish horsemen we could do nothing. They were suspicious of all Christians, even of us their allies, and thought some plot was afoot for their own destruction, so they held aloof. And this was sore ruth to us; but as you shall see, God was not without purpose in this matter.

It was the day before Lent began* when Walter de Brienne and all his host came marching down upon the plain before us, very early in the morning.

OVER twenty thousand men marched in companies, all footmen, filling the whole plain and spreading over it like an armed wave. In their midst were full seven hundred knights and lords, riding to the sound of drums and music and songs, for they had come as to a feast.

Most of these lords we knew well, because we had been fighting beside them during six whole months. There rode Duke Walter and the Bastard of Romania, Jean de la Roche, the Count of Achaia, the lord of St. Omer, Ser Angelo of Verona—to name them all were too long a tale. The greatest French and Italian lords from all the baronies of the whole land were here, and when we beheld this vast array, it seemed to us that we had perhaps chosen the worser part.

The Duke halted his array, and there was some confusion; and this is what took place. The five hundred Catalans whom he had chosen to serve him sent their leader to the Duke, and said:

"Lord, our brothers are here, whom you wish to destroy utterly, which is a great sin. Therefore we tell you that we wish to go and die with them. So we defy you and take our discharge from your service."

*March 15, 1311 A.D.

At this, the Duke laughed right heartily.

"Go, then, and bad luck go with you!" he rejoined. "It is well enough that you should die with the others."

So those five hundred who were our brethren pressed on afoot to join us, and no man hindered them. It was thought very honorable in them to desire to die beside us, and I saw the Bastard of Romania wave his hand at them as they passed his ranks. He was all in black armor, and the esquire who bore his pennon was also in black. The Count of Achaia, beside him, wore beautiful armor inlaid with gold that had come from Milan; and there in the sunlight you might see the pennons and arms displayed of the greatest houses in France and Italy, even some of England.

The five hundred joined us, coming on foot across the marsh and through the swamp very easily. They embraced us, and we kissed them with right good will. Then there was little time to lose. My uncle En Roger sent out the almogavars, who were to lead the enemy horse across the boggy ground.

I passed the word then through all our ranks that no man was knowingly to send his bolt at the Count of Achaia, for if we came alive out of this affair, I was most anxious to have his suit of armor unspoiled. And I sent up a special petition to St. George, and swore if he would aid me this day, I would within the year make pilgrimage to his shrine in Barcelona and there hang my mail and armor, in thanksgiving. That is to say, the armor I was then wearing, and not that of the Count of Achaia.

Through all the host against us now went a shouting and tumult of cheers, and the Lord of Thebes moved his pennon into the van beside Duke Walter. Our almogavars were light-armed and exceeding fleet of foot, and did their work well. They spread forth and became a most tempting mark, so that the Duke lowered his visor and his spear, and started forward. And behind him came all that splendid array of chivalry, with the intent to strike upon us and let their footmen complete the work. But God frustrated their intent.

THE voice of my uncle, En Roger, lifted above the tumult and the growing thunder of hooves. It was calm and steady, and reached every man of us.

"Not a bolt until they come to the boggy ground, brethren! A man down for every bolt, and let the women take aim at the horses."

We lifted a shout, and our women ranked behind us shouted also. The Turkish horsemen on the hill were stirring uneasily. They began to see now that we had bespoken them in all honor and good faith.

IT was a wondrous and stirring sight to see that great company of knights come spurring down upon us, all of them with pennons and mail and golden spurs, the sunlight striking upon their shields and helms. Fleetly our almogavars ran before them, sprinting for our lines across the boggy ground. Fast behind them came Duke Walter and his knights.

My Lord Duke was in the van of all, and suddenly I saw his horse slow in the boggy ground, and pitch forward. Then I loosed the bolt that was ready, and heard the twang as En Roger loosed his, and suddenly all were loosed, and we were reaching for the bolts stuck in the soft ground before us.

A fearful and wonderful thing happened. Those horses in the van came to the boggy ground and floundered there, so that those behind, unable to stop, piled up behind and on top of them. And there arose a sound like clanging thunder in the air, as the iron quarrels suddenly smote mailed men and horse all together.

Fast as we could loose and wind our strings, we shot. Two lines of us—one shooting, one reloading. The clangor of the smiting shafts driving into armor rose without end, and the women shot at the horses. All across that open expanse arose a wall of horses and dead men; and when the Count of Achaia came within my range, I was most careful to aim at the gorget. My bolt split and spoiled the gorget; but also it slew the man within.

My uncle, En Roger, shouted at us, and we spread forth, leaving the almogavars to slay those knights who lay in their armor. Some of them, indeed, broke through, but these died swiftly; and of the seven hundred, none escaped save that knight of Roussilon and the good Sir Boniface whom I have mentioned.

As for us, the whole Company rushed forward, and the advancing foot soldiers were smitten by our bolts, and saw that all their lords were dead. Then confusion fell upon them, and with sword and dagger we swept onward into their

ranks. These broke before us, and the farther ranks broke, and being weary after an all-night march, those men could not well flee.

We slew them, indeed, until our arms were too weary to lift sword, and even our women were spent with the slaughter. Never in all the history of the Grand Company was there so great a killing—no, not even on the day we smashed the army of the Greek Emperor, for then our numbers had been greater.

It so happened that many companies of these men in desperation bore down upon us when we were very weary, and then they might have irked us sore. But as God ordained it, just then the Turkish horsemen, our allies, struck down upon those companies and scattered them.

Being fresh mounted, and very terrible at killing, those Turkish horsemen slew with their bows and then took to their scimitars, pursuing the fleeing host. So joyous were they at this work that of all the host not one man escaped alive. The plunder was so great that none would believe it who had not seen it.

That night the company prayed Sir Boniface to become Duke of Athens, but this he would in no wise do. So my uncle, En Roger, was made captain of the duchy, and took to wife the Lady of Salona. And the Grand Company divided among themselves all the city of Thebes, all the towns and castles of the whole duchy, and took the great ladies as their wives; or if they had wives already, gave them over to their men. So that there you might see noble and high-born ladies wedded to men unworthy to hold their washbowls.

The armor of the Count of Achaia fitted me very well, and the gold spurs; so according to my vow I very carefully preserved the armor I had worn that day, and laid it aside in the castle until the time came to fulfill my vow and travel to Spain. As for the Lady Agnes, her beauty was no less when we were wedded than it was before. And today the Company rules in that duchy, and there is no man in all Greece to gainsay its wishes.

THERE ended the tale of En Berenguer, he who became Count of Achaia by his own right.

I took it back to the study of my friend Martin Burnside, and so stirred was my imagination, so fantastic was the picture this story had brought me, that I could make no comment upon it. Of its truth, I had satisfied myself very readily, for the chronicle of that same Grand Company may be read to this day in any library. Martin Burnside grinned at me and peered over his spectacles.

"What'd I tell you, huh?" he chirruped blithely. "Got under your skin, didn't it? But I've something here to show you, my boy."

HE opened up a freshly arrived packing-case in one corner. From this he unwrapped a heavy crossbow, black with age. Filthy, rotted, little except its outline to reveal what it once had been, yet it was still solid.

"If you were a good Catalan, now," said Martin, "you might be able to 'renovate' this thing, as En Berenguer phrases it. I told you, I think, that Perkins was sending me this?"

"Yes," I assented, gingerly inspecting the thing. "But I don't see what it's got to do with the story. If it happened to be the same one that our friend shot the Count of Achaia with—then, I grant you, it'd have something on the ball. But it's just a plain crossbow."

"So you think. It, and the book, were in the Spinola collection. Now look at this name—spell it out."

He showed me letters cut in the wood of the stock. Uneven, rough letters, but plain enough to read, even to my eye. *"En Berenguer Estanyol."*

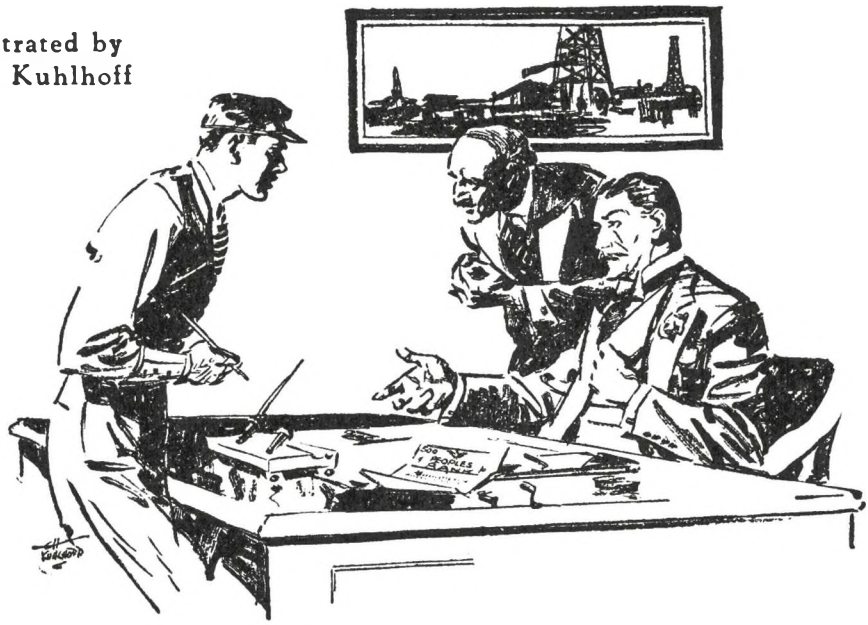
"That proves nothing," I said. "I've been looking up this Catalan stuff. *Berenguer* was a name as common as *John Smith*. We don't know the last name of our chap, anyhow; it wasn't mentioned in the story. So this proves nothing."

Martin Burnside chuckled. "But En Berenguer Estanyol was the last Catalan chief of the Grand Company. He went back to Spain after the Cephissos battle, and left this crossbow there. Probably hung up his arms in a church, as he vowed to do. Then he came out to Greece again, finally dying in Athens. And, my boy, he inherited the duchy of Athens from his uncle, En Roger Deslaur. Now are you satisfied?"

It was all too far away and long ago for me to care a tinker's dam, and I said as much. Just the same, it gave me a thrill to touch that old crossbow—the weapon before which chivalry had died.

Another picturesque story in this remarkable series will appear in the next, the October, issue.

Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff



The Worm Turns

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

A drama of the oil-fields by the author of "A Man Four Square" and, "Oh, You Tex!"

JIMMY SIMPSON borrowed a pair of long office shears from Nan Evans and trimmed the cuffs of his shirt. Meanwhile he watched old Baggs furtively. In case the accusing eye of the chief clerk pounced on him he wanted to appear immersed in figures. Jimmy had acquired the knack of camouflaging his castles in Spain with the manner of brisk business. He tried to look like what Walpole called a go-getter even while his mind was drifting into alien atmospheres.

For Jimmy was a dreamer. As a clerk he was not very efficient. He recognized ruefully that he was not expert even in ducking trouble. In his college days he had known how to run a kick-back through a broken field, but that did not help him to sidestep Baggs when the old boy tackled him.

After the storm he could take refuge in fantasy. For instance: He was the sultan of Never-Was land and his slaves dragged before him the trembling figure of H. K. Baggs. The charge against him was bullying the office force, driving them like slaves, and in general ignoring their feelings as human beings. The sultan was a forceful man, not in the least like the Jimmy Simpson known to the Roger Walpole office force. He gave a slight gesture to his slaves, said, "Six with a bamboo on the bare feet," and passed to more important matters.

The day-dream ended suddenly. Jimmy was snatched back to earth by a rasping voice.

"That balance ready yet, Simpson?"

"Not quite, Mr. Baggs," Jimmy answered with false cheerfulness. "Working on it now."

"Ought to have been done an hour ago," Baggs snapped out curtly. "Can't think what you do with your time—or rather the firm's time."

Jimmy said nothing, but his ears burned. Baggs could always get under his hide by bawling him out before the other clerks. Some day he would tell the old bloomer where to get off. (Another dream, Jimmy knew, not likely to be realized. The trouble with Jimmy's dreams was that they never seemed to translate themselves into actualities.

Still, half a dozen with a bamboo cane, laid on with zip, would cure H. K. of what ailed him.)

The office door had opened and Miss Ethel Walpole was swinging into the drab atmosphere like a peacock into a farmyard. No doubt she had heard the chief clerk's cadging sneer. Miss Walpole was the loveliest bit of lilting grace Jimmy had seen in a blue moon. He had never spoken to her except to say once, "Yes, Miss, he's in." She was the princess of his dreams, absolutely unattainable except when he withdrew into his sultanship.

"Dad in?" the princess now asked, not of Jimmy but of Baggs.

"Yes, Miss Ethel. He's alone in his office."

The sun went into eclipse for Jimmy when the girl disappeared into the inner room. Nan dashed off a line rapidly on her typewriter, ripped out the sheet, and let it drift across the floor to Jimmy. He salvaged it with his foot.

"Never mind, old dear," Nan had written. "Maybe there will be a fire while she is in there and you can save her life."

Jimmy looked at Nan reproachfully. Let her guy him! Some day, by a process of hazy magic, he was going to get hold of a million and initiate a campaign of love-making that would sweep Miss Ethel Walpole from her feet. . . . More dreams. Jimmy groaned mentally. He knew he was not the kind of chap to take the world by the throat and choke a fortune from it.

On her way out Miss Walpole sailed past Jimmy, unaware of his existence.

BAGGS stepped out of the office of the boss. He let his gaze light on Jimmy. There was a gleam of sardonic humor in his small ferret-like eyes.

"Wanted in the office, Simpson."

"Me?" Jimmy asked, a little surprised, a good deal disturbed.

He had no dealings with the boss. All orders came through the office manager.

"I said 'Simpson'," Baggs said sharply.

Jimmy followed him into the inner room.

Roger Walpole was the kind of business man you read about in fiction but do not often meet. He was big and aggressive, with a cold bulbous eye, well-dressed in rather an extreme fashion. Temperamentally he was a bully. His theory of management was that you got more out of subordinates if you snapped the whip. It did not do to let them forget that they might be fired any day.

Now he leaned back in his swivel chair and read a letter, a big fat cigar in his mouth. When he had glanced through it he let himself notice that another piece of furniture, one of the clerks, had come into the room. He stared at Jimmy, still without speaking.

Simpson gulped. A shiver ran down his spine. If the boss would only say, "Off with his head," and be done with it!

What Walpole said at last was, "I suppose you haven't saved a bean."

"No, sir. No—not—"

"Just as I thought. No vision—no eye to the future. You'll never be anything but a twenty-five-dollar clerk."

Jimmy did not correct his figures. It did not seem the time to explain that his salary was twenty-two-fifty.

"I hope so, sir," he said, reaching for a cheerful manner.

"He'll do well enough," Walpole said to the chief clerk.

"I think so, sir," Baggs agreed.

WALPOLE picked up some papers from his desk. He spoke heavily to Jimmy. "These are certificates for five hundred shares of stock in the People's Bank at Amethyst, par value one hundred dollars a share. I am going to sell this stock to you."

"To me?" Jimmie's eyes bulged.

"To you, for ten dollars."

"Ten dollars a share?" Jimmy stammered.

He did not know what it was all about. There was a mistake somewhere. This sounded like one of his dreams. What was the sense of talking to him about buying fifty thousand dollars' worth of bank stock when he had just two half dollars, a quarter, a dime and a car slug in his pocket?

"Ten dollars in all for the five hundred shares," the heavy voice boomed. "The ten dollars will be deducted from your weekly salary."

"I—don't quite understand, sir."

"Not necessary you should. Take it or leave it." Walpole slapped the stock certificates down on the edge of the desk. "Are you buying this stock for ten dollars or aren't you?"

Astonished and confused though he was, Jimmy knew the obvious answer expected of him was yes. "I guess I am, Mr. Walpole—if you say so."

"Of your own free will—a *bona-fide* purchase?"

"Yes sir."

"You haven't ten dollars with you, I presume?" Walpole asked, by an afterthought.

"No sir. Not ten."

"Mr. Baggs, do you want to lend Simpkins ten dollars?"

"Simpson," Jimmy mentioned mildly.

Baggs produced ten dollars and handed it to Jimmy, who passed it to Walpole.

"The stock is yours, Simpkins, and the ten dollars is mine," Walpole said, and added ironically: "Hope you make a million on the deal."

"Thank you, sir."

"Have the stock transferred to Simpkins, Baggs," the boss directed. "Then turn it over to him."

"What do you want me to do with it, Mr. Walpole?" Jimmy asked.

"Don't give a damn. It's yours. Paper your room with it if you like."

Jimmy was dismissed. He went back to his desk dazed. None of his dreams had been more amazing than this. If there was any meaning to the transaction it was beyond him. Of course there was a catch to it. Roger Walpole had never given anything away in his bulldozing life. From Jimmy's point of view fifty thousand dollars was a sum beyond the hopes of avarice.

He could join the University Club. He could buy a car. He could get several suits of clothes, tailor-made. Maybe he could meet Ethel Walpole—go riding with her and save her from the hoofs of her frenzied steed. . . . At this point Jimmy felt the need of a confidante—this was too staggering to bear alone.

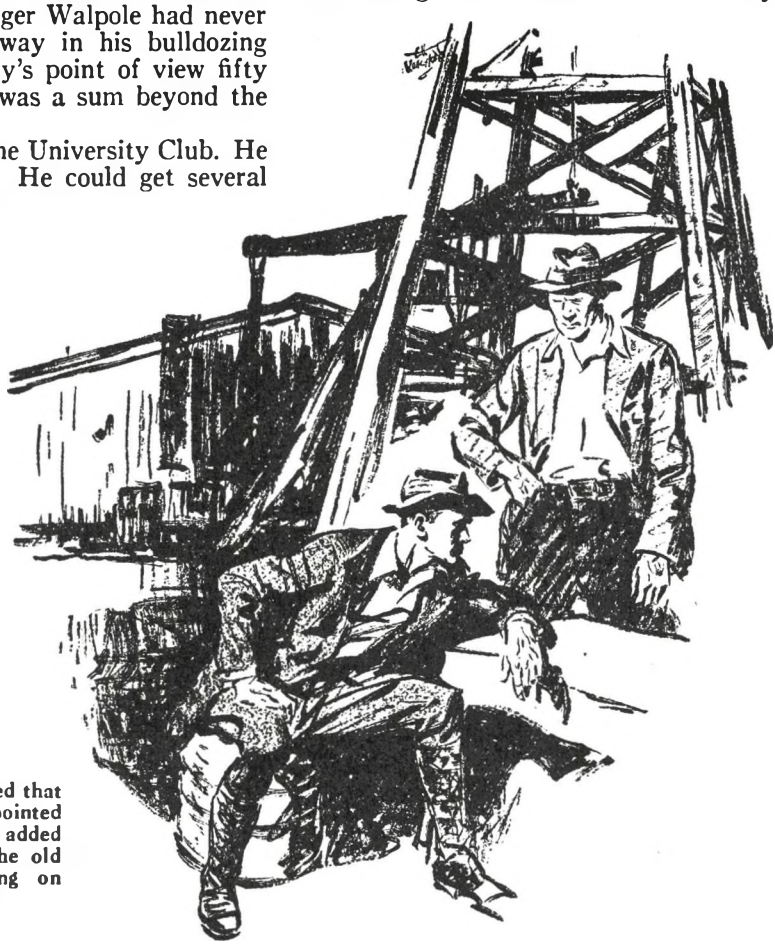
As always, he chose Nan. She was a good old wagon and could be depended upon to give him sympathetic attention. Of course she would laugh at him, but hers was such a friendly gay mockery that he loved it. Her laughter was satisfying. It was queer how she mothered him as if he did not know how to look after himself, and yet in spite of it believed in him.

Passing her desk, he shoved a penciled note at her—an urgent invitation to join him at lunch. Presently he caught her eye. She nodded acceptance.

The midday meal for Jimmy and Nan usually meant a stool at a lunch counter, but today he led the way to a department-store tea-room.

"Why so ritzy?" Nan laughed.

He liked her smile; in fact he liked most things about Nan. She was very



The foreman claimed that all the indications pointed to a big well. He added one proviso: "If the old man can just hang on long enough."

"If you can raise ten thousand dollars, I can finish drilling," Nicholson said. "It's a gamble, of course."

good to look at, this slender red-headed young thing, so vividly in tune with life. Her clothes had style, though they were necessarily cheap. Never before had he met anybody who actually seemed to enjoy being poor.

"Wait," he ordered enigmatically as he seated her.

"You are lunching with a potential millionaire, Miss Evans," he told her grandly. "Go as far in ordering as you like—up to sixty cents."

Her derisive smile mocked him. "Yes? Well, I'll fall for it. Was it a great uncle in Australia who died?"

"Not at all. A business deal." He showed a trace of anxiety. "Be careful about running over sixty cents. I only have a dollar thirty-five with me."

The freckled nose tilted impudently at him. "Why don't you carry a few hundred for change?"

"We don't do that, we rich fellows," Jimmy explained. "It is only pikers like Walpole who are always pulling out fat rolls."

Nan was bursting with curiosity; there seemed to be something in this. It was more than one of Jimmy's day-dreams.

"I'm an awf'ly good listener, Jimmy," she told him. "Spill it."

Jimmy told the story.

IT was characteristic of Nan's cool-headed alertness that she began at once to look for the catch.

"Be careful, Jimmy. Look into it before you go too far, old dear. Roger Walpole is no Santa Claus. Make sure you aren't to be the goat."

"I don't see how I can be, Nan," Jimmy said, frowning at the table-cloth. He went on to express doubts of his own. "Can't be phony stock, can it? The boss wouldn't go in for that kind of a deal."

Nan considered and shook her head. "No, he couldn't afford to do that. He always stays inside the law." Her face brightened at an idea. "My last job was with Morrison & Williams. They're good lawyers. Let's ask them about it."

Jimmy protested: "Girl, I wouldn't be the rich man I am today if I had spent all my money on lawyers."

She knew what that meant. "We'll raise some money one way or another. They won't overcharge, and I'd hate to see you keeping books in the penitentiary. You have more brains than Baggs and the boss together, but they are slick enough to skin the eyeteeth out of you."

"Half of that last isn't true and the other half is," he said.

"It's all true," Nan denied briskly. "If only somebody could put confidence in you, Jimmy, you'd travel a long way."

Jimmy and Nan told the story to William K. Morrison, one of her former employers. The firm made an investigation and reported. The People's Bank at Amethyst was in a bad way. Its management had over-extended heavily loans to cattlemen. Prices for beef were very low and the cattle business was in the dumps. None of the cowmen around Amethyst could meet the mortgages and the cattle if sold would bring nowhere near the amount lent. Unless a miracle should intervene the bank was due to fail soon.

Evidently Walpole was trying to evade responsibility. When a bank fails stockholders are assessed twice the face value of their stock in order to protect depositors and other creditors, Morrison explained.

Jimmy got the point. "Walpole is easing himself out," he said.

"Trying to, at least," amended the lawyer. "If the bank fails within sixty days of the date of transfer he will still be liable."

"Why the sixty-day provision?"

"To protect creditors against fraudulent disposal of stock."

"If the bank fails after sixty days I'm liable," Jimmy said.

"Yes," agreed Morrison with a little smile. "Of course, if you have no property, as I understand you to say, the creditors would be out of luck."

JIMMY and Nan talked the matter over at length. They realized if he protested the transaction to Walpole there was a likelihood of losing his job. There was no danger to Jimmy if the bank failed. The lawyer had made that clear. But young Simpson did not want to be a party to any shady trickery.

"I've got to tell Walpole I can't take the stock," he said ruefully.

Nan nodded. "Yes, if you feel you must."

Jimmy walked into the sanctum of the boss next morning as soon as Walpole arrived.

"About that stock, Mr. Walpole—" he began, and stuck.

The transferred stock was lying on the desk. "Here it is. Seems to have come in this morning." Walpole tossed it to him.

"I can't take it, sir."

"What d'you mean—can't take it?"

"I couldn't protect the depositors if the bank failed."

Walpole's jaw tightened. He did not intend to listen to any moral lecture from this squirt. "You'll take it and you'll like it," he domineered. "Now get out of here. Never come in again unless I send for you."

Jimmy surrendered, for the moment at least. He got out, taking the stock with him. The matter could ride for awhile!

Next morning Jimmy found on his desk a short article from the *News* financial page, ringed with a blue pencil. Nan had put it there. The story told of some wildcat oil wells being drilled in the vicinity of Amethyst. It mentioned that some of the big companies were showing interest and might enter the field if it was proved good. . . .

A few days later the *Post* ran a story to the effect that the Trans-Continental Oil Company was spudding in on the O'Higgins dome, fifteen miles west of Amethyst. This was followed not long after by a more important one. A wildcatter on the dome had struck a five-thousand-barrel gusher.

After that Amethyst was frequently in the news. A second driller duplicated the experience of the first. There was a stampede to the field.

Baggs said to Jimmy one morning: "About that stock, Simpson. Bring it in and leave it with me. Mr. Walpole may possibly want to have it transferred back to his own name."

Jimmy said "Yes sir." But he resented such cavalier treatment. It was his stock now, even though it was not worth anything. Why should he turn it back to Walpole because he was afraid to stick up for his rights?

Nan was indignant. "Don't you give it back, Jimmy, not without looking into it. You're not a slave. He wouldn't take it back when you asked him to. You stick to it, till you see what's doing. Maybe the bank is going to pull through."

"How long do you think I'll keep my job if I tell the old man to go jump in the lake?" Jimmy asked.

"Your vacation begins Monday. Amethyst is only a hundred fifty miles from here. Why don't you slip down there and find out for yourself exactly what is doing? An oil-boom town would be a lively place to spend a week."

"You mean stall—not give Baggs the stock?"

"Yes." She flashed out: "Why be a worm? Keep that stock."

This was not so easy. Baggs mentioned the matter Friday night. "Bring that stock with you in the morning, Simpson. I'll have you endorse it in blank," he said.

Jimmy made no objection, but in the morning he did not have the stock with him.

"Got those certificates?" Baggs fired at him as he came into the office. Jimmy did credit to his college dramatic training. He pulled up short and slapped his leg with obvious exasperation. "Knew I had forgotten something," he answered.

"You'd forget your head if it wasn't sewed on," Baggs cut back with withering sarcasm. "Go get that stock."

The office manager went back to the morning mail he was reading.

THE worm did not exactly turn, but it wriggled.

"Meaning my stock, Mr. Baggs?" Jimmy asked mildly.

"And don't be all day about it," snapped Baggs. "We have work to do in this office."

Jimmy started to mention that this was not news, but thought better of it. A declaration of independence was not in order unless he wanted to walk the streets looking for another job.

Nan's fingers moved swiftly on the keyboard of the typewriter. She caught Jimmy's eye and looked down at what she had been writing. Jimmy went to his desk, fumbled for a moment with some papers, and made a step or two toward the door. His gaze dropped to the carriage of the machine in front of Nan. He saw, written in caps:

STICK IT OUT, JIMMY.

The office closed at noon on Saturdays. Jimmy had not shown up again and Baggs was in a most brittle temper.

About five o'clock Jimmy got in touch with Nan over the telephone.

"What became of you this morning?" she asked. "Mr. Baggs was running a temperature of 104."

"Do him good," Jimmy answered nonchalantly. "If I warmed up the blood of that fish I deserve a medal. . . . Why, I went out to City Park and shot eighteen holes of golf. Did a 76. Not so bad for a chap out of practice."

Nan chuckled, then mimicked the sharp thin voice of Baggs: "Have you forgotten, Simpson, that this company pays you three dollars seventy-five cents a day for your time, which is about three dollars more than it is worth?"

"I'll talk that over with you," he came back. "How about a movie tonight?"

Nan thought that would be very nice.

BUT they did not go to see a picture. Instead, they rode out to City Park on a street car and walked across the golf course while they formed themselves into a committee of ways and means. It was astonishing how much confidence Jimmy gained from a talk with Nan. It always pepped him up, made him feel he could do wonders.

He had nearly two hundred dollars in the bank, left him by a maiden aunt who had died. They decided he should draw it out, go to Amethyst, and look the situation over. If Walpole wanted the stock back—or at least wished to be in a position to take it back if he desired—it must be because he hoped the oil boom at Amethyst would favorably affect the condition of the bank.

"I'll go on tonight's train," Jimmy said. "I've got just enough in cash to get me there. No use waiting till Monday."

She insisted on lending him five dollars to carry him over until she could draw his money from the First National and send it to him. Jimmy hurried home and packed a suitcase. Nan was at the station to tell him good-by.

Jimmy kissed her just before the train drew out. He had never done so before, but he thought the occasion justified a display of affection.

She waved her handkerchief at him, her eyes bright with shining faith. "All aces, no deuces," she cried.

Jimmy's heart was high. There had been an unexpected gift in her warm generous kiss. It lifted him to a curious exaltation. He felt like a young knight setting out on a brave adventure carrying on his lance the colors of his mistress.

THE clerk did not even look up.

"Nothing doing," he said. "We've got 'em sleeping on the billiard-tables."

Jimmy left his bag at the hotel while he went to look for a lodging. Though it was three o'clock in the morning the streets were filled with men moving to and fro. They poured in and out of saloons, stood around street corners. Drifts of conversation floated to him.

"Never saw the beat of his luck. He can buy up a dry hole and it will be a gusher in a week. . . . Fishing for a string of tools he lost. . . . In the sand now but still dry as a cork leg. . . . Spudding in on section 26. . . . Working on afternoon tower."

Before the night was over Jimmy learned that everybody in town talked oil, hoped oil, gambled oil, dreamed oil. It was just now the Alpha and Omega of their existence. Trucks were snorting through the streets loaded with equipment of all kinds. Carpenters were sawing and hammering on frame buildings that were being run up over night. At Amethyst it was day all night.

He found at last a cot in a corrugated iron shack upon which he could sleep from four o'clock in the afternoon until midnight. The other two shifts were taken by other men.

Jimmy called on the officers of the People's Bank and got from them a good deal of evasive camouflage about the prospects of the bank. Since he was a stockholder, the president told him that the bank had taken a quitclaim deed

on two sections upon which it had held a mortgage. This was located not far from the O'Higgins Dome, and a leaser was drilling a well on it. If he happened to strike a big one the bank would certainly benefit greatly by it. There was a discreet silence as to what would occur if he developed a duster.

From J. L. Daniels, the local lawyer who had been employed by Morrison & Williams to make a report on the condition of the bank, Jimmy obtained a more candid opinion. The People's was hanging on by its teeth and might be closed any day by the banking commissioner.

"You think it is going to fail," Jimmy said.

"If Nicholson strikes a big well on the Robinson place the People's will pull through," Daniels replied. "But stick a pin in two points, young fellow. The first is that Section 6, where Nicholson has spudded in, is a long way from proven territory. The other is that there has been a lot of drilling trouble and I am told reliably that he is mighty near the end of his resources. Two weeks ago he quit work but later succeeded in raising a little money for his pay-roll."

Jimmy took a bus out to the oil field. Gaunt derricks were going up by the dozen. Trucks and automobiles rolled over the prairie. Here a crew was installing a new pumping jack. Not far away a lot of men with pick and shovel were throwing up a dam to hold the overflow from a gusher. Everywhere there was activity.

HE took a long tramp across country to the Nicholson location. Before he reached it he could see the monkey bar monotonously lifting the cable up and down.

Presently he fell into talk with the foreman, a little Irishman in half-leg boots, corduroys and leather jacket. He learned that they were drilling through a layer of soft shale not far above the oil-bearing sand. The foreman had not the least doubt in the world that they would strike oil in quantity before two weeks were up. He claimed that all the indications pointed to a big well. He added one proviso: "If the old man can just hang on long enough."

Jimmy walked back to the bus and returned to town. In the bus was a contractor looking for a truck-driver.

"How much do you pay?" Jimmy asked.

"Girl, your millionaire friend is on his way. . . . Take a letter."

The man told him. "Can you drive a truck?" he added.

"Like nobody's business," Jimmy said.

"You've got a job, young fellow."

AND that night Jimmy wired his resignation to Walpole. Already the atmosphere of the raw rough place had gone to his head. He had listened to a dozen stories about men who had grown rich over night. The lightning might strike him. While he was driving the truck he could keep his eyes open for opportunity.

Jimmy kept in touch with O'Reilly, the foreman for Nicholson, and heard from him one night that the boss had laid off the drilling crew for lack of funds. Young Simpson made it his business to meet Nicholson. In the back of his head there was an idea. He broached it to the driller.

Nicholson accepted it eagerly. "If you can raise ten thousand dollars I can finish drilling," he said. "It's a gamble, of course. Oil is where you find it. But I'm convinced we're going to get a big well. I'll give a twenty-five-per-cent interest to anyone raising that much."

An hour later Jimmy's truck plowed through the mud and came to a stop in front of the Grand Palace hotel. The driver had caught sight of a man he knew. He hopped down and walked into the lobby.

Baggs was at the desk inquiring about a room.

"Hello, H. K.!" Jimmy sang out. "On your vacation? Fine. Amethyst is a great town."

Baggs turned and looked at Jimmy. His ex-slave was spattered with mud from head to foot. He was in a red woolen shirt and a broad-brimmed Stetson hat. Somehow he looked bigger, his shoulders broader. Already his face had taken on a tan from the untempered sun.

"Vacation!" Baggs sputtered. "I came down to get that stock, you young scoundrel. Where is it?"

To his surprise Jimmy discovered that this narrow-chested little man held no terrors for him in the scheme of things.

"Had a pleasant trip, I hope," he said genially. "Rather poor train accommodations yet."

"Don't get funny with me, Simpson," Baggs ordered. "You'll turn over that stock or get into trouble."

"Can't think what stock you're talking about, H. K. By the way, I'm taking the train tonight. Want to see Walpole on a business deal."

"He won't take you back. I'll promise you that."

"Tough luck," Jimmy grinned.

JIMMY'S entry into the offices of the Walpole Investment Company created something of a sensation among the clerks. He was in his rough field clothes and he moved with a sunburnt vigor they had not noticed in the old days. The story of his insubordination was current news. They wondered if he had come to knuckle down and take his whipping.

Nan smiled demurely. Having talked it over with Jimmy, she knew why he was here.

After he had exchanged greetings Jimmy asked to see the boss. Walpole had him admitted at once.

"Have you come to bring me that stock, you young crook?" the broker roared.

Jimmy managed an expression of puzzled surprise. "What stock?"

"You know damn' well what stock, the five hundred shares of the People's Bank I put in your name."

"Oh, the stock I bought from you. Want to buy it, do you?"

"You'll turn it over to me or I'll have you thrown in jail," Walpole told him, his face apoplectic.

This was a bluff, as both of them knew.

"Interesting, if true," Jimmy said nonchalantly, and perched himself on the edge of Walpole's expensive desk.

"You were in my employ," the big man went on angrily. "I used you as a dummy, to protect me."

"Your idea is to explain to the court that you used me as a dummy to defraud your creditors?" Jimmy asked politely.

"I'll show you that you can't bilk me, you little squirt! It's my stock, and I'm going to control it. Are you going to turn it over to me or not?"

A PULSE of exultation beat in Jimmy's blood. He remembered how he used to walk in fear of this man. Never again. He was free, as a fellow ought to be. Walpole in a rage lent to the gayety of nations.

"Better pipe down," Jimmy advised coolly. "With your blood-pressure you can't afford to put on an act like this. I'm here to talk business."

"What business?" demanded Walpole, making an effort to calm himself.

"It may interest you to know that the People's is going to close its doors before the week is out," Jimmy said.

"Who told you?"

"I have it on good information. The bank commissioner has been holding off on the chance that Nicholson might bring in a big well."

"Did he get a dry one?" Walpole asked quickly.

"No. He has quit drilling, within fifty feet of the oil sand, probably."

"Why?"

"Out of money."

"Can't he borrow?"

"I'm here to make you a proposition, Mr. Walpole. If you'll put in ten thousand dollars Nicholson will give you a twenty-five-per-cent interest in his lease."

"I don't want any share of his lease."

"It's a gamble," Jimmy mentioned. "You win big or you lose. Nicholson thinks he is going to get a well. So does his foreman. The geologist LaGrange feels he will, and LaGrange does not often miss it. Personally my opinion is of no value. My idea was that since you have fifty thousand in the well already you might want to put up ten thousand more to protect your investment."

"How d'you mean I have fifty thousand in it?"

"I meant a hundred thousand. If the People's folds up now you are liable to the depositors for twice the face value of your stock. The bank will suspend if Nicholson doesn't strike a well. He won't get one if he can't drill. So there you are, Mr. Walpole."

The broker followed each step of the argument but tried to escape its logic. "Let some one else dig up the ten thousand—say, some of the bank officers."

"They haven't got it. For a month they have been scraping the barrel to keep going. It's up to you. Take it or leave it. Neck-meat or nothing, as the old-timers say."

Walpole was a plunger and always had been. More than once he had taken long chances and made a big killing. He knew as well as Jimmy did that Nicholson was drilling on unproved ground that looked good. Moreover, he had received a code message from Baggs within the hour corroborating what this young fellow had told him about the likelihood of the bank's closing.

"You'll turn back the bank stock to me if I pull the People's through," Walpole said curtly.

Jimmy shook his head. "Oh, no! I'm entitled to a good commission for getting you in on this oil lease. I'll take the bank stock for my profit."

"Fifty thousand dollars' worth of bank stock as a commission," Walpole growled.

"Not worth ten cents today. If you think it is, I'll turn the stock over to you *and have it registered in your name.*"

"No need of that," Walpole fenced. "Just sign the stock in blank."

Jimmy smiled blandly. "And be liable for it if the People's goes under. Not good enough, Mr. Walpole."

"What does it matter if you are liable, since you haven't a dime?"

"I intend to be worth a great many dimes one of these days, and I don't want a judgment for a hundred thousand dollars against me when I do."

The broker snorted incredulously.

"I'm playing for a stake," Jimmy said. "I'll gamble for the chance of a big profit, but not to help you out of a hole."

WALPOLE squirmed and twisted. He tried threats and cajolery. Jimmy stood pat. In the end his ex-employer threw up his hands. He would put up ten thousand dollars for a quarter interest in Nicholson's lease if the commissioner would promise to hold off closing the bank until the well was finished.

Jimmy got busy on long distance. A gentleman's agreement was made with the bank commissioner. Walpole talked with Baggs, who was still at Amethyst, and told him he was sending ten thousand dollars and a contract to be signed by Nicholson.

Inside of two hours the cable at the Nicholson well was once more moving up and down monotonously.

TO Nan, Jimmy told a story of high wages and plenty of work for stenographers at Amethyst, with the result that she resigned her position with Walpole and took the train with Jimmy for the booming oil field. Without any difficulty she got a place as public stenographer at the Grand Palace Hotel. From the first hour she had more work than she could do.

Six days after this the well came in with a roar. There was an instant rending of the superstructure of the drilling apparatus. The crown box catapulted into the sky. A moment later everything and everybody was drenched in black petroleum.

Nicholson organized his fighting crews at once. Men in slickers diverted the viscid stuff into temporary reservoirs while others fought to cap the gusher.

Jimmy rushed into the hotel with the news. "We've struck a gusher, Nan, a big one! O'Reilly says it will run twenty-five thousand barrels. Girl, your millionaire friend is on his way."

Nan's eyes sparkled. "Oh, Jimmy, I'm *so* glad."

"Take a letter," he ordered crisply.

The girl looked at him, surprised at his tone. She reached for her notebook.

"'To Miss Nan Evans, Grand Palace Hotel, Amethyst,'" he said.

A pulse of excitement began to beat in Nan's throat.

"'Dear Miss Evans: In view of recent developments I find it necessary to take a partner in my business. Having looked the situation over very carefully, I have decided to offer you a fifty-per-cent interest in the firm of Mr. and Mrs. James Simpson, said organization to begin functioning as soon as I can get out a marriage-license and arrange for a parson. Before declining this rare opportunity—'"

Nan interrupted with two murmured words. They were, "Ethel Walpole."

"Never heard of her. 'Before declining this rare opportunity—'"

"Is anyone thinking of declining it?" Nan asked demurely.

Jimmy gave a voiceless shout. "Girl, girl, what I crave is a wide-open space far from the madding crowd! Get your hat and climb on my truck. We're going where we can hear the larks sing."

Very promptly Nan got her hat.

The Pirate of

A spirited short novel of hazardous adventure with the Coast Guard air-patrol, by the able pilot writer who gave us "Rough Water" and "Murder Island."

A HURRICANE had just swept through the Straits of Florida, smashing the Keys and crippling a dozen craft. A Danish steamer had sent an SOS—its situation was desperate and growing more so by the hour.

It was a routine job for the Coast Guard Aviation Base at Dinner Key, Miami. They'd had a succession of calls these last few days, beginning with the request to fly out and escort in the Pan-American clipper plane that had been shot up by Cuban revolutionists in Havana the day Machado abdicated. It was a routine job, but it was a tough one. Lieutenant Robert Hurley was as tired as the others, but he was picked to go.

The steamer had gone to the bottom by the time he got there, but he finally located the two ship's boats bobbing on the choppy swells. Somehow he landed in that smother without smashing the hull, and got the injured men aboard the *Seroson.* An hour and a half later those men were in the Key West Naval Hospital. Bob Hurley, wearily content, returned to Miami and to bed.

And now the telephone had been ringing steadily for five minutes, pulling him back to the job. It was five minutes past three. He rubbed sleep from his face and answered the phone.

"Bob Hurley?" The inquiry came brusquely, and he recognized Commander Newsom, his immediate superior.

"Yes." His voice was still thick. "What the—"

Newsom's tone was a crisp staccato. "Sorry to disturb you. Get dressed and meet me in front of your hotel in fifteen minutes. Now don't go back to sleep!"

"Okay." Hurley found a cigarette beside the phone and fumbled with a match. "What the devil's happened?" he asked.

"Details later," Newsom barked. "We're driving to Fort Lauderdale—the old man's orders. I don't know about it yet, myself. You're sure you're awake?"

"Practically stepping into the elevator!"

Hurley sat a moment after hanging up, puzzling about this call. The "old man" was Captain Marshall, the commandant of the whole division.

Slipping out of his pajamas, Hurley got up and crossed the room. He was a close-knit man, powerfully and lithely built, perhaps thirty or a little older. His whole bearing emanated vitality and health. Things were happening out there in the darkness, things of which he soon would be a part.

He grinned at himself there in the mirror, scrutinizing for an instant blue eyes that were level and intent, a square chin, wide cheek-bones and a generous nose which was slightly off center to starboard as the result of a seaplane crash half a dozen years ago.

Eight minutes later, in khaki shirt and slacks, he was standing at the curb in front of his hotel.

ON two wheels, a car turned the corner and slowed abruptly. Hurley saw Commander Newsom at the wheel, and stepped forward as the door was opened. "Good morning," he said, getting in. "What blew the lid off this time?"

Newsom let his clutch out with a jerk, and the car leaped.

"Hardest case we've ever had," he said, "and we've got to do it quickly. Guns! Cuba is in the midst of revolution, practically. Machado's out, and we don't know who's in. You know how active gun-runners have been the last few months. But Bob, we didn't know what gun-running operations were!" He paused, then exploded: "Somebody has cleaned out the entire Government cache of armament from the hangars that were under guard at Carlstrom Field."

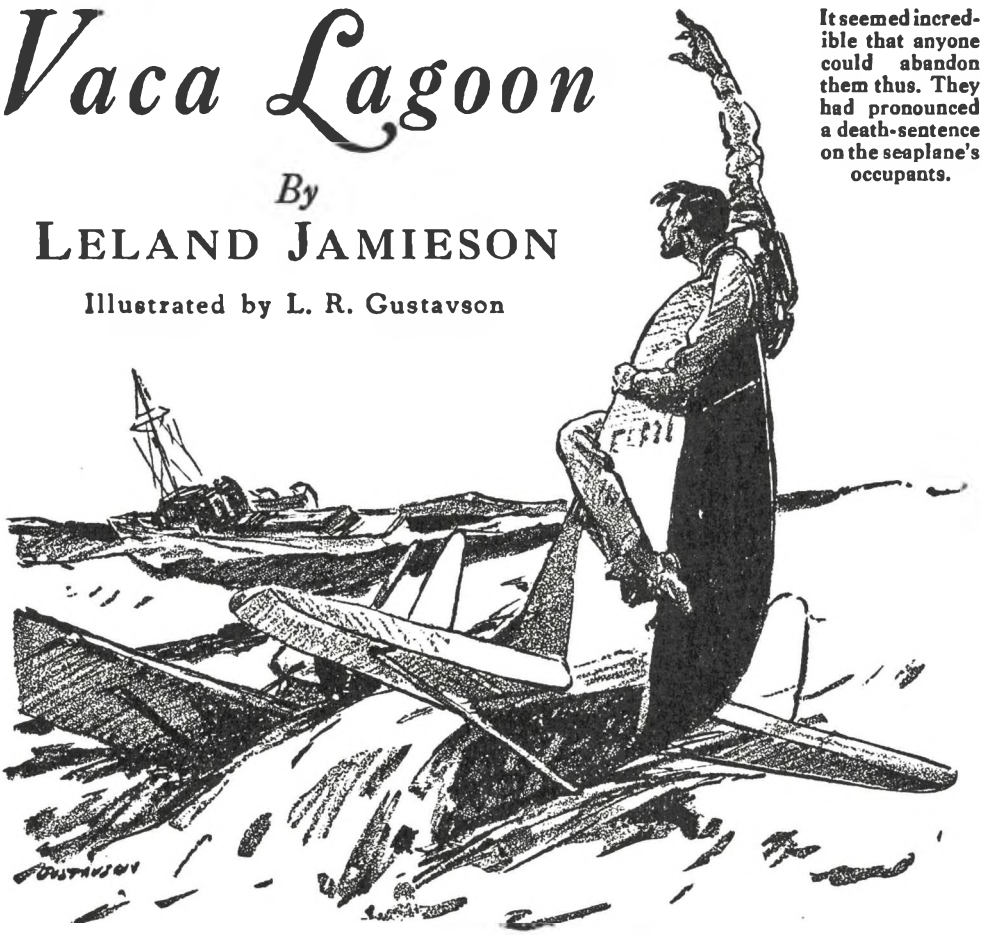
Hurley knew Carlstrom Field. A thousand cadets had undergone the grind of flight training there in wartime, but

Vaca Lagoon

By

LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



It seemed incredible that anyone could abandon them thus. They had pronounced a death-sentence on the seaplane's occupants.

now the place had been abandoned to decay and the casual and disinterested attention of the watchmen who patrolled its silent streets. A few of the hangars contained military stores of ammunition and machine-guns.

"How could such a theft be possible?" Hurley asked. "With guards around there day and night!"

They swept around a long curve and straightened up again before Commander Newsom spoke. "I don't know," he admitted. "It's baffling—and damned peculiar. But the thing right now is to prevent those guns and all that ammunition from getting into Cuba. Don't you see the possibilities? U. S. armament, clearly marked. Conceivably, if it's delivered to a group of rebels and they overthrow this new government with it, there can be a lot of messy complications. Feeling down there is pretty strong now against the U. S. Our job is to keep the stuff away from Cuba at all costs—and after that, we'll worry about how it got away from Carlstrom."

Hurley sat swaying gently with the motion of the car, his eyes leveled on the road ahead, his face very grave.

"This is always the way of revolutions," he declared. "The Outs get themselves a bunch of guns and ammunition, and pretty soon they're Ins. What do we do, and when do we start? This isn't going to be easy; you know that."

"No, it won't be easy," Newsom agreed. "I thought I'd take one seaplane and give you the other. We'll watch for loading operations on the coast—Ten Thousand Islands, and the Keys, and anywhere else we think may look suspicious. But Captain Marshall will outline the program on a coördinated basis. This is so big, it's out of my hands."

Hurley asked: "How could this have been done—does Captain Marshall have the dope on that?"

Newsom shrugged. "They must have backed trucks up to the door and carted it away. They could have transshipped it at a dozen points within twenty-five or thirty miles—Punta Gorda, or the Caloosahatchee River, or anywhere on Charlotte Harbor. With it once aboard

a boat, they would likely run south or a bit southwest and pass between Dry Tortugas and Marquesas Keys, heading for a landing-place somewhere near Havana. We can get into the air at daylight and patrol that strip there. By this time the sea will have moderated enough that if we see any boat in that vicinity which looks suspicious, we can land and have a look at her."

"Counting out the cost of transportation, somebody is going to make more than a hundred thousand dollars on this haul. That means a fight, even if we get the drop on them."

"Not the slightest doubt of it," said Newsom grimly. "So you want to watch your step. If there's got to be shooting, you be damn' sure you start it first!"

MILES flowed swiftly beneath the wheels. At last Newsom stopped the car before a low Spanish house on which a porch-light was burning and at which three other cars were standing. He got out, and Hurley followed him.

Inside, the three men sitting close together in somber discussion of the case gave way to silence as Newsom entered through the open door. Bob Hurley had seen Captain Marshall only once before—a short, thick-set, alert man whose every move was quick, whose words came in chopped irregularity in a brassy bass voice which rumbled even when he tried to whisper. He got up, and shook hands vigorously with Newsom. Newsom said: "Captain, this is Lieutenant Hurley, you know." Marshall thrust out a hand.

"Come in," he rumbled. "Sit down. You know Lieutenants Ainsworth and Dennison? Well, gentlemen, this thing has reached the President, already. It's up to us to stop those guns!"

Lieutenant Ainsworth said: "Captain, shouldn't I telephone the base to get patrol boats ready? I can do that while you explain the problem." At Marshall's nod, he arose and left the room.

Commander Newsom asked: "What are the details of the theft, Captain? I didn't get much from what you said on the telephone. If we start from there, we can proceed and form some theory as to where to begin searching. Naturally, it will prove futile to start flying up and down the coast if these people have cut out to sea."

With some sarcasm, Marshall boomed: "I should think that would be obvious, Commander. The details of it are these: One watchman heard a shot near the hangar where the ordnance was stored. When he got there, the other watchman was dying, but the dying one gave an account of having surprised this truck and crew of men at the hangar door, just opening it. He tried to arrest them, but they got away, after shooting him down. The second watchman eventually discovered that all but a few cases of the ammunition had been taken from the hangar."

Bob Hurley said:

"I was over there not long ago, Captain. A watchman told me he went inside every building every day, on his round of inspection. How could anybody have stolen a million rounds of ammunition in small lots, without its absence being noted?"

Marshall held out his hands palms up, a quick gesture. "They left the wooden outer cases stacked up as they'd always been. Case at a time, they unscrewed the covers, took out the inside metal cases containing the cartridges, put back the wooden lids and left the wooden cases there. So the watchman found everything in order each time he inspected it."

Commander Newsom swore briefly. "That means we'll never find the bulk of the stuff," he predicted quietly. "It's in Cuba long ago. They couldn't steal a million rounds of ammunition in one night, of course!"

Captain Marshall nibbled at the soggy end of his cigar. "In any event, Newsom," he said in that brassy tone of his, "the State Department has sent orders through the Treasury to prevent that stuff getting into Cuba, if it's not too late. And they have stressed—"

The telephone rang sharply, and he broke off, marching briskly into the next room. Newsom, to the others and especially to Bob Hurley, muttered: "This is no job for the air patrol; this is work for the patrol boats. We may be able to spot suspects, but the Straits will be too rough for many landings."

BOB HURLEY nodded. Of course, when the excitement started, he'd have to be in the wrong branch of the Service! Well, his old chum Sam Keeler would have the best of him this time, for at this moment Sam was somewhere in the Keys, commanding patrol boat 238. He smiled briefly, thinking about Sam Keeler and the fun that Sam would have when the radio brought in terse orders to swing back looking for gun-runners.

From the next room came suddenly a gruff ejaculation, followed by hurried interrogations.

And then Marshall reappeared.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "word has just come in that patrol boat 238 hailed an auxiliary schooner for inspection and hove her to last evening. Before a boarding-party could go over to her, the schooner came alongside, and four members of her crew boarded the 238 direct. They had guns, and they took command. They shot Lieutenant Keeler when he resisted. They transferred their own cargo to the 238 and sank their schooner." He paused, and an electric silence seemed to stifle every individual there. They were stunned by sheer amazement. "Gentlemen, this is piracy—and murder."

A LACK of comprehension seemed for a minute to muddle Hurley's brain. What was this that Captain Marshall said? Sam Keeler—*dead?*

Lieutenant Dennison asked in a gentle, awed voice: "How did the information get back, Captain?"

Marshall rumbled: "That was Apprentice Seaman Koontz who called me. During the fight he got on a life-preserver and swam ashore to Vaca Key and flagged the northbound train from Key West and got to a telephone." He sat down, lighting a fresh cigar. "Gentlemen," he added, "it has been several years since a Coast Guardsman has been killed by smugglers. By God, we're going after these fellows and teach them to respect us!"

So it was true; there could be no mistake about any of it, if Koontz made the report. Sitting there, Bob Hurley could see Sam Keeler's ruddy face, could hear his eager voice once more. A bitter, blinding grief descended on him. Next summer he and Sam had planned to buy a cruiser or a sloop and loaf north in the Gulf Stream. And now Sam was dead. It couldn't be—but it was; he and Sam would never cruise together any more.

Lieutenant Ainsworth queried in a casual tone that Hurley found himself resenting: "Captain, where did this happen? It must have taken Koontz some time to reach a telephone."

"Only a couple of miles from Vaca Lagoon. They were putting in to Vaca Harbor behind this other boat, apparently, or they saw the other boat coming out of the harbor. I'm not clear on that point. But it was near there."

Hurley blurted his thoughts: "Why do we sit here?" he demanded. "Why don't we get started after them?"

Pinching his lip, his eyebrows raised, Lieutenant Dennison inquired: "In the middle of the night?" And he added irrelevantly, "It's beginning to rain."

Lieutenant Ainsworth smirked: "Dashing flyer spurns darkness to seek smugglers! Be yourself, Hurley. Koontz will be here pretty soon, and we can find out something about this business."

"And in the meantime, whoever murdered Sam Keeler will have got away," Hurley countered hotly. "What have we got airplanes for?"

Gruffly, Captain Marshall said: "There is a certain procedure for these circumstances, Hurley. You're a junior officer."

With stiff formality, Bob Hurley returned: "Begging the Captain's pardon, but Sam Keeler was a lifelong friend of mine. I wish we could get started—do something about it, sir."

The murmur of the rain had increased; a peal of thunder rolled across the night.

"Even if you found her," Captain Marshall wanted to know, "what could you do then? The seas would be too high to land your plane; you couldn't bomb her; you couldn't attack with a machine-gun, either."

"Why not, sir? The ceiling may be low down there, but I would have enough for that!"

Lieutenant Ainsworth snapped: "And add to the casualties, you nit-wit! There are still six Coast Guardsmen on that tub—you'd attack them too?"

Hurley had momentarily forgotten the existence of the six. Of course, with them aboard the 238, the customary methods wouldn't work. But he insisted: "I could radio her position, and you could send other patrol boats to capture her."

WITH some irritation, Captain Marshall barked: "You're impractical, Mr. Hurley. No more could the other patrol boats fire on the captured crew. You are in a state of mind. This is a devilish important problem, requiring deliberation. I think best we send a message to the Treasury Department, too."

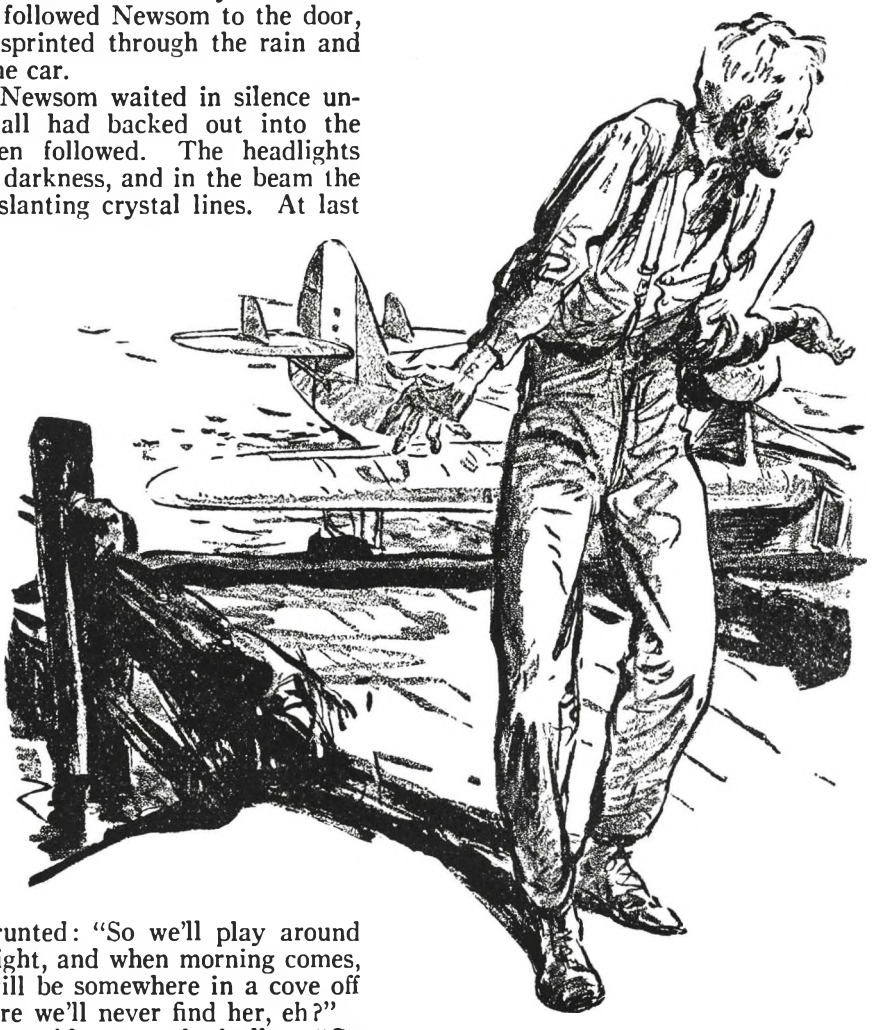
Commander Newsom demanded in a voice which indicated mounting strain: "Why should anybody want the patrol boat? Why didn't these cutthroats sink her, instead of their own schooner? A seventy-five-footer will haul relatively little cargo. Did Koontz explain that, or give you any inkling of the reason, sir?"

"No. Perhaps he can explain it when he gets here. We'll have to wait for Koontz. Meanwhile, we'll go to the base and report the facts to Washington by radio. We can discuss our detailed plans after we've had a reply." He stalked from the room to his car, which stood in the arched driveway entrance.

Hurley followed Newsom to the door, and they sprinted through the rain and reached the car.

Inside, Newsom waited in silence until Marshall had backed out into the street, then followed. The headlights sliced the darkness, and in the beam the rain laid slanting crystal lines. At last bridge. A sentry halted them momentarily at the entrance of the reservation.

This was a temporary Coast Guard base. Headquarters was a white, low structure set no more than fifty yards from the pounding surf of the Atlantic. They got out. In the clammy darkness



Hurley grunted: "So we'll play around here all night, and when morning comes, the 238 will be somewhere in a cove off Cuba where we'll never find her, eh?"

Newsom said sympathetically: "Go ahead and get it off your chest. I know how you feel about Sam. But the old man's right about this: if we go charging down there, the six men in the crew are liable to be knocked off as soon as we come into sight. This is really a ticklish bit of business, Bob."

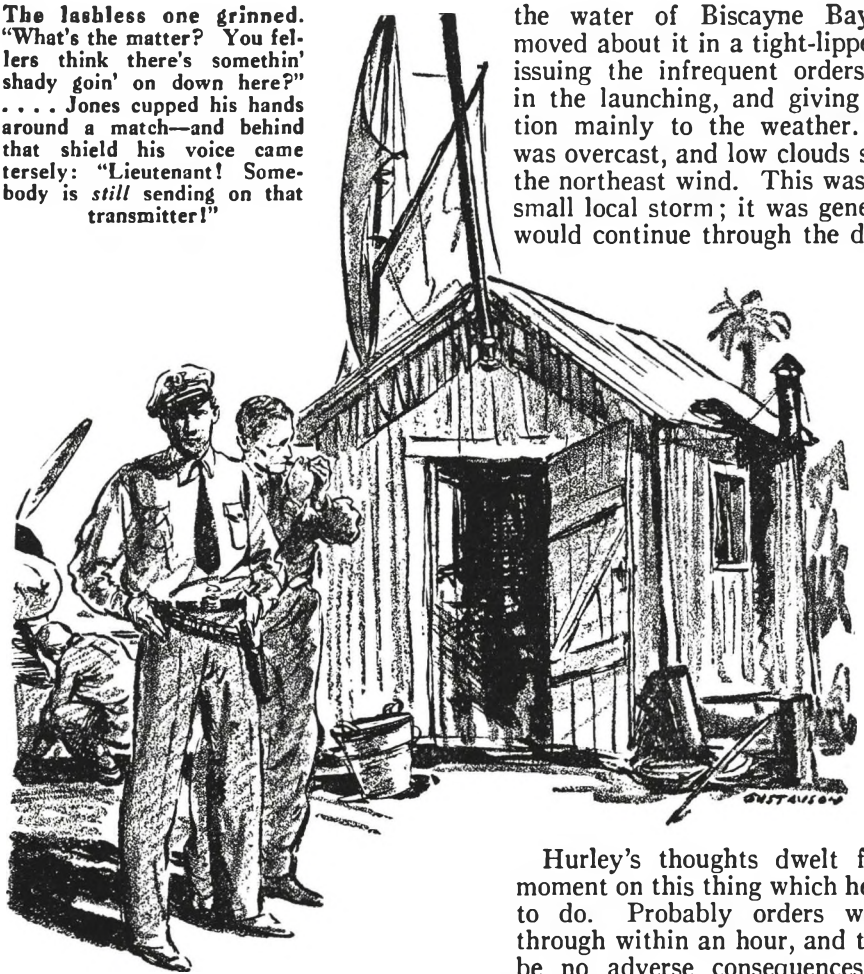
"Rats!" snapped Hurley. "Give me a seaplane and turn me loose. I'll at least *find* the 238. We'll have that problem whipped, and that will make it easier when you and Old Red Tape figure out a way to help the crew."

They rolled through the wet darkness, the tires whining. Newsom crossed a

Hurley felt Newsom hand him something, heard Newsom's words, whipped by the wind.

"You drive back to Dinner Key in my car, Bob. It will save time if you're there, when word comes to take off. I'll telephone you. You take the *Seroson*, and I'll follow in another plane. Now watch your step!" Then he was gone.

Hurley hesitated for a moment, queerly disappointed. He had hoped, perhaps, to have Newsom's tacit permission to go back and take off now, without more of this senseless waiting. But no—he had to wait on radio messages from



The lashless one grinned. "What's the matter? You fellers think there's somethin' shady goin' on down here?" . . . . Jones cupped his hands around a match—and behind that shield his voice came tersely: "Lieutenant! Somebody is *still* sending on that transmitter!"

Washington, and red tape, and old men to deliberate. . . .

And standing there, a daring thought occurred to him. Newsom had said: "You take the *Seroson,* and I'll follow you in another plane." Why couldn't he go back to Dinner Key and take off now? Why couldn't he misunderstand these hasty verbal orders and go back there now and get into the air?

There was a zestful stimulation to the very idea of the possibilities. He could be down in the Keys at dawn, ready to locate the 238 and radio her position back to Lauderdale before old Marshall ever came to a decision to do anything. After he got down there, he might figure out some way to save those six men who were prisoners! It would be anticipating orders, yet not violating them—and there was so much involved. He got into Newsom's car and hurtled toward Miami through the rain. . . .

An hour later, down the Dinner Key hangar ramp, the Douglas *Seroson* was being rolled on its beaching gear into the water of Biscayne Bay. Hurley moved about it in a tight-lipped manner, issuing the infrequent orders necessary in the launching, and giving his attention mainly to the weather. The sky was overcast, and low clouds scudded on the northeast wind. This was not just a small local storm; it was general, and it would continue through the day.

Hurley's thoughts dwelt for a brief moment on this thing which he was going to do. Probably orders would come through within an hour, and there would be no adverse consequences. But he knew he must stay out of trouble. "If I scratch this seaplane, or gum up the old man's plans, I'm really going to get hamstrung," he mused, and climbed into the cabin of the plane and passed through to the cockpit.

Jones, the wizened radio-operator who had flown with him so often on desperate rescue missions, was waiting quietly, surrounded by his maze of dials. He smiled: "All ready, sir. Any special orders?"

"Nothing. Keep off the air except when reporting our position." Hurley passed on and sat down in his seat. Baxter, chief aviation machinist's mate, was already there beside him, ready to take off. He had the reddest hair Bob Hurley had ever seen upon a man. He grimaced, glancing from the sky down to the windshield of the cockpit.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I couldn't stop this thing from leaking. We put a new glass on your side, but couldn't help much. A light rain outside is going to be a heavy rain inside. I'm sorry, sir."

Hurley grunted, "Being wet is my least worry, Baxter," and sat down at the controls.

Methodically he checked controls and instruments, rocking the ailerons with quick jerks on the wheel, setting the Kollsman altimeter to zero with a deft rotation of its rubber knob, and tapping it. One at a time he tabulated every dial, and then, without another word, touched the starter buttons each in turn and rocked the throttles.

The Wasps took with heavy detonations that smoothed out quickly to a deafening purr as the props surged against the mooring lines, sending twin blasts of air across the tail. Through his cockpit window he nodded to the launching crew; the lines were dropped on both sides simultaneously, and the Douglas slipped out into the bay, bobbing and yawning in the mounting wind and sea.

It was a rough take-off. The wind was kicking up a nasty chop out there, even though the bay had some protection from Cape Florida; Bob Hurley knew that in Hawks Channel, farther south, there would be a swell and surging sea which would make landing hazardous if not impossible this afternoon. But that would take care of itself, once their quarry had been sighted. Grimly he gunned the engines wide, and let the plane spank herself up to the step, where for a few moments she seemed to leap from crest to crest, each impact a little lighter than the one before. And finally, with her tremendous load of gas, she swept into the air.

Until he was flying at three hundred feet, with Miami and Coconut Grove smeared clusters of white buildings in the rain, Hurley had not realized quite how bad the visibility was going to be.

SILENTLY he cursed the weather and turned east toward Cape Florida—then, at a scant four hundred feet, southwest, hurtling downwind past Ragged Keys at an amazing speed. Baxter, tense in a straining scrutiny of the dim horizon, sat with binoculars against his eyes, varying his pose only by the swinging of his head and shoulders as he swept the leaden sea.

Despondency and a bitter disappointment filled Hurley heavily as minutes passed and he realized the futility of trying to find a ship out here today. Of course, if he flew within a mile or two of it, he could sight it easily enough. But what chance, really, was there of doing that? He debated going back and giving up. Yet in the end, he flew on.

But the hours dragged away and no slate-gray patrol boat took shape upon the surface of the endless sea. There was no possible way, of course, to guess the destination of the crew that had pirated the 238. There were a hundred spots down here where a boat that size could be tucked out of sight. Yet with a kind of desperate tenacity, Hurley zigzagged across the miles.

AN hour lengthened into two, to three, to four, at last to five. Baxter's eyes were bloodshot now, ringed by red marks from his binoculars. Jones was pallid, wretched with illness from the everlasting bouncing of the plane. Hurley's muscles ached in reaction to the strain.

And they had found no trace of the 238, although they had combed the Keys, from Elliott's Key to Dry Tortugas. . . . Sick at heart, desperate and embittered, Bob Hurley turned northeast against the wind and calculated the time which would be necessary to get back to Miami.

His air-line course lay over open water almost all the way, for his return. But with his chart upon his knees, he did not set out upon that line. Rather, he swung eastward once more, and as he flew, he made a circle with his pencil around Vaca Key. Here, or near here, the piracy had taken place. He had looked the scene over a while ago, wheeling above it for ten minutes. Of course, the boat was gone; he had not expected it to be there, naturally. Yet now he was not satisfied to pass the place again without another and more careful look. Perhaps some one down there might have seen the fight, or have some information. He turned to Jones.

"Radio the base," he ordered tersely. "Tell Commander Newsom I'm going to land at Maraville and take on gas."

Jones said, "Yes sir," and repeated the instructions. Baxter, sitting rigid with his binoculars as ever at his eyes, lowered them a moment and declared: "Lieutenant, we got plenty gas to get to Dinner Key, if you want to go on through."

Hurley shook his head. "I want to have a look at Maraville and see if we can't stir something up. The only dock in this section of the Keys is there. The gas is our excuse to land, that's all."

Baxter, busy with the glasses for a moment, dropped them once more and looked across the cockpit dubiously. "Maraville is a swell place to roll this

Douglas in a ball, Lieutenant," he protested mildly. "That harbor's full of junk—sunk barges and railroad iron and boilers left there by Flagler's crew. A patrol boat has a mean time getting in there in a wind like this!"

Hurley showed his teeth. "Watch us go in there," he insisted. . . .

Maraville is a village of perhaps a hundred souls a mile or so to the north of the longest viaduct in the oversea railway between Miami and Key West. The town itself almost touches the lagoon, where that shallow body of sea and marsh and savanna curves back upon itself above the harbor. And the lagoon, in turn, skirts Vaca Key for a mile or so upon the east, ending in the dredged and deepened basin and the bay. From the basin a channel leads southward more than half a mile to open water, On the north side of the bay, a sheet-iron fish-house stands, a solitary sentinel above a rotting and decrepit wharf.

As Hurley spiraled down to come in for his landing, he could see the sunken and half-sunken debris which Baxter mentioned. But his eyes were not upon that mass of rusting iron; his attention was attracted by the appearance of a man upon the dock, who, as the engines fell to deep-throated mutterings when Hurley cut the throttles for the glide, turned and dived into the fish-house.

THEY came in fast, ready to get off again if the harbor proved too full of obstructions. Baxter, looking from his side of the cockpit, yelled: "Okay, Lieutenant, here!" Hurley fish-tailed violently to kill the speed, and hauled back upon the wheel a little, and "burned" the Douglas on. Water hissed and splayed back along the hull, and the plane sank down from the step and slowed abruptly. Hurley, watching the fish-house for the man he had seen, felt a strange, almost sinister sense of desolation which seemed to hover here.

"Up on the bow," he said to Baxter. "Watch out for snags. Make us fast to the dock. And watch that fellow who dived in there when we came in to land."

Baxter nodded soberly. "I seen him," he declared. "I been thinking there may be something funny, there." He opened the overhead hatch and climbed through and took his place upon the bow.

Swinging judiciously in with the curving of the channel, Hurley slowly edged up to the wharf. Baxter leaped across the space of water and made fast.

The man who had been here a minute earlier, watching them land, was as yet absent when Hurley reached the dock. A silence that was almost oppressive in its contrast to the snarling Wasps seemed to have settled here.

Yet this silence was not complete. Jones, the radio operator, climbed ashore, and he had scarcely set foot upon the dock before he turned and scrutinized the building, and said in a hushed voice:

"Lieutenant, who's that working on a radio?"

Hurley heard nothing. Baxter, evidently, had not caught the sound that reached Jones' ears. They exchanged glances. Hurley said: "I don't hear anything. What do you mean—working on a radio?"

JONES' face had a queer puzzled expression. His voice fell to a whisper suddenly. "Somebody transmitting!" he ejaculated. "Just said: *'Coast Guard plane just landed here. More later!'* He's quit now! I could read it by transformer-hum up there!" He pointed quickly to a transformer which was bolted to a pole above their heads at the corner of the building.

Excitement like a flood of light swept over Hurley, leaving him astonished and trembling faintly with a wild exultancy. Piracy and murder were enacted somewhere near this place last night, and now a message was going out that a Coast Guard plane had landed!

"How was it signed?" he snapped in an undertone at Jones.

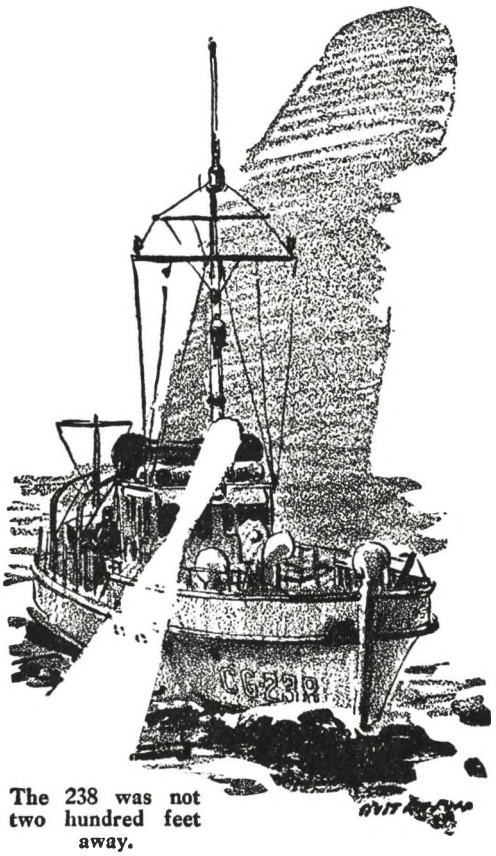
Jones' eyes were bright. "Lieutenant, it wasn't signed! It just broke off, as if—" He stopped abruptly, indicating with an almost imperceptible movement of his head the doorway of the building.

Through that doorway, now, there came a thin, angularly formed man who was regarding them with a veiled intentness. Hurley moved to meet him, noting the other's sickly look, ashen eyebrows and the absence of visible eyelashes. He said in greeting: "Hullo. I'm Lieutenant Hurley, Coast Guard. We landed here—"

Showing a singular irascibility, the other broke in with a high, cracked nasal challenge: "I don't care who you are! You'll have to move that thing—I got fishin'-boats comin' in here to unload."

It was rarely that Hurley disliked a man so instantly.

"Another crack from you, and you'll go back to Lauderdale with us! Didn't



The 238 was not two hundred feet away.

you hear me say we are the Coast Guard?"

For a moment which grew long and tense, they faced each other there. Then the blond and lashless one lowered his boring gaze, flicking it over Baxter and Jones and finally to the rough, uneven planking of the wharf. A subtle change came slowly to his seamy face, a gleam of cunning. He grinned, revealing yellow teeth.

"Name's Cornish," he returned meekly enough. "Didn't aim to rile you. But you fellers is a nuisance, kind of. If it aint a picket boat droppin' in here, it's a patrol boat. But this is the first time a flyin' machine has ever paid us an inspection. What's the matter—you fellers think there's somethin' shady goin' on down here?"

Hurley said: "When we decide there is, we'll tell you. This is the only decent harbor for fifty miles around. When we buy gas, don't you make a profit?"

Cornish shook his head. "I'm in the fish business. I aint equipped to handle airplanes. Course," he added, "I don't mind accommodatin' you fellers in the Coast Guard. . . . How much gas you want?"

"About a hundred gallons," Hurley said, restricting his glances to the ancient and decrepit dock and bay. Yet his keen eyes had seen already the antenna system stretched from one gable of the sheet-iron building to the wrecked hulk of an old drydock two hundred feet away. "We'll sit around out here while you go after it."

Without a moment's hesitation, without changing his expression, Cornish returned easily: "Reckon I'll need all of you fellers to go in to Maraville with me and load her up. Them drums of gasoline are plenty heavy." He turned his lanky shoulders and looked out across the far lagoon toward the entrance to the bay. No boats were visible. "Reckon we'll have time to get back here before my fishermen come in." He moved toward an ancient truck which stood half-hidden in mangrove.

But Hurley, with a covert glance at Jones, hung back. If he could contrive to remain here, it would allow him to make a leisurely examination of these premises. He was quite a handy man with locks.

To Cornish, who stood looking at him through expressionless ice-blue eyes, he explained evenly: "Some one must remain on guard. Baxter and Jones can go in with you."

Cornish glanced at Baxter. Scarcely turning his head, he spat a brown geyser over the Douglas wing. "Don't reckon them two's enough man-power," he insisted. "Drums weigh right at five hundred pound. I can't lift, account of a strained back."

"Two men, on a hoist—you can make a rope sling—"

"Aint got a hoist," Cornish interjected restlessly. "Course, if two of you can raise five hundred pound into this truck body, go ahead and leave a man down here. Although what could happen to that flyin' machine is beyond me. Got it tied up, aint you?" He turned on his heel and slouched toward the truck.

For a moment his own stupidity enraged Hurley. Why hadn't he given as excuse for remaining, the necessity of working on an engine? Then, logically, he must have stayed. Now, if he did so, under the thin excuse of remaining as guard to a machine which no one could possibly steal and which no one but a skilled mechanic could damage without help, his suspicions would become openly apparent. There was nothing else to do but go along.

At that moment Jones cupped his hands around a match which he held to a cigarette—and behind that shield his voice came tersely: "Lieutenant! Somebody is *still* sending on that transmitter! He just sent, *'QRT—stop sending: QRX —I will call you.'* Then two more words, *'Go back!'*" With affected unconcern, the little radio operator puffed upon his smoke and flicked the match away. Without a change of expression he followed Cornish.

HURLEY joined him. In his absence, what messages might not be sent—what boats might not slide up to that dock and land priceless evidence? Yet if some one stayed here, those imagined messages would not, most probably, be sent in their entirety; certainly no boats could come to tie up at the wharf, unless they were entirely innocent. So perhaps it might be as well to go along, and try to ferret information out of Cornish.

He turned back abruptly and stepped from the dock to the bow of the plane. There, with quick, deft movements, he locked the hatches, and then leaped back upon the wharf and joined the others in the truck.

Two courses remained open, he reflected as they set off: He could arrest Cornish, under the presumption that the radio in the shack was directing the 238, and then, searching the building, perhaps uncover other information; or he could get this gasoline and take off once more to search for the patrol boat. The thought of going back to Dinner Key did not occur to him.

Racking his brain for the best course to pursue, he hit upon a scheme of locating the patrol boat. If his assumption that it had been turned back by this Vaca Harbor radio was true, then, once the plane was safely on its way, orders would go out for the 238 to put back in. And, he remembered with a grim satisfaction, the plane had a direction-finding loop antenna, for use in over-water navigating. Jones, possibly, could tune on the 238 as she acknowledged that order from the fish-house radio—could tune in and thus point toward the boat. So after that, Hurley could continue his flight in that direction and sooner or later would sight the craft. . . .

The truck clattered up the grade, crossed the oversea railroad, turned off the rough, uneven trail upon a narrow, winding highway that led north, and toiled noisily toward Maraville.

There was no sign of human life, until suddenly the truck rounded a sharp curve, and there burst into view a huddle of unpainted shacks in the midst of which, set high upon stilts against the tidal smash of hurricanes, was the yellow boxlike station and the railroad loading platform.

None of the inhabitants of this village put in an appearance. Cornish turned around behind the building and backed up to a kind of warehouse. He got down and unlocked the door of that small structure, and then, as Jones and Baxter dismounted, following Hurley, stated:

"You'll have to roll the barrels outside and make a skid to slide 'em into the truck. I'll be back directly." He walked through the rear door of the store.

Baxter, estimating the height of the truck body, scrubbed the heel of his hand across his nose. "Lieutenant," he asked querulously, "you sure we aint got enough gas already in that seaplane?"

Bob Hurley said: "We've got a thirty-mile head-wind. On second thought, I think we'd better add another drum: make it three instead of two."

Jones, sauntering back to the truck from the warehouse, said in an undertone to Hurley: "If you'll take a look behind that fourth barrel from the door, there's a rope block-and-tackle on the floor. Didn't that guy say he hadn't any hoist?"

Mildly incredulous, Bob Hurley muttered: "So he did—now what the devil—" With a backward glance at the doorway through which Cornish had just gone, he moved to the interior of the warehouse, Jones and Baxter close upon his heels. Sure enough, behind one drum was a much-used block and tackle, just as Jones had said. Hurley pulled it out.

"So!" There was a frosty suspicion in his curt ejaculation.

"That line was hid back there," Jones said. "I never would have found it, but I tripped on a tin can and fell over a drum, and my hand slid down behind against the wall."

Hurley conjectured quietly: "Why did our friend Cornish want us to spend a long time loading these drums? That's another puzzler. But we'll fool him. We'll use the tackle and get through with it—then I'll go find the man and see what he's been up to."

IN ten minutes they had three drums of gas loaded and were ready to return. Hurley, leaving Jones and Baxter waiting in the truck, pushed open the

back door of the store. To his astonishment, he saw Cornish leaning carelessly against the counter, with the storekeeper on the other side. They stopped talking, and Cornish said pleasantly enough: "Need some help, Lieutenant?"

Hurley stopped, staring. He said:

"We found your hidden block-and-tackle. We're loaded, and we're in a hurry. If you'll drive us back, we'll shove off."

Even in the dim light, he could see that Cornish was puzzled. The man said: "Hoist? Why, Lieutenant, a fisherman up the key borrowed my hoist last week to put a new engine in his boat. I aint seen it since."

Hurley returned thinly: "Anyhow, we left it hanging on the hook over the door out there. Let's go."

IF Cornish wished to delay their arrival at the dock, he gave no indication of it, for on the return trip he drove as rapidly as the road permitted. The loading of the gasoline was accomplished quickly by siphoning the contents of the three drums to the wing tanks.

Cornish, during the gassing operation, stood on the dock, offering a suggestion now and then. As the crew went aboard, he asked in a bland tone:

"You'll need some care, gettin' out of here without scrapin' a wing, won't you? If I can help, you tell me what to do."

Hurley, in the cockpit with the top hatch open, nodded. He called: "No, the wind will drift us back from the dock; we'll make out fine." Baxter came forward and closed the cockpit hatch. Hurley opened his side window. They had dropped all but one wing line, and now Cornish loosed that and stood back.

He had, Hurley thought, a faintly amused gleam in his eyes. But he called after them: "Glad you dropped in. Watch out for snags as you get into the channel—this lagoon is full of old iron."

Hurley nodded. The motors took in a rumbling staccato. The props dragged the plane slowly through the water in a wide, smooth arc. In a moment the fish-house and dock moved past and dropped behind as the seaplane taxied down the bay for the take-off.

Everything seemed to be all right, yet an undercurrent of apprehension still lurked deep in Hurley's mind. He couldn't shake it off. He said to Baxter, sitting there: "Did you check the oil, when you put the gas in?"

Baxter nodded, grinning. "Yes sir. These Wasps don't use much oil, sir. There's more in the tanks than when we started!"

Hurley flicked his switches and gunned his engines wide. The flowing roar of the propellers and exhausts engulfed him, and he concentrated on the job of getting off.

It was rough, out here beyond the full protection of the eastern neck of land. The wind *was* rising. The plane bounced along for almost a hundred yards, jumped to the step, and with one clipping impact of a whitecap got into the air. Flying at a hundred feet, Hurley swung directly east-northeast across Hawks Channel.

Jones, busy with his receiver, was tuning on the frequency of the 238's transmitter, hoping to pick up a signal from it to Cornish's man back there. He rolled his dial with careful patience. And he shouted suddenly:

"That guy back there is sending now, Lieutenant! He's telling some one to come in!"

"Tune in the answer," Hurley snapped. Jones nodded.

During five tense minutes they flew on. The plane was past Hawks Channel now, long out of sight of Cornish's eyes. Below them the wind kicked up mountainous rollers on the sea. Mist and rain were a flat smear across the horizon. At times the bumpy air grew violent. The controls were never still.

But Hurley had forgotten weariness in the suspense of waiting. For he was hearing, in a moment of exultant satisfaction, Jones' voice crying out above the thunder of the engines:

"Got 'em, Lieutenant! Somebody's answering—somebody's saying he's starting in—asking if we're gone!"

So there was another period of delay, while Jones turned once more, this time with his loop antenna, trying to get the bearing of that boat. In another moment they would turn and head in that direction, and before long they could swing definitely toward Dinner Key, to send every available Coast Guard boat and plane out in the search.

BAXTER'S shout was lost at first against the other noise, but it came again, interrupting Hurley's thoughts. The machinist's mate's voice was sharp with an intense alarm. Hurley looked across the cockpit aisle, and Baxter pointed at the engine instruments.

"Look at that!" he bellowed. "Oil-pressure going down! We'd better get back—quick!"

That, of course, was for Hurley to decide; but he didn't think of it that way. No decision was necessary; the decision was already made for them. For not just one, but both engines had lost their oil-pressure. The needles were down to fifteen pounds, and they were sinking gradually around their dials. One look was enough to show Hurley that they soon would go to zero.

HE jerked his gaze back to the scene outside. He'd been flying a straight course, to let Jones tune that signal in. They were outside of Hawks Channel now. They were perhaps twenty miles from land—and they were going down at sea. For those engines would quit soon. Not one, leaving them crippled with the other—not one, but both.

As his mind sought the solution to that engine-trouble, Hurley swung back to the left. He'd get as far back toward land as possible, before they went down in that smother. In such a sea, they wouldn't last an hour, and there was no patrol boat in this area right now. He flung an order back over his shoulder:

"Send a distress message—position twenty east-northeast Vaca Key—going down—engine-trouble."

They were going down, all right. Already the right engine was losing revvs. The oil-gauge was hovering near zero. The engines jarred out of synchronization as the power fell away, the grind of the two props coming into the cabin with teeth-chattering vibration, a *woam-woam-woam-woam* that gradually accelerated.

Baxter, heedless of what was coming in a moment, kept yelling: "Lieutenant, that guy back there done something to these engines! I tell you, they were okay before, and while we were in town somebody did something to 'em!" His voice trailed off, to rise again, shaking a little as he pointed.

The right engine was down to a thousand revvs now, laboring and knocking badly. The left was doing better, but it was beginning to fall off a little, too. And the right one was smoking; the smell of cylinder paint was a faint reek in the cockpit; smoke, blue and thick, whisked from around the cowl and was flung back into the mist. It wouldn't be long; a landing was imminent.

Without any spoken word, they all knew that a landing in these seas would probably be fatal, too.

The right engine stopped then, and Baxter screamed: "She's on fire, Lieutenant! She's on fire!"

Maybe the engine was on fire. They couldn't tell, in all that smoke. But if it wasn't now, it would be in a moment. If they were to have any hope of floating, taking the smashing beating of each comber after they were down, they'd better dump their gas and hit that greenish mess with empty tanks. That was their one chance, and they all knew it. Dump their gas.

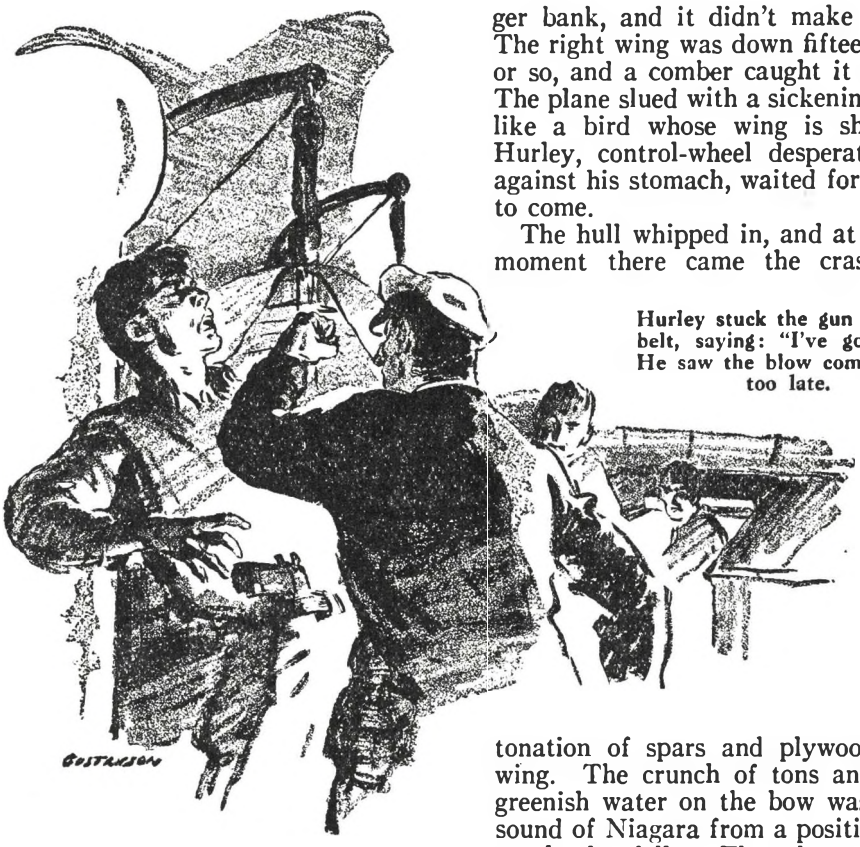
Yet if they had waited too long now, and that engine *was* on fire, when they tripped the dump-valve, the ship would go up in a blast of flames while still descending. They had to take the chance. Bob Hurley glanced at Baxter, seeing a kind of desperate urgency on the machinist's mate's red face. Baxter's hand was already on the dump-valve control. Hurley looked back, to see Jones frantically working on his key. They had to do it; they had to take the chance. At Hurley's nod, Baxter threw both valves open wide.

At the same instant, Hurley started a turn, designed to send the crippled plane back into the gale which swept the seas. He had no hope of getting down into a trough. He had no hope of getting down without smashing the hull. But he did not have time to be afraid. The thought crossed his harried mind that he and he alone was responsible for Baxter and Jones here, that he had brought them here contrary to his orders. Then that realization merged swiftly with the knowledge that his left engine was laboring and pounding out its life. The turn was but half made.

THE mind, in a crisis, accelerates to an amazing speed. Hurley was calm. He said to Baxter, all emotion stricken from his tone: "Get back in the cabin and put on a safety-belt. If the front end of this crock folds in, I want somebody back there who can pull me out."

Baxter seemed to sit there for an age before replying, jerking at the dump valves once more: "Gas is drained, sir. Tanks closed." He didn't argue about going back; he was a military man, and he knew the necessity for doing it. He got up and moved past Jones.

Jones, face paler than usual, continued to sit there working at his dials. He croaked: "No answer, Lieutenant. I put the SOS out a dozen times." He flicked two switches on his panel and started once more pounding on his key.



Hurley stuck the gun into his belt, saying: "I've got to—" He saw the blow coming, but too late.

Hurley turned forward and faced the foam-flecked sea. Things had taken on a sudden clarity, this last half-minute. He saw why Cornish had wanted them to go to town; he saw why Cornish had wanted a delay, once they had reached town. While the plane had lain here at the dock, some one had put a foreign substance in the oil tanks. It couldn't have been anything else, for the cabin and the cockpit were locked up. And he remembered Baxter's lightly-spoken jest: "These Wasps don't use oil—there's more oil in the tanks than when we started."

Of course they had thought the surplus oil was foam—at least, he had. But it was not. It might have been sugar, to gum up the inside of the engines, blocking the oil-channels with a hard carbon that shut off the flow. It might have been powdered emery, to grind through every working part. It might have been some other thing.

It made him furious with a grim self-reproach that he had let this happen. He had entered this adventure knowingly. But Jones and Baxter—

His thoughts were cut off, for the plane was turning on the last hair-trigger bank, and it didn't make it, quite. The right wing was down fifteen degrees or so, and a comber caught it violently. The plane slued with a sickening impact, like a bird whose wing is shot away. Hurley, control-wheel desperately back against his stomach, waited for the blow to come.

The hull whipped in, and at the same moment there came the crashing detonation of spars and plywood on the wing. The crunch of tons and tons of greenish water on the bow was like the sound of Niagara from a position underneath the falls. The plane went under. Water—a wall of water—leaped up and smashed against the cockpit windshield, almost in Hurley's eyes. Transfixed, he watched it there, and waited breathless for the plane to rise again.

But that seemed totally impossible, in such a sea. The right wing seemed entirely gone. Oddly, glancing at the instruments before him, Hurley noticed that the artificial horizon, its gyroscope still rotating in deceleration, showed the plane was canted almost forty-five degrees.

With that wing gone, there wasn't any hope. The SOS might have gone out, and half a dozen freighters might have picked it up, but still there wasn't any hope. For the plane was going down. Water was spraying into the cockpit and the cabin through a dozen seams. The roar of water outside had displaced the engines' sound.

Jones, still at his radio, had turned off all his switches, and just sat there. He looked so frail and helpless, Hurley thought. Yet his eyes were not vacant with terror yet. He spoke in a kind of hushed voice that sounded queer, inside the cabin now.

"I kept on sending till we hit, Lieutenant."

"Anybody answer?" Hurley asked. He tried desperately to make the query in a casual way. But he could see, before Jones answered, that there had been no replies.

"Nobody acknowledged my SOS, Lieutenant," Jones admitted. His eyes, Hurley noticed, were brown, large and liquid as a woman's, but now wide and dulled by fear. Jones flicked his glance back to the radio equipment. Unconsciously he touched his key, as if to send another call for help, perhaps forgetting that the trailing antenna was submerged. Then he seemed to remember that, for his fingers came away. There was a sudden note of desperation in his voice. "Somebody ought to have heard me call, Lieutenant! Some ship has just got to have heard us—I sent it out a dozen times—sent it right down till we hit!"

PITY touched Bob Hurley. He could understand Jones' terror. And he thought without reproach: "It would be better if we had somebody else here, instead of this boy. He isn't going to stand it very well." Then he remembered that it was his own fault that they were all here. If he had waited on official orders— But there was no use to remember, no use to condemn himself, although he was doing that enough. They had to do something before the plane went to the bottom. They couldn't last long. Green water darkened the cockpit-hatch glass each time a comber curled in before the blasting wind.

What to do? They had a rubber life-raft which would have supported them with ease, in normal wind and weather. But now they would never get it launched successfully. They would be swept overboard when they crawled out on the wing. The life-preservers would be futile things in such a storm.

The radio operator seemed to suppress a shiver. He said in a strained voice: "If we could rig up a kind of emergency antenna from the nose to the tail, I could keep on sending for a while —till the batteries went dead. Maybe somebody would hear us—yet."

Hurley tried to appear confident; he had to keep both men from realizing how hopeless it was to expect to get out of this alive. He was the commissioned officer, and he was the pilot of the plane.

Nodding readily at Jones' suggestion, he returned in a tone intended to be soothing: "Have you enough wire to string an antenna? Where would you put it?"

Jones' pale face broke into an eager smile. "From the top of the vertical fin on the tail to a point on the fuselage directly over my transmitter." He looked upward, indicating with a slender finger the exact spot. "I have a small drill that may do the trick. I think I can get insulators from the old antenna lead-in. It's a chance, Lieutenant!"

"Yes," Bob Hurley agreed with a sober thoughtfulness, "it is a chance."

Machinist's mate Baxter moved forward from the cabin, lurching with the movement of the hull. Pausing there behind the cockpit, he gave Hurley a quizzical glance, his eyes unreadable, and then grinned down at Jones.

He said to the latter with a hard-bitten jocularity: "You aint a mountain goat. How you going to hang on out there, stringing up that wire? You aint going out there, that's all—not while I'm aboard this tub."

A change had come over Jones. His eyes became very sober yet quite bright, and his face had taken on a flush. He got up, facing Baxter; his smile was a little twisted and a little whimsical.

"You're as clumsy as a cow," he grinned. "You'd fall off the wing if there *wasn't* any wind! And you're so dumb you wouldn't know where to string the wire in the first place! I'm going—"

"Yeah?" Baxter challenged explosively. "You're a wise guy, aint you? Well, figure this out—if you go up there and get washed overboard, who's going to operate this radio? *I* can't. Can you, Lieutenant?"

"I'm no operator." Hurley looked down at Jones, adding gently: "Baxter is right about that, don't you see? One of us will have to string that wire. Every man where he is of most service, understand?"

JONES' eyes wavered between the faces of the other two, disappointment in the set of his mouth. "I've been in three shipwrecks," he said plaintively. "It's easier to be out doing things than it is to sit by and watch!" His voice trailed off, to rise an instant later in alarm: "Hey! The water in the bilge is up to the level of the floor!"

Already the plane was down in the water until a portion of its weight was being borne by the buoyancy of the empty gasoline tank on the lower side.

The right wing was out of sight, submerged, what was left of it. The canting caused by the loss of the right wing pontoon was increasing steadily, throwing the left wing, still practically intact, higher and higher in the air.

They were going to have to hurry, to rig the new antenna before it was too late. It was too late now, probably, for a hurricane had just swept through the Keys. It had driven all freighters to cover, and now there probably were no vessels within a hundred miles to answer the distress calls. It would be dark within two hours. After that—

"Get your antenna wire together—insulators—everything you need," Hurley said crisply to Jones. He turned to Baxter, lips pursed tensely. "You're going to have the job of holding the line I put around my chest. It's going to be up to you to get this hatch closed, once I get through it. With an open hatch, a couple of combers would sink this tub." He looked at Baxter speculatively, wishing he could joke about it, but somehow unable to. "Can you haul me back, if I slide off the tail?" he asked.

Baxter was bareheaded. His red hair lay in a wet mat, through which he ran short, powerful fingers nervously.

"Lieutenant," he protested, "you aint got any business out there, sir! You ought to stay inside here while I rig up that wire. I'm bigger'n you, sir. I'm the one that ought to go, not you!"

HIS sincerity and eagerness moved Bob Hurley powerfully. Bitter self-reproach swept him.

But his explanation to Baxter consisted only of the words: "If I fall off out there, I'll need your greater strength to pull me back. I couldn't pull you back, if you fell off." He took the line that Jones brought to him. Looping it beneath his armpits, he fashioned a knot against his chest. Then, with the antenna wire, a pair of pliers and an insulator, he stepped up toward the hatch.

He had to steel himself to release the locking fingers on the hatch. His final warning to Baxter was almost curt. "If you feel me fall off the tail, put your weight on this line! Get this hatch closed quickly!" Poised there, he waited out the surging swells, timing his departure. The plane lunged down, rode upon a swell. It topped the crest and tilted sharply to ride down. Hurley, a queer breathlessness upon him, shouted, "Let's go!" and flung the hatch aside.

Things happened quickly then. The wind beat at him when he emerged. The top of the wing was a slick wet yellow surface. He lay face down, clinging to the air-vents on the gas-tanks, watching Baxter slam the hatch shut just as a massive sea broke green and white above.

The first comber smashed him with an unbelievable force. He was buried in cold salt water. But he held his breath, feeling the lift of the plane as she rode through the swell; he felt himself thrust up into the open air, and before the next swell roared across before the wind, he moved quickly and cautiously backward toward the tail.

IT seemed impossible to hold his footing. Three times, while he struggled backward, curling walls of sea water all but drowned him. Yet he did get back. His weight bore the tail down until it was submerged entirely, so that he was standing thigh-deep in water even in the troughs. But somehow he got a loop of wire through the top rudder hinge aperture of the vertical fin; somehow he laced it through an insulator and spliced it fast.

Such a simple operation, that, yet it required almost fifteen minutes, while he fought desperately against the lashing of the sea. But finally, with a vast relief and a new hope that perhaps a vessel might hear Jones' pleas for help, he turned to start the precarious return trip to the hatch.

And as he turned, something across the tossing waste of grayish ocean caught his eyes. His heart leaped wildly. In a surge of thankfulness, he recognized the silhouette of a Coast Guard patrol boat which plunged through the smother two hundred yards away.

Reacting to his first impulse, he shouted madly. That bawl must have carried far across the water even in the wind. Then, as he watched the rearing bow, he was startled into silence, and a chill of dread transfixed him there.

For the number on her bow was *238!*

Then, with a swift return to realities, Hurley braced himself for the impact of a towering graybeard, and when it had passed, once more waved and shouted. Being rescued by the 238 meant being taken prisoner, like the six men already held aboard her; but it meant a reprieve. And with a quick lift of new confidence, Hurley speculated on this possibility: if he could get aboard the 238, he might contrive, with eight other Coast Guards-

men there to help him, to overpower that pirate crew somehow. If he could only make himself apparent to them there!

The plane, of course, was low in the water, scarcely a speck upon the tumbling surface. Visibility was bad. Spindrift at times was almost dense, like the blur of blowing snow. The 238 churned heavily ahead.

Clinging to the vertical fin, Hurley yelled himself hoarse and flailed his arms until they seemed too heavy to lift shoulder-high again. In sheer desperation he was sobbing, cursing the lookout, muttering a prayer. Steadily the 238 held to her course, to pass not quite a hundred yards away.

It was too far for Hurley to see much. There was no one on deck. Of course, there was some one inside the wheelhouse, steering. If they would only look this way! With one last frenzied, hopeless scream of anger and frustration, Hurley watched the stern come into view. This was the end of them. In another hour it would be too dark for anyone to find them, even if Jones managed to transmit again.

AND then, slowly, the 238 changed her heading somewhat. Hesitating, she rolled dangerously in a trough, and finally headed up and swung about. Hurley, overcome with relief, shouted through the hatch to Jones and Baxter:

"That's the 238! We'll be prisoners, but we'll be alive!"

With a tense eagerness he watched the boat swing back in a wide circle, joyfully calculating how it would be best to try to get aboard her. Patiently he waited, watching the figures which had now come in sight upon the deck.

There were two of them, and they were peering at the wreckage of the plane with a curious deliberation. One of them had a pair of binoculars, which he raised to his eyes and held there fixedly, at last to pass them to the other person. They seemed to go into a lengthy discussion of the problem.

Impatiently Hurley yelled: "Make a lee and throw us lines. There are three aboard here. Don't try to launch a boat in this sea!"

But they gave no sign that they could hear. Why didn't they do something?

With some misgivings, now, Hurley watched that pair. Once, when the 238 came very close, he was startled by a momentary study which he got of them. One was tall, with a dark face. The other was of frail build, almost delicate, and small. And with a start, Bob Hurley realized that this second one must be a woman. He strained his eyes as the boat moved near—and there was no doubt about it, then.

"Throw us lines!" he called beseechingly. "You can't do any good unless you heave to and make a lee! For God's sake, don't—" His words were choked off as a comber came across the wing and blasted him beneath a six-foot wall of greenish sea.

When he could get his breath and had shaken the water from his eyes, the 238 had seemed to disappear. And then he saw her. Rage and helpless indignation boiled up in him bitterly. For the 238 had turned and already had all but disappeared southward through the growing dusk and clammy mist. . . .

It seemed incredible that anyone could so cold-bloodedly abandon three men thus. They had pronounced a death-sentence upon the seaplane's occupants. And it crossed Hurley's mind that Sam Keeler's passing had been no worse than his own was going to be.

He was exhausted now; he was numb and bordering upon collapse when they dragged him down into the cockpit.

Inside, he sank into a seat, too worn out to speak. In a half-conscious state, feeling Baxter's hands roughly chafing at his wrists, he felt a warming affection for these men grow in his heart. How loyal and unquestioning they had been—these two kids who formed his crew! When the plane went down, they would die with him, uncomplaining. It was something fine to know men like that.

He muttered to himself: "Stop getting sentimental, you crazy fool!"

"Yes sir," Baxter said respectfully, at once. "It's not that, sir." Dimly Hurley saw him blink and turn his head away. And Baxter added in a quick, defensive voice: "You make me so damn' mad, going out there and leaving me in here!"

Hurley smiled in silent understanding.

JONES, working frantically, got the new antenna tied into his transmitter. He delayed an instant, to turn and look back into the semi-darkness of the cabin, to call to them with a kind of desperate hopefulness: "We're fixed now, Lieutenant! Going on the air again! Somebody's sure to pick up our SOS this time. The range of the transmitter should be a lot more at night than—"

"You lay another hand on him before I tell you," Nina Manning said, "and you'll live about one minute." Whitey's little pig eyes burned insolently. "Say—" he began.

"Well, start poundin' brass!" Baxter cut the little operator short. "No boat's going to come back for your yelling—the Lieutenant tried that a while ago."

"I'm not calling the 238," Jones declared. He began a rhythmic tapping of the key, talking while he sent. "For me, I'd just as soon take my chances here as be picked up by the 238. Those guys murdered a Coast Guard officer; they'd as lief slit our throats as gig a shark!"

"Come on," Baxter growled, showing the mounting strain they all were under. "You play on that radio, and the Lieutenant and I'll hold the social conversations, kid."

Hurley broke up Jones' swift retort. "What are you sending, Jones?" he asked. "It's too fast for me to read."

"SOS seaplane *Seroson* sinking thirty miles ENE Vaca Key SOS."

"Thirty?" Hurley murmured. "I hope that's our real position. I thought we were closer in. Didn't I say twenty, a while ago? Since we went down, the wind has drifted us, undoubtedly. And the Gulf Stream, too."

"Oh," Jones returned confidently, "that's our position, all right, sir. While you were outside, I got it by tuning on Key West and Havana and Miami with my loop antenna. I charted it on a map, and we're there. We can't be anywhere else, sir." He passed a map back with one hand.

With a quick smile of approval, Hurley accepted it. Jones wasn't big, but he had a head on his shoulders. Only thirty miles! Yet it might as well have been a thousand, for all the help they could summon before the plane sank.

The irregular clicking of the key went on: Five minutes of transmission, five minutes of listening, the cycle always broken by Jones' unwavering declaration: "No answer yet, but we'll pick up somebody, Lieutenant!"

"Don't worry about us pickin' up somebody," Baxter snorted, after Jones had said that twice. "You see to it somebody picks *us* up! You'd look kinda fishy, Jonesy, tryin' to feed a shark."

"I'm in hopes—" Jones muttered, and broke off. With a quick lift of his head, he stopped sending. His abruptness, the very alertness of his movements, brought

Hurley to attention. With both hands Jones tuned his receiver. There was a certain air of frantic haste about him now. Pressing his headphones to his ears, he sat as motionless as stone. Baxter cried out in a voice so hopeful and relieved that it was faintly ironic against the smash of seas: "What the hell's the matter with you?"

Jones waved him imperatively to silence. Hurley could see the operator's silhouette dimly in the lights that were mounted on his radio equipment. He could see him scribble something on a sheet of paper there—could see him drop the pencil and hammer desperately upon the key before he turned back to both of them, his tone a sobbing shout of joy:

"The 240, Lieutenant Ainsworth in command, is about ten miles northeast of us! He says watch for his searchlight, and put up flares so he can find us when he gets here!"

Baxter cried out: "By God, Jonesy, are you sure?"

Hurley said: "Jones, tell Lieutenant Ainsworth we'll watch for his searchlight. Tell him to hurry; we can't hold out much longer. Find out what speed he's making. The cabin's half full of water now!"

"Yes sir," Jones said, and went about his task.

Baxter said in jubilation: "Boy, we was done up! If the 240 hadn't come along, look where we'd 'a' been! Lieutenant, if you hadn't got out there and tied that antenna up—"

"You'd have done it," Hurley said. "If you hadn't pulled me back to the cockpit, I'd still be out there too."

"Lieutenant Ainsworth sends you his regards, sir," Jones called quietly. "Barring accident, the 240 should be here in thirty minutes."

BUT it wasn't that long, though it seemed hours before the searchlight stabbed weakly through the mist and rain ahead, sweeping the water, throwing into high relief the swells that marched endlessly across the sea. Hurley shouted at Baxter to bring flares forward, and, together, they opened the hatch quickly and sent a lurid parabola of flame into the sky.

So within five minutes the 240 was hove to on the windward, and the searchlight was swinging over the wreck to the rhythm of the swells, and Lieutenant Ainsworth's voice was booming downwind through his megaphone:

"It's too rough to get a boat down! We'll throw you lines!"

With life-preservers on, the three men crawled out on the wing. The cockpit filled almost immediately as a black wave swept across, and they felt the plane slip below the surface, a dead thing now. But by this time they had caught the lines and were being hauled through the churning sea.

IN Ainsworth's cabin underneath the fantail, Hurley changed to dry clothes —a shirt and pair of slacks belonging to his brother officer, and a pair of seaman's shoes.

"We sighted the 238, but they wouldn't pick us up," he said, tying a shoe-lace.

"You hardly expected that, after Keeler's treatment, did you?" Ainsworth retorted. "What time was that?"

"Just before dark. I'm positive the 238 was heading for Vaca Harbor." He launched a terse description of the radio transmitter in the fish-house, of Cornish and his curious behavior, of the *Seroson's* disaster and the probable cause of it. "So if we head into Vaca Lagoon right now," he finished, his tone growing volatile with excitement at the prospect of the encounter, "we'll probably find the 238 in Vaca Harbor, going in or coming out. I don't know what she's up to. But we'll have to hurry! Let's go!"

Ainsworth gave him a deliberate appraising look that lacked approval. "I imagine Captain Marshall would like the opportunity to tell me what to do," he returned a trifle stiffly. "Did you see any of the six Coast Guardsmen on deck as the 238 went by?"

"No, I didn't," Hurley answered evenly, hiding his impatience. His tone a little acid, he demanded: "Must we sight the poor devils to be sure they're alive, before we try to help them?"

Ainsworth balanced himself against the vicious rolling of the vessel, while a look of tolerant forbearance crossed his handsome face. "I'm only a lieutenant, junior grade," he said. "But senior to you, Hurley. I imagine we should report the facts to Captain Marshall by radio, and await instructions, don't you think?"

Bob Hurley was worn out from hours in the air, followed by more arduous hours in the sinking plane. Discipline had never rested very gracefully upon his shoulders, try as he always had to submit to it. Now, hardly knowing that he spoke, he heard his tongue lash out at Ainsworth in a bitter fulmination:

"To hell with Marshall! Listen, guy—it's well enough to abide by regulations when things are going right. But this is life or death for those men. The 238 won't stand around waiting on the old man to get his patrol boats under way—don't you think the cutthroats on that tub know you're down here? If you don't move fast, you'd just as well not move at all. If you don't get into Vaca Lagoon and blockade the harbor in the next few minutes, the 238 will be out in the Straits somewhere, bound for God-knows-where! Are you going to let those poor devils die?"

HE paused, eyes glittering feverishly, watching the mixed emotions that seemed so transparently to form upon Lieutenant Ainsworth's flushing face—anger, resentment and uncertainty.

Finally Ainsworth said reluctantly: "We'll put about and run into Vaca Harbor for a look around." He moved toward the galley to pass through toward the wheelhouse. "I'm a damned fool," he added grimly. "I'm letting myself be influenced by sympathy, and by you." His direct glance met Hurley's for an instant. "You have a reputation of being pretty wild—pretty crazy too. Did you ever stop to think of that?"

Hurley grinned, vastly relieved. "Probably I have," he admitted. "Probably I'll get tried for taking the plane without orders. But who the devil cares? Let's go!"

Ainsworth took the wheel, when they had crossed the wet and dancing deck and reached the wheelhouse. Hurley braced himself against the chart-board and watched the other officer head the 240 skillfully into the wind, and wait for a long trough before making the turn back, and settle the patrol boat on the course to Vaca Harbor.

It was a wild night, Hurley admitted.

"How long will it take to reach the entrance of the harbor?" he inquired.

"Probably two hours, maybe three," Ainsworth said, throwing his weight against the wheel and swearing at the way the boat steered in such a rough following sea. "I can't run at full speed—got to take it slowly until we get into Hawks Channel, anyhow. . . . When we get inside the channel to the harbor, then what? Remember, we can't use our guns because we're just as apt as not to kill our own men, in the dark."

Hurley pursed his lips, thinking of the situation. The searchlight was no good to them, of course, for it would only warn the skipper of the 238 of danger. At last he said: "My idea is to put the dinghy over and load it with five or six men and try to board the 238 in the dark—before her skipper knows we're anywhere about. Naturally, he knows we're in the vicinity, but probably thinks you've picked me up and have headed back to Lauderdale. After we're in the harbor proper, a dinghy will be seaworthy enough. We can get up to her without making any noise. If she's at the dock, we can get aboard. You be easing in behind us all the time, and at the first shot I fire, you throw the searchlight on us so we can see what we're doing. Can you add anything to that?"

"What if the 238 starts to run past us—in case we're discovered?"

"Use this tub to block the channel. Turn her broadside. A collision may sink her, but you'll pin the 238 in the harbor."

"If we knew who these people were," Ainsworth murmured after a short silence, "we would know better how to act. If we had some idea how far they'll go—"

Hurley laughed bitterly, remembering Sam Keeler. "They'll kill you; that's as far as they'll go! I forgot to mention—at least one member of the outfit is a woman. I'd like to know who the devil *she* could be!"

"A woman?" Ainsworth was incredulous. He dropped a window of the wheelhouse to improve his vision. Cold mist whipped in and wet their faces as the 240 moved sluggishly across the endless swells.

Hurley yawned. Reaction to the past few hours was coming swiftly now, bringing a leaden weariness. It would be all right to leave Ainsworth with the navigating of this boat while he himself got what rest he could. "When you start to poke into the channel at Vaca Lagoon, have somebody call me. I'm going to try your bed."

WHEN Hurley awakened to the touch of a seaman Ainsworth had sent down, he sensed instantly the change in the motion of the boat, and realized they must already be inside the channel to the harbor. Even the engines seemed to have been stopped. Instantly alert, instantly filled with a dull sense of dread, he sat up, asking:

"Where are we? How far from Vaca Harbor?"

"I don't know exactly, sir," the seaman croaked in a hoarse whisper. "Lieutenant Ainsworth wants you topside, sir. There's something's happened."

THE galley was dark now. Moving through it, Hurley could feel the presence of members of the crew, and a moment later heard their whispers. He passed on and climbed the companionway ladder to the deck. The entire boat was dark, the running-lights out. Night was wet and impenetrable in all directions. The engines' small vibration came up through the deck, outside, but idling as they were, they made no sound. Hurley traversed the distance to the wheelhouse and pulled the door open and went inside.

"Where are we?" he shot at Ainsworth in the dark.

"In the harbor channel—stuck in the mud! Can you imagine all the infernal damned ignorance of the man? I turned the wheel over to him while I went to the bow to try to see—and he sticks us—with an ebb tide! We're fast!" Ainsworth was almost sobbing in his rage.

Hurley sucked in his breath in slow exasperation, and then checked himself. "How far from the dock?" he demanded.

"I'm not certain; possibly half a mile, maybe less than that."

"Any signs of anything ahead? I don't see any lights at the dock, but in this mist I probably couldn't see them anyhow."

"Nothing." Ainsworth broke off into a deluge of swearing, ending with a tirade at the offending seaman: "Mallary, do you have any idea of what this negligence of yours may mean? The 238 may get away from us! There are lives at stake here—and you have to run aground!"

The seaman sounded miserable and sick. Hurley could not see him in the dark. "I know it, sir. I can't understand how I could 'a' done it, sir. I seen a channel marker not fifty yards back there, an' I held her dead ahead—"

In spite of himself, Bob Hurley felt sorry for the man. He broke in: "There's a bend in the channel about here, Mallary, and you couldn't see it in the dark, of course. —With an ebb tide, you'd better hurry, if you're going to try to get off," he shot at Ainsworth.

"What do you think we've been doing for the last ten minutes?" Ainsworth snapped. He made a movement, and the engine clanged noisily.

Hurley jumped in startled reaction. The bell had sounded as loud as a gun there in the darkness. He protested nervously: "Say, that damn' thing can be heard a mile or more! Send a man back to the engine-room hatch—and I'll relay your orders to him for the engineer. It's bad enough to be stuck here, without giving it away!"

Ainsworth, in that tone of forbearance which he used occasionally, returned: "If the 238 was going to hear us, she would have heard us long ago. Mallary stood here ringing it enough to wake the dead."

With an aggravating sense of frustration Hurley went outside and walked forward to the bow. A thin drizzle of rain mixed with a heavy mist lay like a curtain over the lagoon.

Hurley debated for a moment. Here in the harbor, the dinghy would be seaworthy enough. It would be a long, slow pull, to row against the tide and wind to the invisible dock yonder, but it was apparently the only thing to do.

EVEN as he turned, to go back to the wheelhouse, he checked himself, frozen by the sound that floated indefinitely across the water: the faint yet unmistakable *glug-glug-glug-glug* of a heavy boat's exhaust getting under way.

He slipped back to the wheelhouse, and his voice was urgent. There was no chance to get the 240 floated soon enough. There was no point now in putting down the dinghy with its loading party. Only one possible thing remained for them to do.

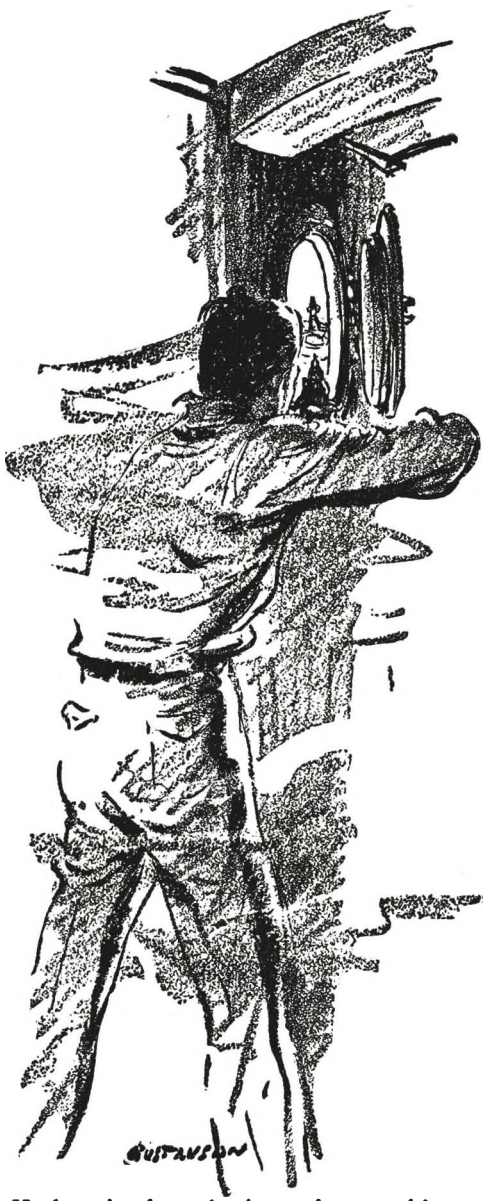
"Listen!" he warned tensely. He guided Ainsworth outside, into the mist and wind. The soft detonations of those engines had accelerated now, and had moved much closer.

"That's the 238!" Ainsworth confirmed nervously. And in a tone of desperation: "Mallary! Get Wert and unlimber the one-pounder! We can't risk shooting any of our men aboard her, but we put a few shots below her waterline and cripple her."

Mallary moved off with a quick: "Aye, sir!"

Hurley demanded: "Can't you swing this boat's stern into the channel enough to block it—pivot the bow?"

Ainsworth dived into the wheelhouse. The telegraph clanged again, and the echoing bell from the engine-room came instantly. The wheels began to turn, shivering every timber of the boat with their vibration.



Hurley aimed at the bags of ammunition, and squeezed the trigger. . . . It seemed the gates of hell opened wide.

And the stern did move at last, enough to block the channel partially. Ainsworth, watching the compass-card swing sluggishly through three points, said exultantly: "If they get past now, they'll have to scrape our stern to do it. If they make a mistake, they'll stave in their bow—and then we'll have 'em!" He rang off the engines. "Our one-pounder is our only gun heavy enough to damage their hull, but I'll arm the crew, in case we're boarded. You take a couple of men and a machine-gun on the stern. I'll handle the searchlight and the one-pounder on the bow." He hurried toward the aft companionway to reach the armory beneath the fantail.

Hurley hesitated a moment. It was doubtful, to him, if, as Ainsworth had said, they would "have 'em." Rather, it was the 240 which lay at a disadvantage.

For the 240 lay quartering across the channel, helpless in the mud. Her one-pounder was mounted three feet forward of the forecastle companionway—seven or eight feet forward of the wheelhouse—and it could not be swung to fire aft because of the wheelhouse. Therefore, after the 238 had collided with the 240's stern, definitely establishing her position, the brunt of the burden of trying to sink her would revert to the men stationed on the 240's fantail—armed only with a machine-gun and small weapons, neither capable of opening her hull.

This thought agitated Hurley. For at the same time the 240 was thus at a disadvantage, the pirates on the 238 could swing their one-pounder into action at the best angle—and they would not be shooting low to avoid killing anyone!

"The searchlight—blind 'em just as they hit us," Hurley thought. "If I can hold that machine-gun on the same spot long enough, it's bound to make a hole." He started aft along the starboard deck, hurrying to help set up the gun.

What gave the warning of their presence no one ever knew. For no apparent reason, the night was suddenly transfixed by the blue-white beam of a searchlight, a searchlight that stabbed across the bay, probing experimentally, swinging, to rest in an incredibly short time full on the 240 where she lay.

A shout sounded from the stern. Some one cursed, and a seaman added a high, fear-shrill exclamation. Three men in dungarees detached themselves from the group aft and ran along the port deck toward the one-pounder and the wheelhouse. The light enlarged their statures, throwing long, grotesque shadows that jerked fantastically. One of them was yelling: "Jeez, a fight!" They dived into the wheelhouse.

In turn, the searchlight of the 240 speared across the harbor, and the two beams locked. Both boats stood revealed to one another, and the 238 was not two hundred feet away, the numbers on her bow sharply white upon her bow. She was accelerating powerfully. A cluster of figures was half-hidden by the wheelhouse, and a lone

man with a rifle was poised at the port rail 'midships. The sight imprinted in his mind, Hurley whirled aft to man his gun.

Ainsworth emerged from the aft companionway just as Hurley got there. His arms were loaded with service .45's and cartridges. Behind him two men came with a machine-gun and ammunition for the one-pounder. Hurley got a glance at their flushed, excited faces as they thrust their heads up into the light. He debated what to do, for he could see that there was not a chance to get the machine-gun set up in time to bring it into use. Just then the one-pounder on the bow let go; its detonation came as a dull *whap!* and there was a flood of sound that rolled off across the far lagoon.

"That'll fix 'em!" some one cried.

But it didn't "fix 'em." For just then the *dup-dup-dup-dup-dup* of a machine-gun rippled to their ears, and the 240's searchlight went out with a crash. Slugs ripped through the wheelhouse glass, tinkling it across the deck. Bullets thudded into the superstructure with a splintering of wood. There was a dull, awful sound and then a scream. In the light Hurley saw one of the seamen who had climbed out on the deck with his arms locked around the machine-gun go sprawling on his face, a bullet through his brain. The gun was under him, and he was very still. He hadn't screamed; the scream had come from his companion, who had sat down suddenly, back to the cabin bulkhead, clawing convulsively at his right shoulder.

Ainsworth was yelling: "Their searchlight—shoot out their light! God, this is murder!" He fairly flung two automatics into Hurley's hands, and, dropping an armful of ammunition to the deck, ran forward. As if in answer to his shrill command, the one-pounder on the bow barked thunderously.

INSTANTLY the 238's searchlight went out. The impact of the projectile could be heard distinctly, followed by intermingled shouting. Darkness shrouded the lagoon again, a darkness made more impenetrable by its contrast to the blinding brilliance previously existing. The one-pounder spoke in a dogged rapid fire, shivering the deck and splitting the misty night with lurid flame each time it vomited its steel.

What effect this fire had, Hurley could not tell. The stabbing orange jets from the 238's machine-gun had ceased, leaving the movement of that boat indefinite. It was impossible to determine her position, and therefore the gunners up there must be shooting blind. If the shots were searching out their mark, there was no indication of that fact.

Then, as suddenly as it all had started, silence filtered down upon the scene—silence and darkness and a creeping horror. At the next moment, that machine-gun might start jetting death again. Through the straining stillness came the prolonged *whish* of the 238's bow wave, but its sound covered such a wide angle that Hurley could not be positive of its direction. The murmur of the engines was almost upon them, now. He stood poised there, a gun in either hand, straining his ears for those sounds; hearing them, and the agonized breathing of the wounded man here at his feet, the low gutturals of men forward, and the flat metallic clinking of a chain from somewhere across the bay.

DURING that momentary interlude, the question of this ambuscade by the 238 crossed his seething mind, a colossal blunder on somebody's part. Ainsworth's vessel must have been closer to the dock than he had thought, when it finally ran aground, and the engine-telegraph bells must have warned the skipper of the other boat in time to let him post his men ready at their guns.

But however it had happened, the result of it suddenly took form. For without other warning, without, now, even the throaty mutter of exhausts, the 238 glided down upon them.

It seemed to Hurley that his eyes had played a trick upon him. No vessel could appear so vast there in the darkness, no vessel could materialize so instantly. The first warning was the dim phosphorescent line that marked the bow wave, the faint hiss of it—and then the hulk took form as something even blacker than the night. He leaped back involuntarily.

Bow met stern in a glancing blow. There was a first faint shock, and the two boats seemed to glance apart for a bare instant before another greater impact came. And then, to the rising screech of bolt-heads, to the splintering and crash of the wood, the 238 forced its way past, riding rail-to-rail. There was no light aboard her now.

All guns were silent. Even the one-pounder under Ainsworth's men withheld

its fire now, for fear of killing some of those unfortunates who still were prisoners aboard the other craft. It had been well enough to shoot before, aiming below the water line, hoping for a lucky hit that would render her unseaworthy. But at close quarters, the piece could not be depressed enough to clear the rail of its own boat—and besides that, the wheelhouse was directly in the line of fire. So the 238 went grating past unharmed.

It all took place so rapidly that Hurley caught his breath in sheer astonishment. The nerve of the skipper of that boat! And then, a rising desperation filling him, Hurley realized that this was the last chance those six would have. If something could not be done to help them now, the likelihood was that nothing ever would be done, for no sane man would ever bring the patrol boat back to Vaca Key.

The distillation of his quick summary of this contingency was action—action of a kind and potency that Hurley did not then appraise. He could not turn back the 238; no one could now prevent her swift escape, for she was gliding past, the rails still hard in contact. But he could go aboard her as she slipped along!

IT was absurdly easy. The 238 was grinding her way through the narrow opening. The two rails were crushed together. Hurley, when the after portion of the other craft came to him, leaped lightly over to the fantail, fell flat upon his hands and knees, and lay with head raised, in furtive appraisal of his peril there.

Already the 238 was in the clear, the grounded patrol-boat lost in the mist and darkness. The engines accelerated suddenly; the wake was a gushing noise behind, a straight line of dull blue-gray in the flat blackness of the harbor. The helmsman knew this channel intimately, all right, to be able to run through it at such terrific speed!

The boil of the wake drowned all other sounds. If there were people in the after cabin underneath him, their voices did not come to Hurley's ears; if there were men topside, they were not now visible against the gloom. Yet absence of his enemies temporarily did not blind Hurley to the acuteness of his peril. He moved half doubled, one gun drawn for use, the other in his belt, in a brief exploration. The first thing was to locate some or all of the captured Coast Guardsmen.

The boat was a standard seventy-five-footer of the patrol class. Underneath the fantail was the gear locker and the arsenal; immediately forward was the one officer's cabin, and beyond that, the galley. The top deck of the cabin and galley was raised some two feet above the main deck, and on it various gear was stowed, including the dinghy. There was, therefore, little concealment possible, even in the dark.

To his surprise, he was able to reach the aft wheelhouse bulkhead without seeing anyone. From the galley came a faint glow now, and voices were a soft murmur against the rumble of the Sterlings. With a penetrating glance in both directions, he pressed his face against the wheelhouse glass and peered inside.

RATHER better than expected, he was able to make out the forms of three people there—the helmsman and two others. He could see a dim silhouette of the helmsman in the glow of the binnacle light, but the outlines of the other two were blurred. A man was saying harshly:

"Okay, then, but you're crazy! The thing we ort to do is dump this stuff in Cardenas Cove like we planned, an' quit. I tell you two, they're onto us!"

To Hurley's startled ears came a woman's voice: "We're going into the Cove before tomorrow night—and we're coming back here then for the other jobs. Where is the nerve you're always bragging about, Conway?"

Hurley stiffened, as that voice touched some hidden memory center in his brain. The man addressed as Conway uttered a profane exclamation. "Listen—they hung Alderman for less than they've got on us now!"

"Fer God's sake!" the other man lashed sharply out. "Did you think we was gonna be hauling coconut milk? We're going through wid all of it, see? When we git done, there won't be no trace of anything, see? This scow will be on the bottom of the Gulf and we'll be clear—and plenty rich. Lousy rich!"

The woman argued: "We talked it out before we started, Conway. So far, things've gone exactly as we planned—except the Coast Guard officer."

"Yeah," Conway admitted; and added doggedly: "but somethin' slipped somewheres! How come this Government gang down to the lagoon so fast, hot after us? That's what I'd like to know. I don't aim to git hung. I'm done, see?

When we drop this junk at Cardenas, I'm takin' my cut—an' I'm done."

The voice that answered was as cold and brittle as the glass against Bob Hurley's ear: "I guess you'd better git your cut right now."

An electric silence hung there for a moment, filled with something dreadful. Then Conway's hoarse cry of terror broke the spell. "No, Whitey! No! God, you can't do that to me, Whitey! I'm your pal, Whitey!"

A gun spoke twice in quick succession before Bob Hurley could start to move away. As his perceptions accelerated with excitement, he heard the galley hatch slide back—and felt the spill of light flare up into his face. Almost at the same instant three men emerged from that hatch—three men in Coast Guard uniform, who, apparently unaware of his existence, approached along the deck.

In a flash he remembered the leader—a thick-shouldered, ugly-faced young man with a broken nose—as a seaman on this patrol boat with Sam Keeler. So he had no hesitation. He stepped out to meet them. There couldn't be more than five or six in this gang of pirates. With three sailors, one of whom, besides himself, he could adequately arm, he should take the boat by surprise and mop up quickly. He said in a low, commanding voice: "Take it easy, sailor. Turn around and get back in the galley. I'm Lieutenant Hurley—from the 240."

THE trio paused uncertainly, glancing in the dim light from Hurley to the wheelhouse from which the shots had come. "What's wrong up there?" the leader asked. "Hey!"

"Get back!" Hurley snapped. As he talked, he gesticulated with his right hand—unmindful that it still held a .45 in their direction. "Get down out of sight, dammit! Two of them got into a brawl up there—forget them now. I've got two guns, and we can round up the other boys and clean up here and get this tub back, see?"

"Point that gat somewheres else," the man in front protested. "It might go off."

Hurley grinned, remembering the gun. He stuck it muzzle-first into his belt, saying, "Okay. I've got to—"

He saw the blow coming, but it was too late. He was off balance, and he tried to dodge but it was useless. The ugly-faced seaman swung a left hook that connected squarely. Seeing it coming, Hurley realized only then that he had not seen this man anywhere before aboard Sam Keeler's boat. There was only a similarity of appearance that he had mistaken. And then he crumpled underneath the blow.

HE could hear voices a long time before his eyes were capable of sight, or so it seemed; then he realized that he was on a bunk, still aboard a boat, his wrists bound together at his back, his eyes covered by a cloth. The vessel rolled very gently, grating against a dock or piling or another craft. An intermittent jabber of Spanish came from somewhere above and to one side, garbled and made unintelligible by the dull sounds of heavy boxes being dragged across a deck. Hurley lay for a moment trying to identify the sounds. Then, trying to shift his position, he discovered that his feet had been bound too. Swearing, he jerked painfully and futilely to free his wrists.

Cool hands were on his face then, removing the cloth. That strangely familiar woman's voice came once more to his ears, bewilderingly calm against his own intense agitation.

"Lieutenant Hurley, it is unfortunately necessary to keep you this way for the time being. You'll feel better, possibly, being able to see."

He looked up into a pair of violet eyes that were regarding him with an estimating scrutiny, hard, direct. In response to his grimace of appreciation, she gave him a faint smile with full red lips, and moved lithely back to the center of the cabin.

She was rather tall, and slender and full-breasted. Her face was perfectly and beautifully oval, the skin a smoked ivory that gave her a Spanish look. She was dressed in linen slacks and white silk shirt open at the throat, hatless, a bright red scarf folded to a band around her yellow hair.

The sight of her standing there left him for a moment nonplused, a little shocked. Out of his years of experience in the Keys of Florida, he had fashioned his own idea of this woman who evidently commanded desperate men—and he could not quite believe his eyes at seeing her, young and vital, filled with a kind of lazy animal grace as she paced with a long stride about the room.

"Who," he demanded with a slow intake of his breath, "are you?" And then, before she could reply, memory returned.

Her eyes were smoldering as she turned them on him, as with a whimsical lift of her head she answered: "I suppose I should feel mortified that I made such a slight and temporary impression on you, Lieutenant Hurley. I remember you so well! You called me Claudet, the last time we met—but my name is really Nina Manning. Does that help? Shall I mention Captain Glaskill?"

HURLEY shook his head. "It took me a minute," he said in a flat voice. Through his mind passed swiftly snatches of memory: a meeting with this woman when she had tried to lure a flotilla of patrol boats away from a spot on Elliott's Key where her subordinates were putting aliens ashore—the schooner *Glenna Mary* and its cutthroat crew—a desperate struggle ending in shooting it out with Captain Glaskill and being almost trapped when the boat went down—a quick, vindictive search for this woman who now stood before him—to find that she had vanished like smoke before the wind. It had been a year, but it all came flooding back as vividly as if it had been yesterday.

"So this time," he muttered, "you've turned pirate. The pirate of Vaca Lagoon—you look like one." He shrugged moodily. "You seem to have me tied up pretty well. So—what?"

Her voice was a low taunt. "As always, Lieutenant, you are very direct. What do you expect?"

"In your hands, anything. Where are the Coast Guardsmen who were on this tub when you turned pirate?"

A hard gleam came into her eyes as she stared down at him. "You murdered Captain Glaskill, didn't you?" she countered, face coldly impassive. "The Coast Guard did that. Well, the Coast Guard paid for it."

An overwhelming hatred of this woman left him trembling. "You know, don't you," he demanded harshly, "that you can't get away with this? We'll stretch that lovely neck of yours."

"*You* won't be there, I can assure you," she returned with a sardonic drawl. "You are the man who actually shot Captain Glaskill, aren't you?"

He struggled to sit up, and the rope around his wrists bit painfully. "Let's get down to facts. I take it you must have been in love with Glaskill—enough to murder seven Coast Guardsmen in revenge. I'm dumb enough to let myself get caught by you. So that makes it your move. But whatever you're going to do, sister, let's get it over with."

She inclined her head a trifle, a gracious, mocking little gesture. "All right, we'll get it over with, but this will take some time, Lieutenant Hurley." She turned, moving in that tigerish gait through the bulkhead into the galley; her ankles flashed in the light as she disappeared up the companionway.

Hurley sat there for a moment, cramped by the position of his hands. With an effort he swung his weight forward from the low bunk and stood up. The hatch above his head was closed, so he could see nothing there; and from the outside, darkness pressed in against the portholes. The light was dim. This cabin was apparently Nina Manning's, for it had absorbed somehow a faint, indefinite perfume. By the chronometer on the aft bulkhead he saw that it was a little after two o'clock. He had not been unconscious more than a few minutes.

A dozen questions filled his mind, the foremost of which was their location. The 238 could not have run far from Vaca Lagoon in this short time; yet they seemed to be inside another harbor, seemed to be tied up at a dock. Had Nina Manning changed her mind and decided to take on more armament before departing?

SUDDENLY the hatch over his head slid back, and a man's legs came briskly down the ladder. The fellow was short and thin, with a narrow face containing close-set black eyes. His manner was suspicious and imperious, his tone ugly.

"Set down, you!" He thrust out a hand quickly and Hurley forcibly sat back on his bunk, bumping his head. Just then the tailored slacks and trim ankles of Nina Manning came through the hatch. She closed it, taking one more step to the cabin deck, and turned to her subordinate with the command:

"See if the galley hatch is closed, Whitey."

"We gotta load some stuff up there, Nina. No use delayin' the job."

"All right. Close the galley door, then. Lock it." She watched Whitey obey, and then, lips pursed momentarily in study, added to Bob Hurley: "In thirty minutes we'll be leaving here for Cuba. Just before daylight, we'll meet a boat loaded with some guns that are being run through to the opposition—guns

we're going to have. As the Coast Guard officer in command of this boat, you'll be on the bow during the engagement, directing my men. Whitey will be in the wheel-house with me, and the first move you make to give a warning will be your last."

She took a short turn around the cabin, her long strides adding a mysterious emphasis to her instructions. Hurley, watching her through calculating eyes, asked:

"What is this—hi-jacking, or piracy?"

"Whichever you prefer," she answered pleasantly. "I don't see that it makes much difference to you. You'll do what you're told."

"This looks like a case of one gun-runner hi-jacking another gun-runner. The patrol boat lets you get alongside without being questioned, and from then on it's easy." Hurley looked slowly from one to the other of them. "And what if I don't cater to this little play?"

"Listen, mutt," Whitey sneered, "you'll cater to it plenty quick. I rubbed out one guy tonight already. I'd as lief shoot you as slap your face right now." His right hand flicked out and lashed Bob Hurley's cheek, the fingers open, leaving four long vivid marks.

"No doubt you shot him with his hands tied behind him and his feet bound," Hurley taunted sardonically. "That sure must have taken nerve."

Whitey's eyes gleamed redly. He gave Nina Manning a beseeching look. "We'd ought to burn him outta the way right now an' save trouble," he told her. "I can wear his uniform an' stand out there as well as him. No use takin' chances with him when we're gonna—"

"You lay another hand on him before I tell you," Nina Manning interrupted in an utterly changed voice, "and you'll live about one minute."

Whitey hesitated. He looked at her resentfully, his little pig eyes burning over her insolently from head to foot. "Say—" he began.

Something in her blazing eyes brought him up short; indecision crossed his face, mingled, it seemed to Hurley, intangibly with maliciousness and fear. He turned away through the bulkhead.

THE woman said, as if nothing had happened: "Now, Lieutenant Hurley, I'll explain what you're to do: You're the spokesman. You will stand on the bow and make the formal commands for search and seizure. My men will transfer the cargo after that."

"On what grounds is all this seizing done?" he jeered, and was startled by the answer.

"Under section two of the treaty of June 18, 1926, with Cuba. This boat is Cuban registry. Being under suspicion, she must submit to examination—and as it happens, we've been in hot pursuit of her since soon after she left Key West last night, so that gives us power of seizure, don't you see?"

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody told me that. I found it out for myself. I've had enough boats seized in the last three years." Anger brought a slow flush to her face, heightening her dark, amazing beauty.

"It's a shame you're nothing but a pirate," Hurley taunted. "With that face and that—"

She slapped him, not hard, but enough to sting. He grinned. He said: "Okay, that's the second time tonight. Now what do we play? What reason have we got to be suspicious of this Spig boat in the first place?"

"Suspicious that her cargo is a certain lot of ammunition stolen from the Government at Carlstrom Field."

His eyes widened in surprise. He was no longer bored, and his thoughts were not concerned with what might happen to him later on. Watching her, he said carelessly: "That takes a lot of gall, doesn't it—to have the stuff on board here and seize another boat for having it?"

She gave him a calculating glance, but ignored the question altogether. "You know what you're going to do. Need I remind you that one move, one word to give a warning—one effort to escape—will bring your death?"

He nodded lugubriously. "I was afraid of that," he said, and watched her climb the companionway ladder, open the hatch, and go quickly into the night.

FOR a long time Hurley sat there, pondering the case. He was satisfied, now, that Nina Manning was responsible for the theft of a million rounds of ammunition from that hangar. Who, then, was operating the other boat, the one to be hi-jacked? Where had its arms come from?

The drum of the engines began, forward, followed by the subdued clang of the wheelhouse telegraph. The 238 got slowly under way. Sitting there uncomfortably, he listened to the swelling volume of the wake, the creaking of the

timbers in this craft. Life was suddenly sweet to live, now that he had almost reached its end.

Eventually he slept, from sheer exhaustion, lying in that cramped position on his side. And then he was hearing Nina Manning's voice once more, a voice this time turned flatly metallic with a subdued strain. He looked up at her, and faint daylight was creeping through the portholes, outlining her profile delicately. A flush of excitement was upon her face.

"You're handling the one-pounder, Lieutenant," she said in a matter-of-fact statement. "We're overhauling this schooner now. Put one shot across her bow to stop her. My men will be ready, dressed in uniform. When we come alongside, you send them over and they'll know what to do."

Bitterly, he asserted: "You take it entirely for granted that I'll take on such a business."

"I take it for granted that you want to live," she said, untying his bonds deftly.

For an instant, feeling himself free, he considered the possibility of overpowering her. Through that small white door in the after bulkhead he could gain access to the arsenal. But Nina Manning seemed to read his thought, for she stepped lithely away from him the moment he was free—stepped back and stood poised with her right hand concealed beneath a fold of her shirtwaist. "Get forward," she said coldly. He gave her a quick grudging look of admiration, and climbed the steep companionway.

The misting rain of the night before had stopped now, and the sky had been washed partially clean of clouds, so that the sun was rising through a pink veil that seemed to hang vertical above the sea. The air was deliciously fresh and crisp and sweet; Hurley breathed hungrily, feasting his eyes. Then, as he reached the forward deck and saw the schooner quartering across their bow, and realized the death probably soon to come, his face went somber.

IN the wheelhouse Whitey was already at the helm, accompanied by the ugly seaman whom Hurley had unfortunately accosted with such disastrous results the night before. Three other men stood behind this pair, dressed also in the Coast Guard uniforms which had evidently belonged to the members of Sam Keeler's crew. They were obviously trying to assume a military look, and failing in that, they appeared only ludicrous. Whitey's countenance was both saturnine and calculating now as he divided his attention between Hurley and the quarry which sailed steadily across the bow. Suddenly he said:

"All right, lads. A shot through her rigging to bring her about. Then alongside an' over we go. Stow the stuff in the fo'c'stle." He flicked his eyes balefully upon Hurley. "You, up there! You know that gun. You do the firin'—an' you better shoot where I tell you, see? Or else—"

Hurley looked at the unsheathed one-pounder and then back to Whitey. He was wondering if he could somehow manage in the excitement of the fight to swing the gun back and train it on the wheelhouse—take Whitey by surprise and blow him and the wheelhouse off the deck.

"Get goin'," Whitey said.

THE three seamen behind him filed out to the deck, each carrying six rounds. Hurley opened the breech and inserted the first cartridge, closed it and lined up the sights. Just then Nina Manning, shadows of weariness showing underneath her eyes in the morning glare, came into the wheelhouse.

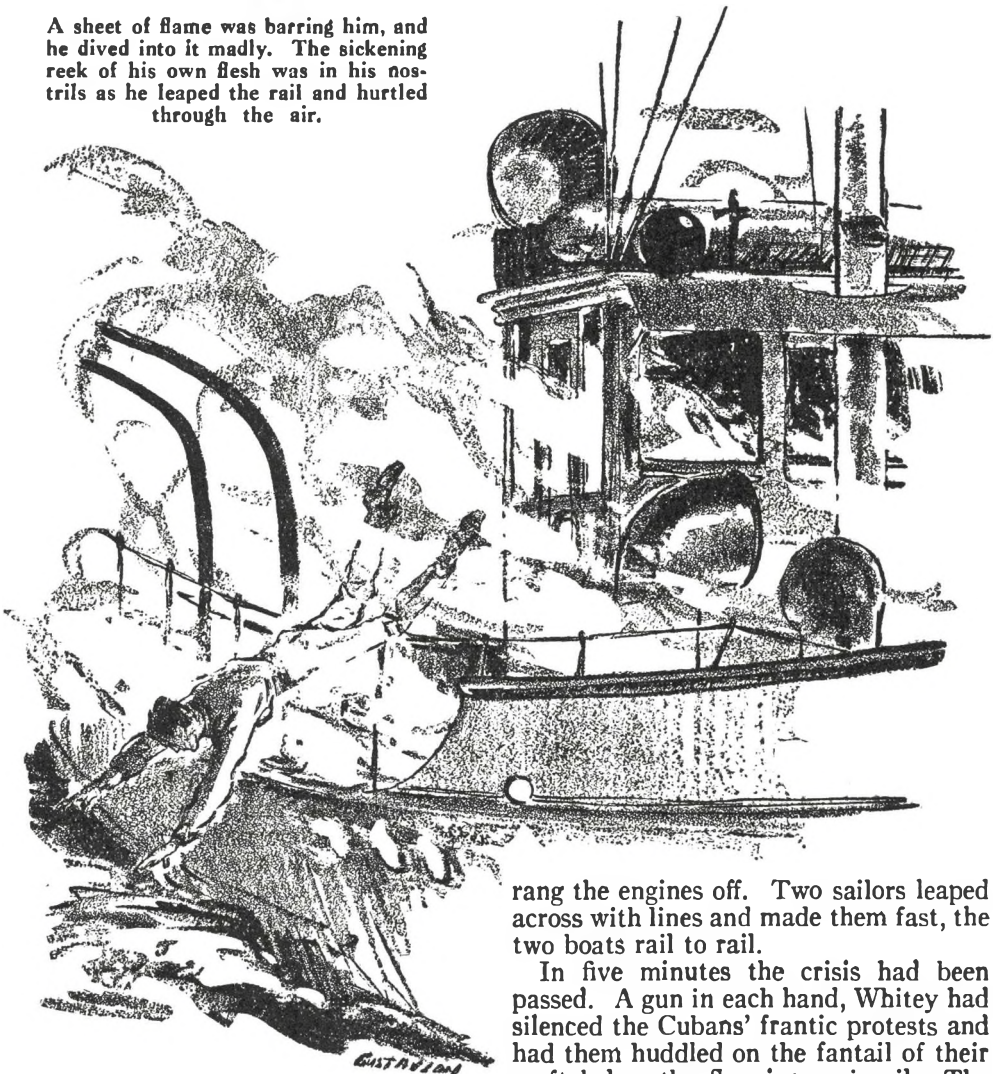
The woman gave a low brittle command: "Get out there where you belong. I told you I'd give all the orders here."

And once more the man's resistance ebbed away. Bob Hurley, watching Whitey move out to the deck and take a position by the capstan, wondered what quality it was that made this woman so invincible. Thinking of her, he remembered something he had planned to do, and hand in pocket, pulled out his penknife and transferred it in his closed palm to the pocket at his hip. His thoughts were interrupted by Nina's crisp word—

"Fire!"

It had been years since Hurley had stood thus on the bow of a patrol boat and sent a warning shot across to halt a rummy or an alien-runner. The dull impact of the gun's detonation on his ears brought back the memory of a dozen fights like this one; yet this was piracy, nothing more or less. Piracy, in which Lieutenant Robert Hurley was acting at the moment in the leading rôle.

The first shot snipped a halyard, letting the discolored foresail balloon with the breeze and flap down on the deck. A



A sheet of flame was barring him, and he dived into it madly. The sickening reek of his own flesh was in his nostrils as he leaped the rail and hurtled through the air.

shout of alarm in Spanish drifted back across the water, and men appeared upon the schooner's stern, running toward the sail.

"Come about—or we'll put one through yer belly!"

Hurley could not determine who said that. Here on the patrol boat every man was poised in a kind of hungry expectancy, like a hound about to be unleashed. Some one muttered, "Look at the Spigs dancin' around over there!" and laughed. "Nina, how much stuff they got aboard?"

"All we can take on, and then some," Nina Manning answered, eyes ablaze.

Things happened quickly then. The schooner had stopped now, and the men aboard her were lined up along the rail, five of them, their expressions ranging from inscrutability to curiosity and fear. Nina, easing the 238 alongside expertly, rang the engines off. Two sailors leaped across with lines and made them fast, the two boats rail to rail.

In five minutes the crisis had been passed. A gun in each hand, Whitey had silenced the Cubans' frantic protests and had them huddled on the fantail of their craft below the flapping mainsail. The remainder of the men toiled at the task of taking case after case, box after box from that unlucky schooner's hold and transferring it to the fo'c'stle of the patrol boat. Bob Hurley, tensely waiting for an opportunity to use that one-pounder on his captors, found none whatsoever.

So in two hours it was over, the patrol boat on its way, Hurley once more bound in the cabin aft. The schooner was hull-down quickly—quickly because a seaman named MacGuggen had opened her seacocks at the last moment before leaving, while another smashed the boats. That Cuban crew would never live to take this tale of piracy to shore. But Hurley didn't know that then.

For himself, he was vastly puzzled. He knew they meant to kill him, sooner or later; but, he asked himself over and over, why the delay? Were other boats

to be pirated, and was he needed to present a "front"? And then, toward evening, he heard steps, and saw Nina Manning come in through the galley entrance, and turn and lock that door. She stood looking down at him.

"Well," he said with a faint grimness, "I guess my rope is getting short. It looks like your move now."

"Yes." She regarded him with eyes that had turned mysteriously dark. Suddenly she stooped a little, and her hot breath was on his face, her warm, soft lips on his. He drew back a little in astonishment. He looked at her, and he grinned ruefully.

"It's bad enough as it is," he muttered. "Don't start that kind of stuff."

"It will be—unfortunate—that the crew of that schooner back there will describe you and what you did today. That is, it would be, if you were to try to go back to Florida."

"But I suppose you'll fix that, so it won't bother me a lot."

She said: "Yes, I was thinking that." Her voice was very soft, and it held a quality of poignancy. "I was thinking maybe you could help me—now that you'll be hunted as an outlaw." Her eyes flashed across his face. "It's hell to be hunted constantly! I've been—ever since I can remember." Her tone grew bitter. "My father was the leader of the Ashley gang." Suddenly she seemed to pull herself together, her eyes becoming speculative, hard. "Since you'll be barred from the United States, and from Cuba too, now, I was thinking maybe you would like to take Captain Glaskill's place."

"Glaskill's place—with *you?*" He laughed. He couldn't help laughing, to think of it. She had just explained some questions he had puzzled over—who she was, and why she was connected with this lawless game—but still it all seemed very humorous. He was very tired and perhaps his nerves were worn a little raw. "Turn outlaw with you?" he laughed.

"If you doubt you are one already," she answered coldly, "just try to go somewhere alone."

"The next thing," he sneered, "I suppose you'll want to be my girl!"

"Couldn't it be done?"

IT was insane to let himself go the way he did. He knew he should have played the game with her with honeyed words and passionate caresses. His very life hung on the thread of his dissembling. Yet knowing that his life depended on it, he was unable to. For memories of Sam Keeler came welling up within his mind, and scalding bitterness and hatred were overpowering. He snarled:

"By you?" And he called her an ugly name.

Her face went white. She said with a queer flat tone: "You'll never say that to another woman—I'm going to see to that." And she passed through the bulkhead. There was something ominous in the slow and silent way she closed the door.

Hurley sat there—waiting. Yet two hours passed, and the patrol boat glided through a sea of quicksilver, and a low green coast materialized—and Nina Manning and her men had not come back to carry out her promise.

BY this time Hurley had managed to reach that penknife in his hip pocket, and by twisting his wrists until the rope bit cruelly, had opened it; by this time, he had sawed his wrists free, and his ankles. He had locked the galley door again, and he had armed himself with the one remaining Springfield he had found in the arsenal. Yet still nobody came, and he decided to carry the fight to them. He unlocked the galley door and turned the knob. It was then that he discovered himself locked in from the outside; he was just as much a prisoner as ever.

There was something queer about this, but he couldn't fathom it. He locked the hatch and door from the inside again, to avoid being taken by surprise, and tried to see the cove where they were going to dock.

The 238 slipped past a group of tiny islands on which palm trees stood in leaning profusion. It entered a strait, a bay, beyond which the shore of what evidently was Cuba rose at a sharp angle from a crude dock that had been built out into the sea.

This spot was deserted, as far as Hurley could determine. Dense vegetation flanked the water and covered the rising slope and crowned the horizon. The patrol boat moved to the dock, and a piling blocked the porthole and cut off Hurley's view.

So there was more nervous waiting, while he heard the crew unloading box after box of contraband that was to change the destiny of millions. It went

on a long time, but only from the sounds could he judge what was being done. Then, suddenly, the unloading ceased, and there were no more footsteps. A sinister silence settled down upon the cove. . . .

A voice was at the door, Nina Manning's voice, cold with a kind of malignant satisfaction.

"Lieutenant Hurley!"

Hurley raised his gun to cover anyone who might break through. "I can hear you."

"Remember the way you murdered Captain Glaskill."

That was all. He strained his ears to hear her move away, but could hear nothing, until, suddenly, the engines started, stuttering and vibrating so that all other sounds, if made, were lost. He stood there at the bulkhead, mystified. Then a thought, coming into Hurley's mind, stuck there with a sudden terrifying force.

Glaskill's boat had *burned*. That was the way he had met death; wounded by Bob Hurley's gun, he had been burned too.

The Coast Guard officer shuddered, realizing what was going to happen to him now. They must be setting fire to the 238. He tugged at the door with both hands, letting his rifle clatter to the floor. Of course, the door was locked securely from the outside. He couldn't budge it. He stepped back and lunged into the panel with his shoulder. Another desperate assault on the door bore no result except a fractured shoulder that he didn't know was injured, then.

At the same moment he smelled smoke, a faint pungent sniff of it. Cold terror gripped him. The 238 trembled and began to move.

THE porthole drifted slowly from the piling that had blocked it, and Hurley thrust his face there frantically. He could smell the smoke now at each breath, and he could see it too, black wisps that curled down across the rail. The 238 was on fire; there was no doubt of that. She was swinging now, definitely under way, accelerating, heading back through the strait to reach the open sea.

In that glance, Hurley seemed to see everything around him, a picture strangely etched into his mind. The shoreline rose from the water in a kind of amphitheater. Stacked in a long, irregular pile were boxes of ammunition, and tins of ammunition without wooden covers—which identified them positively in Hurley's mind as that *matériel* which had been looted from the hangar underneath a watchman's very nose at Carlstrom Field. There was other ordnance there too; boxes of rifles—and, the thing which caught Bob Hurley's eyes above all other things—bags and bags of powder being brought in for the use of heavy guns.

People moved there too. He caught sight of Nina Manning running nimbly across the far end of the dock, and of Whitey standing arms akimbo on an ammunition pile. Just then, a dull splash came from somewhere alongside the patrol boat, and Hurley took one more quick look there. A dark-skinned young man was just rising through the surface, tossing black hair from his flashing eyes and starting to swim boldly toward the shore. With that final sight, Bob Hurley knew this boat was going up in flames.

She was being run to sea with rudder lashed, to burn and blow up and destroy herself before she sank—to consume him with her and take his body to the bottom of the sea, obliterating forever all traces of them both.

HURLEY now had no time to feel the apprehensions that had generated from that knowledge. For he had a small idea, which, starting as a germ of hope, grew swiftly. He dived into the arsenal through the aft bulkhead, and feverishly began to search there for some tracer cartridges.

Every patrol boat that left Lauderdale was supplied with them, but for a moment it appeared that those aboard the 238 had been consumed. Then he found the box that held them—perhaps fifty—and whirled back and jerked his rifle-bolt and emptied its chamber and filled the gun again. With a wild exultant hope, he stepped to the porthole.

The patrol boat was accelerating all the time, and the shore was drifting back. Coolly now, Hurley aimed obliquely through the opening. He didn't need to fire at Whitey standing there upon that pile of ammunition—Whitey, who thought that the man left on this boat to be blown up was tied and helpless. He aimed at the bags of artillery ammunition, aimed carefully and squeezed the trigger.

It seemed then that the gates of hell had opened wide, for flame gushed upward in a fanwise flare, raw yellow flame that blotted out all other sights and be-

came the point of focus in the center of the cove. A dull *whoof!* was a palpable detonation even through the porthole at this distance; a bluish smoke rose up and spread out flatly, drifting slowly on the lifeless air.

AND now the man named Whitey was not standing on that pile, and Nina Manning was no longer fleeing nimbly along the dock, and there were no other men loitering about. For the ammunition pile was gone, or going, in a series of crackling explosions, like firecrackers fired in a chain; and the dock had mysteriously vanished from its ancient foothold, and the men who had toiled long to move this agency of death had died by their own efforts.

There were none left now to cut him down if he managed to break out on deck and try to swim ashore. But Bob Hurley knew he had to hurry to get out, or it would be too late. He ejected the tracers from his gun, and loaded it again with ordinary cartridges. And, deliberately, he sat down on the floor and lifted the gun and started shooting out a hole in the hatch, big enough to let him thrust his hand outside.

The twin Sterlings had picked up their cadence to the maximum; the wake was a low roar. As he fired methodically, Hurley had to fight to keep from growing frenzied with his haste. Smoke was filtering back here now, was turning the interior of the cabin blue. Those flames would reach the gas tanks before long, and then there would be no need to drill this heavy hatch away.

A circle of bullet-holes appeared there in the hatch, and finally Hurley dropped his smoking rifle and leaped up the companion ladder. He broke two knuckles clearing out that jagged hole with one blow of his fist, and reached outside and fumbled with the latch and finally slid the hatch aside.

On the fantail at the stern, he could scarcely see a thing now, for smoke was trailing out behind the boat as she churned northward at this dizzy speed. The acrid curtain of stuff was choking him as he felt his way forward to the dinghy. Sparks were flying back, and one set fire to his shirt and seared his skin before he left his work to slap it out with frantic palms.

He swung the davits out, working madly. With the falls grasped in both hands, he let the dinghy slam down into the boiling foam beside the mother craft, expecting it to drop back on its bow line to the stern of the patrol boat, where he could cut it loose and dive in and crawl into it safely. He was much too far from shore to try to swim that distance now. But the instant the dinghy struck, the bow line snapped; the little boat danced out of sight behind the dense smoke screen.

For a moment the full weight of this catastrophe filled Hurley with abject despair. The 238 was long past the strait, far out to sea. He debated making a hopeless effort to swim back. There was a strong offshore wind that was kicking up a chop, and the tide was turning now. He'd never make it, even if he happened to survive the sharks and barracuda long enough to try. . . .

Standing there, slapping out the sparks that landed on his clothing, breathing in short gasping sobs against the smoke that seared his lungs, he knew he was finished. He knew that no matter what he did now, Nina Manning had won the last toss after all. There was no gratification in the realization that he had repaid her for the murder of Sam Keeler and his crew. There was no satisfaction in the knowledge that he had succeeded, almost single-handed, in preventing the smuggling of arms and ammunition into Cuba, thus carrying out a President's orders to the Coast Guard with valor and dispatch. He didn't even think of that, at all. He was thinking that in the end, despite his effort, he had lost; he was thinking with a forlorn hopelessness that he was going to die.

Then, out of the distillation of those thoughts, the possibility of fighting through that bed of flames to reach the wheelhouse came to him. If he could turn this boat back toward the shore. . . . If the explosion would defer a little while. . . .

Yet fighting his way forward seemed sure suicide, when he attempted it. The wind was from the stern, but the boat moved now so rapidly that it made its own wind, and the flames, roaring, shot fiery slanting tongues aloft that seemed already to engulf the wheelhouse. Even the deck was in flames from the engine room forward—from gasoline poured on the planking and set off. The smoke and fumes were choking.

YET somehow he found a lungful of clear air, and ran. He slipped in the pitch and tar distilled from the deck, and got up with his hands a searing tor-

ment and went on. He reached the wheelhouse and went in—and found the windows shattered from the blasting flames. Yet, ducking for what scant protection he could find, he once more brought his penknife into play, and slashed the cord that held the wheel, and heaved his weight upon it. The boat heeled drunkenly. The wind struck at them from an angle now, not quite across the bow, and the flames for a moment were diverted to one side.

In the glance he got before the curtain dropped again, he saw the dinghy dancing on the water a hundred yards away. By this time he knew well he'd never get ashore alive, but he meant to try to make that final effort to reach the little boat. He lay almost on the floor and tried to see.

Then, before he realized it, the dinghy was on his beam, and he lunged out. A sheet of flame was barring him, and he dived into it madly, feeling the singe of his hair and eyebrows, feeling the excruciating torment of that blast. Every instant was a thousand agonies. The sickening reek of his own flesh was in his nostrils, but he had no time to let it sicken him. He leaped the rail and hurtled through the air—and crystal, merciful water closed above his head for a long time.

When he came up finally, it seemed that he had not the strength to swim the dozen yards required of him to reach that little boat. And, in a daze, when he had finally swum to it, there was no earthly way for him to climb aboard. And when he at last had got aboard, he simply sat there stupidly, while the dull ache of his body numbed his brain.

THE skipper of a little fishing smack picked Hurley up and landed him in Cardenas, fifteen miles away. That happened just a little after he had saved himself from drowning, yet in the end he would have died of burns had not a wise and kindly doctor named Valdés known of the tannic-acid treatment for his case. So as it was, two weeks later a Pan-American seaplane took him from Havana to Miami, and put him ashore at Dinner Key, almost beside the hangar from which he had departed on that momentous journey fifteen days ago.

It had not occurred to him that others might be overjoyed to have him back. So he was astonished, and he was more deeply touched than he ever would admit, to find his whole detachment there upon the ramp. There was no ceremony. Commander Newsom met him and held out his hand and spoke three heart-warming words. Lieutenant Ainsworth stepped up, smiling; and behind Ainsworth were Jones and Baxter, both beaming at attention. Ainsworth said:

"Nice work, old man! We're proud of you. I think you'll like to know that Cornish and his operator are in the dog-house here." His smile broadened. "I wasn't much help. Baxter had to talk to me like a Dutch uncle to get me to go after them—and then Baxter had to sock Cornish when the fellow came out with a gun."

BOB HURLEY looked at Baxter and back to Ainsworth. "Hello," he said, and he was unexpectedly conscious of those hundred staring eyes and of the intense immobility of all those men. Looking once more very directly at Baxter and Jones, he was suddenly conscious of a deep affection for them both. He held out his hands, and swallowed, and said gruffly: "Hello, you two mugs! I'm glad to see you got back whole. I was sorry to desert you the other night, but there wasn't time enough to wake you so you could come along." He grinned.

Baxter, standing like a ramrod, flushed a little and forgot himself and rubbed the heel of one hand across his nose. He muttered: "Aw, hell, Lieutenant, don't worry about that. Ever since I can remember, I been goin' to sleep and passin' up good-lookin' dames and fights. There're always more of both. It's sure good to see you, sir."

Hurley nodded, thinking that this simple statement of Baxter's somehow held the key to the Coast Guard's immortality. Youngsters marched into its ranks and gave their lives in loyal service and marched out to retire, those who lived. The tasks were endless. And as he stood there, those frantic hours through which he had just come faded in importance. The important hours, the glamorous hours, were the future ones. Tonight, tomorrow—any moment—another summons would come through for him, a rescue or a fight—or what-not. And curiously, he found that he was looking forward to it, standing here!

He saluted the detachment. He saluted Commander Newsom. And with a slow, whimsical smile he asked, "What's on the program now?"

THE END

Gypsy Blood

In this second exploit of that strange detective Isaac Heron (himself of gypsy blood), he aids a puzzled Scotland Yard in dealing with a curious case of kidnaping.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

Illustrated by John Richard Flanagan

"LET the *gitana* dance!"

The gold-and-velvet decorated matador waved his sword enthusiastically.

"A *flamenco* song!" demanded a swarthy smuggler, dropping on his knee in a begging posture.

But the shouts of the others in the camp overcame him.

"A dance! Let the *gitana* dance!"

A gypsy guitarist lounged toward a boulder, and began to strum the first wild notes of Ravel's "Bolero." Soon, the air was thrumming with the blood-maddening syncopation. And against a background of mountains with distant Seville, there glided forth the world-renowned gypsy dancer and singer Cora la Bezita.

Black eyes stared insolently before her. Easily, with a catlike laziness, she began to dance. Her long yellow skirt swayed with slow voluptuousness. Velvet brown arms stretched from beneath a red shawl, and lithe fingers clicked the castanets. Beneath the yellow skirt her high-heeled shoes stamped the staccato rhythm of the dance.

The stark white light beat down upon her. But it was not the blistering sun of Spain. Behind the light sweated a cockney, Joe Slate, and his assistant, both in shirt-sleeves. They were perched in a wooden nest above the stage of the Babylon Theater of Leicester Square. Joe Slate, behind his sizzling lamp, was relieved that this was the last scene in the very successful musical show "Gypsy Blood."

"Coo! She aint 'alf a dancer!" muttered the assistant admiringly.

"You git ready wiv yer ambers!" growled Joe Slate. "She'll giv yer 'ell if yer miss 'er wiv the spot in 'er next song."

The assistant spat his indifference, narrowly missing a portly figure in evening-dress standing in the wings.

"Real gypsy, aint she?" he asked, holding up one of his amber slides critically.

"Yus," nodded Joe Slate, following that swirling, yellow skirt with his spotlight. "And that's more'n can be said for the riffraff behind 'er."

"Aint they gypsies, too?"

"Naow! Walk-on parts, mostly. Loafers. They say Cora won't 'ave a gypsy within a mile of 'er. And the pleasure's mutual. Gypsies 'ate 'er like 'ell."

"Why?"

"'Cause she married that French jiggler yer see comin' round after the show sometimes, tight as a lord. A bad lot, 'e is."

"Who told yer all this?" asked the assistant.

"'Eard it in the Blue Boar over a pint of bitter from a real gypsy."

"So there are a few gypsies about, eh?"

"There's allus one or two in Leicester Square," muttered Joe Slate. "A few of 'em got into the gods first night and started booin'. They were soon pitched out."

"Show's good for a long run, aint it?"

"Sure. There's been a library deal for six months ahead. Old Charley Cuttle's goin' to make a packet out of this show. 'Ere, ready wiv yer ambers, Alf. There's yer cue!"

Amidst tumultuous applause from the crowded auditorium the yellow-skirted Cora sank to the floor. Her sleek black gypsy head bowed. The "Bolero" had come to an end. Applause, however,

A gypsy guitarist lounged toward a boulder and began to strum the wild notes of Ravel's "Bolero," and the gypsy dancer Cora la Bezita glided forth. With a catlike laziness she began to dance.

Despite the fact he was a prisoner, this gypsy held his head high.

thundered and crashed within the walls of the Babylon Theater.

Then Cora la Bezita drew herself up. A click, and the flood of white light changed to amber. The beautiful cat-like creature bent a little forward. The conductor stroked his baton through the air, and a soft strange rhythm began to rise from the orchestra.

Cora began to beat out the rhythm with the heel of her shoe on the stage. When the rhythm had permeated and taken possession of everyone in the audience, she lifted her head and began a shrill, wild song that fell away in the sob of passion. "My Mother was a *Gitana,*" was what Cora sang, and all the gypsy blood in her veins was expressed in the strange melody.

SEATED in the third row of the stalls was a lean, brown-faced man in evening-dress. As the wild song sobbed to a close, tears trickled down his cheeks. Isaac Heron, half a gypsy himself, had been caught by the magic of Cora la Bezita. His own mother had been a *gitana,* and the song brought back to him magic nights of youth when he roamed from camp to camp and the stars had glittered upon fires and dancing and singing.

"My Mother was a *Gitana.*" Brusquely, he whisked the tears away with his hand. He sat there with head bowed. The rest of the show left him unmoved. He was still in a queer, sentimental trance as the curtains swung across the stage and the audience rose in an hysteria of applause. There were yells for Cora la Bezita. Once again the sleek black head bowed, the yellow skirt trailed the dust of the stage—and she had gone.

She almost ran toward her dressing-room.

"A magnificent success," crowed the portly figure of the impresario Charley Cuttle, standing in the corridor as she swept toward him.

She nodded, mechanically, and passed him by. A moment later she was in her dressing-room, snapping her fingers for the dresser.

"Quick! Get me out of this dress. I don't want to see anyone. I don't—"

PETULANCE died on her lips as she glimpsed a piece of paper scrawled with pencil on her dressing-table. Her brown hand snatched it fearfully. The words scrawled on the paper were in the Romany language, but the fable was well known to her:

"When you have cut a gypsy in ten pieces, you have not killed him; you have only made ten gypsies."

"Who brought this note?" she demanded shrilly.

Already the dresser had stripped off the yellow skirt, and Cora stood with her beautiful brown body sheathed only in a silk slip.

The dresser, a French maid, gave a casual glance at the note.

"I do not know, madam. Nobody came when I was here."

"Then you were out of the room during this last act!"

"For five minutes only, madam. I wanted to hear that beautiful song and—"

"Pah! Enough." With a gesture of contempt, the gypsy crumpled up the note and flung it to the floor. But as she struggled into a black satin frock, her head emerged and her eyes gazed fearfully round the dressing-room.

"They will never leave me alone," she muttered, in a haunting whisper. "They hate me, and will follow me to the ends of the earth. Yes, that is gypsy hate."

She swept a comb through her hair and snatched a wrap from a chair.

"Your make-up, madam!" protested the dresser.

"Let it stay. I will clean it off later."

"Shall I call Pierce, the chauffeur?"

Cora shook her head.

"I shall not need him tonight. He can wait for you and bring you home when you have packed those dresses."

A joyous smile crossed the dresser's face.

"Oh, thank you, madam."

Impetuously, the gypsy dancer glided out of the room. A party of well-dressed women and men were being shepherded along the corridor by the jovial Charley Cuttle.

Their faces went blank with astonishment as the gypsy dancer slid easily through them. Ranks of admirers and autograph-hunters by the stage door did not realize that the slim black-wrapped figure that stepped out on the pavement and crossed the road, dodging between purring limousines and clattering taxies was the world-famous gypsy dancer.

She ran into that black pool of darkness that is the center of Leicester Square when the flanking theaters blaze with electric light at night—a velvet blackness into which her black satin frock and wrap was merged, as though she had been drowned in black depths.

She disappeared. . . .

Within twelve hours newspapers were announcing that Cora la Bezita, the world-famous gypsy dancer, had been kidnaped. A ransom of twenty thousand pounds was demanded. If this was not paid within forty-eight hours, Cora la Bezita would be murdered.

A distracted Charley Cuttle was watching billposters outside the Babylon Theater strip the fatal announcement *"No Performance Tonight"* across the posters of "Gypsy Blood."

"TWENTY thousand pounds is a lot of money," murmured Isaac Heron.

"It is," nodded Detective Inspector Graves. "And if it is paid over to these gypsy kidnapers, Scotland Yard will look rather silly. We've always prided ourselves on kidnaping being impossible in this country."

"Yet you say the ransom money is ready in bonds and currency?"

Inspector Graves nodded gloomily.

"It is being brought here this afternoon. Fifteen thousand has been raised by Charley Cuttle and the other five thousand by the gypsy dancer's agent in London."

And the Inspector stretched out a hand for the file of papers bearing upon the case.

They were seated in a little office at Scotland Yard. Isaac Heron, already looked upon by Inspector Graves as a lucky mascot, had come round to this office in response to an urgent telephone call.

"Yes," nodded Heron, reminiscently, "I was in the theater that evening when Cora la Bezita disappeared. She sang and danced beautifully."

The Inspector gave him a quick glance.

"Do the other gypsies really hate this woman?" he asked.

Heron shrugged his shoulders.

"Cora is a Spanish gypsy, and they are the most pure-blooded of our race. When it was known that she had married this Parisian gigolo, the gypsy curse of banishment was passed upon her by the King of the Gypsies. They could not forgive one of their blood bartering herself to a gorgio."

"A curse of banishment! What does that mean?"

ISAAC HERON'S gray eyes narrowed. "It means," he said, "that Cora la Bezita never dare enter the gypsy world of Spain again; it means that no Romany camp would ever give her shelter. It means gypsy women would curse her. . . . It means—everything, to Cora. From the manner in which she sang that song the other night I would say that she was homesick for the gypsy tents."

"Well, she's among 'em now," nodded Graves. "They've got her nicely hidden somewhere. And demanding twenty thousand pounds for her release."

"Are you quite sure?" smiled Heron. "You see, except for the newspapers, I know nothing about this affair."

"That means you know as much as we do," nodded Graves. "From the moment when she stepped out of the Babylon Theater that other evening, after the show, she vanished completely. The next day came this demand for her ransom. It's written in English."

He handed a grubby piece of paper over to Isaac Heron, who smoothed it out and read it carefully:

The curse of the gypsies rests on Cora la Bezita. Unless twenty thousand pounds in negotiable bonds and English currency are paid over within forty-eight hours, the first of ten pieces into which we will cut this cursed woman will be sent to you. The money is to be carried by you, her husband, at four o'clock to Thornton Heath. There you will be met, and when the money is handed over, the place where La Bezita can be found will be told. If

you are followed by police, you will only endanger your own life as well as that of La Bezita.

Signed:
The Gypsy Five.

"Very interesting," nodded Isaac Heron. "And when did the dancer's husband receive this?"

"The morning after her disappearance," explained Graves. "It was dropped through the letter-box of the furnished house they have taken at Hampstead. Up to that moment her husband, who had spent the night at home, did not regard her disappearance as serious. As soon as he received this note, he telephoned the police."

"And then?"

"Well, we soon found that for a week since the opening of her show in London, gypsies had been persecuting the dancer. Messages, threatening messages, had been sent to the house and even to her dressing-room. Here is one picked up by her dresser on the night she disappeared."

Graves handed over another crumpled piece of paper on which was the Romany scrawl: *"When you have cut a gypsy in ten pieces you have not killed him; you have only made ten gypsies."*

"A Romany adage," nodded Heron.

"Her husband told us of the gypsy hate that followed on their marriage," went on the Inspector. "And Cora La Bezita had been scared to death by these messages. Well, we worked on that line at once. We raided every gypsy camp around London."

"Foolish," sighed Isaac Heron. "You might as well have raided my flat."

"Why?"

"I am a gypsy too. But let it pass. You discovered nothing, of course."

"No," snapped Graves, reddening a little. "But we made one arrest: A gypsy ruffian named Boswell was hanging about the Babylon Theater that night. He was seen near the stage-door. He was obviously loafing about with criminal intent. I've had him in the cooler for twenty-four hours, but I can't get anything out of him. A stubborn brute."

Isaac Heron smiled.

"And so you sent for me, eh? Well, bring him in, Graves. I'll do what I can for you."

THE Inspector's eyes opened with astonishment at this quick recognition of his carefully prepared plan. The gypsy, Boswell, had been brought over from Bow Street. He was sitting with a constable in an adjacent room. The pressure of an electric bell, and he was brought in.

"Perhaps you had better leave the conversation to me," warned Heron quietly.

A begrimed individual in gray shirt and black trousers and cracked boots was ushered in. Despite the fact that he was a prisoner, this gypsy of the Boswell family held his head, with its tangled black hair, high. There was insolence in the gaze which he flashed round the room.

"Good day, brother!" said Isaac Heron in the Romany tongue.

The gypsy swiveled toward him with an eager gleam in his eyes.

"San tu Rom?" he replied. "Are you a gypsy?"

Isaac Heron nodded.

"I am a Zingaro," he said quietly.

The captured gypsy gave a quick glance at Inspector Graves, who was seated at a desk.

"Calo, pralo!" he whispered to Heron. "Speak our language, brother."

WITH a nod and a smile, Heron gave the gypsy a cigarette. In a few moments they were smoking and talking in the queer Romany tongue. The captured gypsy became extremely voluble, and answered Isaac Heron's questions with eagerness.

As the strange rapid conversation proceeded, Inspector Graves waited patiently. But at last it ended, and the two gypsies shook hands. A nod from Graves, and the constable took the prisoner away.

"Well?" asked Graves.

"I should release him," said Heron. "He isn't a kidnaper. True, he was loafing round the Babylon Theater that evening, but only in the way of business."

"And what was his business?" asked Graves dryly.

"Perhaps picking pockets," smiled Heron. "Or maybe looking for fools who would give him a shilling."

"Yet he was there when Cora la Bezita ran out of the theater and disappeared," said Graves. "It would have been easy enough for him to signal to the other gypsies in the vicinity to seize the woman and bundle her away."

"Yes, he saw her," nodded Heron thoughtfully. "But Cora wasn't bundled away. She walked up to a young man in evening dress who took her by the arm and helped her into a two-seater car."

Graves stared.

"That's news to me. Why the devil didn't this gypsy say so before?"

"I'm afraid you upset his dignity."

"Dignity be damned!" exploded the detective. "I wish I had known about this fellow in the two-seater twenty-four hours ago. Of course, he didn't get the number of the car?"

"No," replied Heron. "But he did notice that the man was wearing gloves."

"That's the sort of damned silly thing his type would notice—something that doesn't matter."

"But I think it does," said Heron.

The telephone rang. Graves seized it.

"All right, send them up," he growled into the mouthpiece. Then he turned to Isaac Heron again. "In any case, that information has come too late. Here's the husband, the agent, and Charley Cuttle with the boodle for the woman's ransom."

"I'm not surprised," smiled the gypsy. "Tell me, Graves, how is the husband taking this tragedy?"

"Terribly worried," said the Inspector. "He spent the best part of yesterday sitting in this office, waiting for news. He suggested offering a reward of a thousand pounds for information that would lead to the finding of his wife."

"Hard hit, eh?"

"Very."

At that moment the door opened, and three men walked in. One of them, the agent of the gypsy dancer, carried a small portfolio. Charley Cuttle swayed miserably in the background. It was the husband of Cora la Bezita who came forward eagerly.

"Any news, Inspector?" he asked.

Graves shook his head.

"Nothing of any consequence, so far," he replied.

"Then the only thing is for me to take the money to Thornton Heath?" he said.

"I'm afraid so."

ISAAC HERON studied the slender, well-dressed Frenchman. So this pallid, weak-jawed individual was the man for whom Cora la Bezita had sacrificed her Romany world, the tent beneath stars, the sisterhood of the camp-fire! Elegant and handsome though he was, there were ravages in that pale face that told of nights of dissipation. At the moment, too, there was a nervous jerkiness in his movements.

"Then let's pay over the money and get Cora back," sighed Charley Cuttle in the background. "I'm losing five thousand a week while 'Gypsy Blood' is on the shelf. P'raps if we get her this afternoon, she'll be able to appear in the show tonight."

"Maybe," nodded the Frenchman.

"Well, here's the money," said the agent, placing the portfolio on the desk. "Twenty thousand pounds took some getting together. Cora only had five thousand in the bank. Charley Cuttle raised the other fifteen thousand."

Detective Inspector Graves glanced at the bonds. Then he handed the portfolio to the young Frenchman.

"Better get along to Thornton Heath in your car," he nodded. "I've got a flying squad to trail you."

A SPASM of real fear crossed that white face.

"But I implore you, Inspector! No police guard, please. It might endanger her life. It would certainly endanger mine."

Graves looked worried.

"Well, I hate to think of a gypsy gang getting away with twenty thousand pounds for kidnaping in London," he exploded.

"But it's our only hope of getting Cora back alive," protested the Frenchman.

There was silence for a moment. Graves caught the gaze of Isaac Heron. The gypsy gave an imperceptible nod.

"All right," said the Inspector. "Go and meet the blighters. And telephone me as soon as the money has been handed over. You're not afraid."

"I would do anything for Cora," said the Frenchman.

The Inspector held out his hand.

"You're a brave man, my friend."

The Frenchman turned to the door. Isaac Heron opened it. The gypsy also held out his hand.

"You're a clever man, my friend," he nodded.

The Frenchman looked at him, and with a smile, passed out.

"I don't like letting that young man take a risk with those blackguards on Thornton Heath," said the Inspector.

"Well, at least you shook hands with him," smiled Heron.

"Yes, I did," nodded the Inspector, "and—"

"And didn't you notice anything?"

"Notice—what?"

"The sort of damned silly thing that only a gypsy would notice," laughed Heron. "He wore gloves—as all polite Frenchmen do in town."

Once again the Inspector's eyes opened in astonishment. Then swift realization came to him. He grabbed the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" asked Heron.

"Get a flying squad car to trail him," he snapped.

"Perhaps it's as well," nodded the gypsy. "In the meantime, if you would like a lift in my car, I think we'll go and find Cora la Bezita. There's a chance that she's still alive."

"But where the devil is she hidden?" asked Graves.

"Where else should she be, but at her own home?" said Heron.

The Inspector stared.

"Impossible," he said. "I've searched the house twice."

"I dare say you searched it for silly bits of paper like those on your desk," nodded the gypsy. "But it never struck you to search the house for the kidnaped woman."

"Come on, let's go!" snapped the Inspector.

The gypsy and the detective swept out of the room leaving the agent and Charley Cuttle staring at each other in astonishment.

"What's happening?" gasped the agent.

"Search me!" replied Charley Cuttle.

"How did you come to guess that it was the husband who had kidnaped his own wife?" asked Inspector Graves, as he was driven rapidly toward Hampstead in Heron's Bentley.

ISAAC HERON snicked the gears neatly and swept past the traffic stop.

"Well, one glance at that note sent by the supposed kidnapers told me that it wasn't a gypsy act of revenge," he laughed. "There's no such gang as 'The Gypsy Five'—I'd have heard of them if they existed. Moreover, the note was written in good English but with a suggestion of Continental phrasing. I decided even before I talked with Gypsy Boswell that gypsies had nothing to do with the kidnaping."

"And then?"

The Bentley swerved quickly past a slow-moving tram.

"Then the man in evening dress and wearing gloves who met Cora on the other side of Leicester Square, seen by Gypsy Boswell. This could only be her lover or her husband. And Cora had sacrificed too much to be fooling about with lovers. It must have been her husband.

"Of course," went on Heron, "the threatening notes sent by gypsies were perfectly real. Cora la Bezita is hated in the gypsy world. But no real danger ever threatened the dancer. It was her husband who played upon her fears. I imagine that on the night he decided to kidnap her, he telephoned first to her in the dressing-room at the Babylon Theater. He probably scared her by suggesting he had heard some plot to kill her that evening and asked her to change her usual plans and meet him at the other side of Leicester Square where his car would be waiting."

"But what was the motive?"

"You saw the real object in that portfolio which you kindly handed to the Frenchman," smiled Heron. "He needed money desperately. It is well known that this gigolo married the gypsy dancer for what he could get out of her. He spent money—her money—freely. Then she called a halt. She put him on an allowance. His position became desperate. It was then he decided upon the clever crime which no one would suspect —the kidnaping of his own wife and holding her for ransom."

THEY roared up the hill that led to Hampstead.

"But where could he hide her?" asked the detective.

"That is what we're going to find out now," said Heron. "What better place could he choose than her own home? She would enter without any persuasion. Then he would attack, tie her up, and write himself that note asking for twenty thousand pounds."

"But I tell you it's impossible in that house," persisted the detective. "Besides, there's always a chauffeur and a maid about the place."

"Weren't they at the theater the night Cora disappeared?" asked the gypsy.

"Yes, but even then—"

"There are places in houses which even maids and chauffeurs are not likely to pry," said Isaac Heron. "But here we are, Graves. Out you get!"

The Bentley had drawn up alongside a tall house overlooking Hampstead Heath. It was of the brick, Georgian type. Graves fingered the bell, and the French maid, who also acted as dresser at the theater, answered. Graves strode in, and Isaac Heron followed.

It was a typical luxuriously furnished house which theatrical stars of the West End affect for a few weeks before pro-

ceeding elsewhere. A mixture of styles and a mass of gewgaws. But Inspector Graves was not concerned with that. He began by examining the cellar, and working upward, floor by floor. At last they came to the attic—a lumber-room and obviously unused.

"Admit you're wrong for once, Heron," said Graves bitterly. "You can see that she's not here."

"There's still another story," suggested the gypsy.

"There's only the roof," snapped the Inspector.

"Exactly, there's the roof," repeated Heron. "And how many people in London realize the queer unknown world that exists among the chimney-pots. Let us get on to the roof, Graves. I noticed a skylight in the landing."

Two minutes later they had scrambled up on the roof. Clutching a chimney, they found themselves looking over the green expanse of Hampstead Heath. But Isaac Heron had no eyes for that glorious view. He twitched the sleeve of the detective and pointed to a flat expanse of roof near the rain gutters. Lying there was the bound and gagged figure of a woman in black satin.

It was Cora la Bezita.

Her insolent eyes were changed. They gazed at the two men imploringly.

"SHE'S all right now," nodded Graves, entering the drawing-room where Isaac Heron had ensconced himself with a book and a cigarette. "The doctor says that a night's rest will work wonders. It all happened according to your plan, you clever devil! Her husband got her quietly into the house, stunned her from behind, and carried her to the roof. There he kept her for the past forty-eight hours, unknown to the two servants."

"It only goes to show how easy it is to hide somebody beneath the sky," smiled Isaac Heron. "And now, Graves, perhaps you can tell me something."

"Only too pleased, my dear fellow. What is it?"

"What has happened to the young Frenchman? It came into my mind that he chose Thornton Heath as the stage for his meeting the kidnapers because it is not far from the Croydon airdrome. If he was contemplating an air journey to Paris, you might find difficulty in tracing him."

"Never thought of that," muttered the detective. His gaze caught the telephone. "I'll phone the Yard at once." Rapidly, his fingers dialed. "Hello, is that you, Brown? . . . Any news from that squad car that followed the Frenchman to Thornton Heath?"

The respectful voice of Constable Brown replied. A few moments later, Graves replaced the receiver.

"Found himself being trailed," he said, quietly. "Took a pot-shot with a gun at one of our men. They closed in on him. But not before he had managed to kill himself."

Isaac Heron nodded and rose.

"A good thing for Cora la Bezita." he said. "Now she will be able to go back to the gypsy tents."

Another of these fine tales of a gypsy detective will appear in our next issue.

HAWK of the

By WILLIAM L. CHESTER

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

The Story So Far:

THE schooner *Cherokee*—last spoken by a whaler in Bering Sea—had been posted as missing, though that fact occasioned no great comment at the time; but had her fate been known, headlines would have blazed across every newspaper in the world.

The *Cherokee* was no ordinary vessel, for her owner and navigator, Doctor Lincoln Rand, had equipped her as a kind of floating infirmary in which he hoped to accomplish for the natives of the north Pacific coast something of what another knight of medicine has done in Labrador on the Atlantic side. With him were his young wife Helena, and his educated Indian aid and friend Mokuyi.

A succession of storms drove the ship off her course, apparently northward. Finally she grounded on a strange and savage coast, an oasis of the Arctic somewhere north of Siberia, Rand concluded, somehow warmed by unknown ocean currents and by the fires of a great volcanic region that flamed beyond the horizon—a land thickly wooded, and supporting many and varied wild animals.

Almost immediately upon landing, Rand and Helena and Mokuyi were beset by painted savages, and would have been killed had not Mokuyi addressed them in his native tongue. *And they understood him!* For these people were of the same stock as the American Indian, though they had never heard of the outside world. Here was the birthplace of the Indian race, whence our First Americans came in prehistoric times.

A few months the newcomers lived among these primitive people; and here Helena's baby was born.

But only six weeks afterward, tragedy wrote an end. Native enemies from the plains to the north raided the village; and both Rand and Helena were killed before the attack was beaten off. Thereupon Mokuyi adopted the little white boy as his own; Mokuyi's native wife Awena cared for him; and later Mokuyi himself taught the boy to speak and to read the English of his fathers.

Kioga, he was named—the Snow Hawk. And the boy throve amazingly in his early years. The bears and one mountain lion were his friends and allies; and in comradeship with these and other wilderness friends, he grew to powerful manhood.

And then, visiting the shore one day, he saw the hulk of a vessel pounding to pieces on the reef. Swimming out, Kioga boarded the wreck, and explored it—and bore away in triumph a steel knife or two, a chest of treasure and an armful of books over which he pored many an hour, renewing his knowledge of English.

Just in time, perhaps; for presently his last link with the outer world was broken when his foster-parents Mokuyi and Awena were murdered by Yellow Weasel, the head of the Long-Knife secret society, who sought to usurp the power of Mokuyi's friend and protector the chief Sawamic. Indeed, the evil-hearted shaman pursued the fleeing Snow Hawk also, and would have killed him. But it was Yellow Weasel who perished under Kioga's knife; and thereafter Kioga fought a savage blood-feud with Yellow Weasel's clan, and killed many of them.

Indeed his prowess in war led to his selection as chief of the tribe after the death of old Sawamic; and he directed their successful defense against a deadly attack by the plains people from farther north. . . . Shortly after this, from the cliffs along the shore Kioga caught sight of a yacht stranded below him; on her decks were the figures of white people!

Later Kioga learned their story: Allan Kendle, a wealthy young American, had sailed north on his yacht the *Alberta,* intending to collect specimens for an American museum; with him were his fiancée Beth La Salle and her brother Dan; they had intended to pick up Beth's mine-owning father at Nome. Instead, however, they had been blown out of their course; and they had picked up a

WILDERNESS

THE fascinating story of a white boy who grows to manhood in a strange and wild new-found land which may have been the birthplace of the American Indian race.

boatload of shipwrecked sailors who proved ungrateful guests—a pack of mongrel pirates, they proved; Kendle had been forced to confine them. Like the *Cherokee* a generation before, the *Alberta* had drifted beyond the known world to ground below the cliff of Nato'-wa; even as Kioga watched, the imprisoned pirates gained the deck, and a fierce struggle followed. Two unseen arrows from Kioga ended the fight in Kendle's favor. But the mutineers had captured Beth, carried her ashore and were fighting over her when Kioga rescued her, and carried her to safety in his cave high in the hills. Returning to the ship next day at her request, he found the *Alberta* all but deserted; for Kendle had led a party ashore to look for Beth and after a deadly fight with Indians, he and one sailor were carried captive to the village.

As Kioga was returning from the ship to report to Beth the situation there, he heard the sound of war-drums. *(The story continues in detail:)*

FORGOTTEN had been Kioga's tribal responsibilities, forgotten the primitive adventurous life he had lived, in the new, thrilling occupation of caring for the white girl. He had gloried in the spending of his matchless strength for her needs, brought in more food than ten people could have eaten. And so when after leaving the ship he had come upon the tracks of a female snow-leopard, he stalked it in the hope of capturing one of the animal's cubs for Beth.

But while he sought a new gift for her, events were transpiring at Hopeka over which in the normal course of events he would have exercised some control, but which, because of Beth, were to cause the first rift in that strong influence by which he commanded the loyalty of his warlike subjects.

Well he knew the meaning of those irregular drum-beats. Their very tempo

With harpoon vertically poised, Kioga stood tense; then with lightning swiftness he drove the weapon down.

caused him to drop all else and hasten toward where he had left his people in peace and security exceeding any they had known for generations. That there were prisoners in the village was a certainty. But whence had they come? He knew that his own tribes had been at peace with one another of late.

Then he had a clue. Dan, who was the white girl's brother, had written a note to some one named Kendle. He had that note in his pouch. Could it be that Kendle had been captured by the Indians?

REDOUBLING his speed, Kioga soon arrived at Hopeka, and unseen by guard or villager, he raised himself level with the top of the palisade and gazed downward.

A great ceremonial fire burned fitfully in the falling rain. Round about it danced many naked warriors, several of them painted black in token of mourning, and chanting the endless monotone of the death-song. Near by, several yards from the palisade and not far from the gate, were the deep-driven sacrificial stakes, as yet unweighted with the bodies of the prospective victims. Several raw fresh scalps hung before two lodges. Hawk started, on noting that two were yellow as flax.

At the time of the great victory over the Wa-Kanek, it is true, he obtained the release of many captives of war. But under ordinary circumstances he had found it wiser not to interfere. Among the Shoni it is the captor's inalienable right to dispose of prisoners whom he has himself taken.

Often, if a prisoner demonstrates his valor upon the stake by singing his songs of defiance despite the flames which consume him, he is cut down and adopted into the tribe, for valor is dear to the hearts of all red men. Indeed, the ordeal of fire is considered an honor by the victim himself, an opportunity to flaunt his bravery in the very faces of his torturers. Barbaric and paradoxical as it may seem to civilized men, torture is a recognized institution among the Shoni. The greatest shame that can be inflicted upon a prisoner is to dispatch him without these honors of the stake.

All this Hawk knew, and he had decided to return to Beth, letting matters take their course, when curiosity concerning those yellow scalps got the better of him. He decided to have a look at the prisoners first.

It was while Beth stirred the embers of the dying fire, that Kioga returned to the cave and stood limned in the portal by the lurid lightning.

He could have walked openly into that village which was his to command, and examined the prisoners at will. He entered, instead, like a prowler of the night, an act which betrayed the gulf between him and the Indians in this matter of torture.

Under cover of dark he slid to the ground within the great wall, slipped into the concealing shadow of the prison lodge, sprang lightly to its roof and applied his eye to the smoke-hole.

Bound and partly stripped of clothing, lay one of the sailors he had seen aboard the *Alberta*; at the other side, propped up against a lodge-pole, lay the man who had defied the mutineers on her deck, his chest and face caked with dried blood.

TO Kioga, the knowledge that these were the people of Beth La Salle put an entirely different face upon the whole matter. And yet—they were the captives of his own people. Dishonor and loss of prestige would result to him did he rob them of their rightful vengeance —for undoubtedly these men had killed one or more of his tribe.

For some time he pondered how he might at once rescue the white men and preserve his own standing. He knew that there was no need for haste. The fatal torture would not begin until the worshiped sun or moon could obtain a full view of it—a thing considered impossible by the Indians while mists shrouded the village.

Moreover, Beth must be transported back to the ship. With a last glance about the village, giving special attention to the location of the torture-posts, he climbed quickly back up his rope and effaced himself as silently and unobtrusively as he had come.

BACK in the cave, Beth La Salle anxiously awaited her captor's return, calculating the term of his absence by the number of times she laid fuel upon the hungry fire.

Heretofore, during his absences, her imagination had pictured him torn, wounded, prey to the terrible wolves whose deadly work she had seen, or engaged in fatal encounter with one of those massive long-haired tigers, or ambushed by a party of fierce revengeful warriors of whom he had spoken.

On his return she had wondered what mortal power could overwhelm one so fully the incarnation of vitality and strength. The simple fact of his survival in an environment fuller of peril than the Dark Continent at its darkest, had proved him master of that environment, banishing her fears. But never before had he been absent for so long at one time. The mental barriers she had erected before his imagined enemies began to crumble. Momentarily the sensation of impending danger worked upon her overwrought nerves. At every sound from beyond the great door of the cave she started up in hope that he had come at last.

And in the village of Hopeka, another woman waited for the Snow Hawk. Calm, collected, fatalistic as her Indian forbears, to Heladi, who knew the Snow Hawk best, nothing on earth had power to harm him. He would come back. And when he did, he would find her fearless and smiling, with confidence in his powers justified by his home-coming.

It was while Beth stirred the embers of the dying fire that Kioga returned to the cave, silently as was his way, and stood limned in the portal by the lurid lightning at his back. Then he slipped a great antlered deer from one shoulder, and a brace of grouse from his belt.

Immediately he produced from his pouch her own silver bracelet, and hand-

ed over Dan's note to Kendle. Beth read the words and glanced up at him with a look of gratitude which more than compensated him for the risks he had taken. Then her brow clouded again.

"But where could Allan and the others have gone?" she wondered. "Do you suppose— Oh, but there's no use borrowing trouble, is there?"

He knew what was in her mind, and for a moment thought to say nothing of what he had seen at Hopeka, because he did not wish to renew those fears which he had so lately set at rest.

But in the end he told her what he had seen at the village.

STUNNED by this news, still shaken by the strange emotion which had been half-formed by his approach, Beth's thoughts leaped from fear to fear. Beyond doubt, Kendle was one of the captives described. The other must be a member of the crew. Death certainly awaited those men if something were not done at once. Nor did Kioga try to deceive her as to that. And he was astonished at the violence of her anxiety for Kendle. For she had never told him what Kendle was to her, and he had not asked, had apparently never given that a thought.

Until this moment, indeed, Kioga had only vaguely attempted to fathom the various relationships of one person to another aboard the *Alberta*. But now her agitation on learning of the white-skin's captivity, her anxiety as to the outcome of events on the ship, began to assume importance. To that man she must be somehow related. A glimmer of light pierced the uncertainty in his mind, then burst into near realization.

"The man you call Dan—he is your brother," he said. "The one in the village—who is he?"

Beth hesitated, suddenly conscious of what was in his mind—his realization of something overlooked, sudden hostility. If she told him, he might not take the risks involved in rescue. And yet, if he were to chance his life, did he not have the right to know? Without evasion she told him as well as she could, explaining everything that was not immediately clear.

He received the blow like a figure carved in copper. He thought of what he had seen at Hopeka, of how easily he could abandon those men to their fate, allowing a savage destiny to rule, unchecked by any act of his. By all the laws he knew, this woman belonged to him. She had cooked meat he brought in. She had shared his dwelling. These were the ways by which an Indian woman consented.

Another thought occurred to him: If he rescued Kendle, could he not allow the man to spend his energies and perhaps his life in vain efforts to discover a passage to the sea? Was it for him to be the means of Kendle's escape with this woman for whom Kioga would gladly have shed his life-blood a drop at a time?

What thoughts moved behind that expressionless mask, Beth would never know, but finally the Snow Hawk gave her an answer.

"First I will go to the village and free your people. Then I will return you to the ship." He made no reference to what she had told him about Kendle, because he was occupied with plans for rescue.

Three persons could not easily be spirited through the forest. It would be suicide to attempt a passage near Hopeka on the Hiwassee, by canoe, under the very eyes of the village. Remained only the turbulent and treacherous Caiyuta River, which also flowed toward the Haunted Whirlpools—the Caldrons of the Yei, in which he intended to make their escape. It was the more dangerous way, perhaps, but the only one offering escape from the Shoni.

WITH Beth in his arms again, he took to the forest, pausing on one of the smaller creek-like tributaries of the Caiyuta. His own light craft, in which so often he had explored the forbidden wonders of the Caldrons, he drew from its hiding-place and lifted Beth into it. From then on, their progress was swift and sure as the quickening currents sped them on their way.

Finally he turned the prow into a dark and vine-hung cavern he knew, made it fast, and would have gone. But sick at thought of the risks he must take, aware that depriving the savages of their prisoners might make it impossible for him ever to return to the native village in safety, she softly called his name, and he came back to her side.

Half-pleadingly, she asked:

"When we get to the ship, you'll stay with us, and come away to a better world—to your own country?"

He looked down on her in the half-light. A few hours ago that question

would have uplifted him to the clouds. Now he knew it could never mean anything to him, and knowing that, he did not much care where he went.

But he had learned enough from Beth to realize that without his aid the *Alberta* would never reach the sea again whole. Returning to Hopeka afterward might prove impossible, what with the hostility that would be aroused by the rescue of the white men.

"You ask it?"

"For your own sake," she whispered.

He moved a step toward her, almost overpowered by the desire to snatch her into his arms and carry her back to the cave, allowing Kendle and his companion to meet whatever the Indians had in store for them.

Then he wheeled without a word, and left her alone.

His decision was made.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Caldrons of the Yei

TRUSSED neck and heel, and flung to his back in the prison-lodge of Hopeka, Kendle had ample time for reflection. Though he lay strained and tense, he was not too far gone in despair to realize wryly that thus far he had done little to win the respect of the La Salles.

But he reflected, with far greater apprehension, that Beth was held somewhere by these same savages, subject perhaps to indignities and hardships. If only he could communicate with the sailor Martin, who had been transferred to another lodge, between them they might devise some means of escape. But his one attempt at calling out put an end to that possibility. An Indian outside the door entered and struck him across the mouth with the flat of his tomahawk.

Beyond, in the village, the increasing beat of the tom-toms and the wild wailing song of death mingled with the shrill cries of children and the wordless plaints of women, bereaved by the guns of the white men. These sounds penetrated the thin wall of the lodge and worked upon Kendle's nerves.

Surely those dull ominous *booms*, the fierce barbarity of those vengeful yells, could not be real. It was all a ghastly nightmare from which in a moment he must wake to find himself secure in his command of the *Alberta*.

Thoughts of impossibilities had scarce entered his mind when of a sudden three hideously painted savages, blood-relatives of the dead, appeared before the lodge and engaged in furious verbal altercation with the guards. Through the lodge-door he could see the brawny captors strike down the brandishing knives and tomahawks with their light clubs. He needed nothing more to suggest what fate was being reserved for himself and Martin. The very protection accorded them was of itself terribly significant.

Soon the guards entered. The two prisoners were brought together again outside the lodge. Their exit was the signal for a diabolical clamor of sound. Wrinkled and aged crones, ugly as the witches of *Macbeth*, scratched at their eyes. The younger women and children were armed with long switches of supple dry branches tied together in bundles. These were brought down with lacerating effect upon the naked backs of the prisoners, which soon ran with blood. When the sailor Martin grimaced in pain, the yelling horde concentrated upon him with shouts and cries of scornful derision—dreadful portent of what was yet to come.

At sight of the several upright stakes with firewood piled near to hand, Kendle's mind darted back to the days of the Indian massacres. A cold sweat bathed his temples at sight of the very thing he had put from his thoughts. He knew nothing of the honorable nature of the Indian torture. Nor is it likely that he would have taken from that knowledge any comfort. White men, despite the awful barbarism of their own warfare with chemicals and fire, profess to abhor the infinitely tenderer personal torture and quick death of the Indian way.

Bleeding from the scourging they had just undergone, the captives were now pinioned hand and foot against the palisade, facing their torturers. Then began that practice which so revolted the first white men to reach America. The savages formed a semicircle at a short distance, and began hurling their various missiles at the helpless captives.

OCCASIONALLY two weapons would touch in midair, their direction changed by the contact, so thickly did the rain of arms continue. Kendle felt such a heavy knife tear through the skin of his arm, pinning it to the palisade. Once the handle of a tomahawk hit him in his already bruised and swol-

Beth caught a last view of the long-boat, filled with men riding stoically to their

len mouth, at which yells of exultant brutal triumph dinned in his ears, eloquent of the pleasure his tormentors derived from the grim sport.

It could only be a matter of moments until one of those misdirected weapons found a living sheath. Kendle fervently hoped that the end would come cleanly and quickly.

Death, however, would arrive later and in more appropriate fashion. The savages did now but vie, one with another, in hurling ax or blade nearest the head or body of the victims, without more than breaking the skin. Before they had done, the wall behind the prisoners bristled with the vibrating implements.

Then they were cut down and subjected to the excruciating agony of the whipping-bundles, which played havoc with their diminishing stoicism. And now they were made to dodge through lines of ready warriors whose eyes were filled with dark and savage menace. As they ran, the braves struck at them with blunt clubs and heavy leather-wrapped stones on rawhide thongs.

When Kendle came out of this ordeal his shoulders and back had lost all feeling; one eye was slowly closing; the wound inflicted by the bear's claws had been reopened.

Thus far he had submitted to every indignity without a murmur, no longer in condition to give thought to Martin, until an agonized and despairing shriek pierced the air to delight the savages.

Turning to the source of that awful cry, Kendle's hair fairly stood on end. His companion in misery had been bound to a post. At his feet a fire was already kindled. The piercing of his cheeks with a spear and the sight of what he must still endure had caused his overwrought

doom. For a second it poised at the brink, then tilted—and was gone, engulfed.

nerves to betray him. That distracted cry induced the unsheathing of a score of knives which were brandished about his head and body in horrible preënactment of the approaching carnival of blood. In another moment his screams were again drowned in the laughter of the Indians.

It seemed impossible that human tissue could so long endure such travail. Kendle prayed for it to end.

AS the mutilated thing sank into God-sent unconsciousness, Kendle himself knew the approach of scorching embers, saw and smelled the quick curl of smoke, and felt the lick of hot flame as the brush about his feet kindled. In a few moments more the flesh would be crisping away from the exposed writhing muscles and tendons. It was too fearful to contemplate. He locked his jaws, determined to die before crying out, to perish before adding one jot to the amusement of these fiends. Then he shut his eyes to blot out the sight of those grimaces which were the masked and painted features of his Indian captors.

Thus far had matters progressed when Kioga returned to look down upon the torture. With narrowing eyes he watched the flames lick up toward Kendle's vitals. He saw Kendle's contorted features and smiled grimly, taking no great pride in this man of his own race, for an Indian would have been singing his defiant war-songs to the very end.

Now, Kendle had proved himself a brave man. But to Hawk, with his background of Spartan training to utmost stoicism, Kendle's facial revelation of physical pain was but added reason why he should not risk his rescue. In one hour the man who stood between himself and Beth would be carrion.

Was not he himself superior to this writhing white-skin? Was it for him to sacrifice Beth, power and his future leadership of the Shoni for such a one? Let Kendle burn!

Then with a last look at the pain-wracked victims, he turned slowly back into the forest.

TONGUES of fire had begun to agonize Kendle. With head thrown back and muscles taut, he prepared to meet his end, when through the fiendish clamor braying into his ears, he became aware of a new note. Opening his eyes, he saw approaching a tall and remarkable figure.

In contrast to the savages about him, the newcomer was unpainted. A magnificent crest of tufted and colored eagle-plumes, his badge of office, ran back like a half-moon from forehead to neck, waving gently with every step. A mantle of feathers hung draped across one shoulder, partly concealing the beautiful lines of a body which might have been that of some ancient Aztec god reincarnated.

In response to a sharp command from this figure, the brands which flamed at Kendle's feet were kicked aside, and his burning clothing extinguished. The attentive and respectful hush which prevailed over what had been a scene of wild and savage discord evidenced the man's high standing and influence.

Notwithstanding this temporary respite, it was plain to the captive that the frenzied dancing had inflamed the Indians beyond the bounds of mere reason, inducing a kind of self-hypnosis which demanded blood—his blood. He could only wonder what interest led anyone, however powerful, to intervene on his behalf.

With his back to Kendle, the tall chief was now speaking rapidly in the dialect of the Shoni. A short pause was followed by a sharp vociferous protest, at which he turned to the prisoner.

Kendle was suddenly electrified. No Indian had ever owned eyes the color of these, glinting blue-green in the dark face. Unmistakably they were the eyes of a white man.

A moment the stare held his own intently. Then the chieftain's long knife flashed about his head. Kendle had visions of becoming the plaything in some, even more cruel game designed to extract the last possible ounce of pain from him. Then he realized that his arms were free. A hand fell to his shoulder. The tall warrior spoke a few distinct words, audible to every Indian surrounding the fire-stake.

There was another short tense silence, during which the faces of the savages reflected every emotion from astonishment to fury.

One of the brawny savages who had tried to take Kendle from his guards earlier in the day stood near by. With an outraged yell, he leaped forward and struck at Kendle with his club. But the chief at Kendle's side lashed out with his tomahawk and the Indian fell senseless upon the ground.

In the pregnant hush followed, Kendle heard directions in English, ordering him to sever the remaining bonds under cover of the warrior's cloak. The blade was in easy reach of his hand, and he quickly obeyed. He was free! And then again despair claimed him. His limbs seemingly dead, his body numbed —escape was bitterly impossible in the very moment of delivery.

Hawk grasped his condition in a quick glance. "Get ready," he said. "I will carry you."

A semicircle of red men hemmed them in on the village side, brandishing their weapons impatiently. At Kendle's back, several feet to the right was the gate. Toward this Kioga suddenly leaped, dragging the white man along and thrusting him outside, the while he continued hurling commands at the savages. Then he followed, slamming the barrier behind him, and snatching Kendle into his arms, raced for the forest.

ONLY the powerful domination which Kioga had gained over the Shoni during his incumbency as their warrior chief could have held them even momentarily in check. But there were those among them who would speedily avail themselves of any opportunity to advance their own ambitions at his expense, and exhort the others to overthrow his authority.

Tumult rose in the village, followed by shouts as the Indians manned the walls. A volley of arrows whistled past, and for a moment it seemed to Kendle that their pace faltered. Then the forest swallowed them. . . .

During all the clamor caused by the presence of captives in Hopeka, Heladi had kept to her lodge until the name of Kioga reached her ears. Unbelievingly she heard shouted denunciations and vin-

dictive insult heaped upon him who but a week since had been venerated by the entire village.

Running into the open, she learned, by frantically questioning the village women, of events which had transpired up to the time the Snow Hawk fled the village, pursued by the arrows of the Shoni bowmen. Beyond that, all was confusion and speculation. Some said he had taken the white captive to a canoe, others that he had gone into the forest. A report soon spread like wildfire that both had been killed and scalped a mile downstream.

It was this piece of misinformation which led the frightened girl to think of the Caldrons of the Yei. She dared not believe Hawk dead. She knew his familiarity with the waterways. He had told her about the Caldrons, how often they had been a haven for him. Instinct told her now that he would turn to them again in his dire necessity.

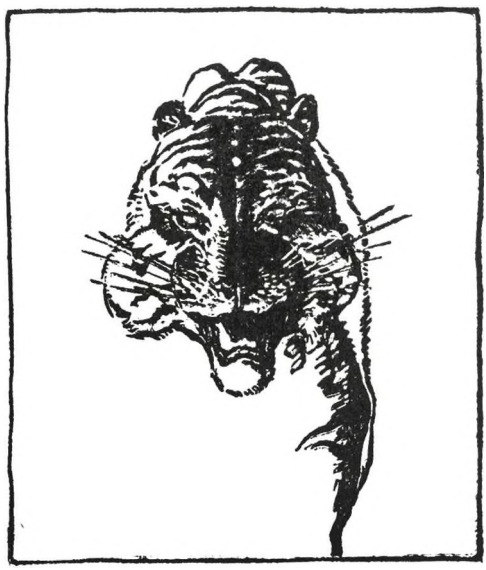
Taking advantage of the confusion, Heladi slipped out to the canoe-racks. A light craft lay on the sand. With a prayer of thanks to her gods, she pushed it into the water, stepped lightly in and paddled to midriver, where the down-current would be swiftest. The village was quickly lost to her view. . . .

Deep in the forest Kendle was amazed at the facility with which his rescuer bore him through the forbidding and tangled terrain, or along the most dangerous precipices, with the surefootedness of a mountain goat. Then he relaxed with exhaustion and shut his eyes.

When Hawk bore him into the cavern where Beth waited in cold suspense and dread, one glimpse of those tortured and broken features brought the girl to her knees at his side, mute with pity. Remorse quickly followed out of the knowledge that this lifelong friend had been risking his life and spilling his blood in her behalf.

Now, as she held Kendle's mutilated face against her breast, he managed a grin which brought fresh pain to them both as it cracked anew the half-healed cuts which had been inflicted upon him. That brave grimace, marking him for the splendid sportsman she had always known him to be, brought quick tears to her eyes.

But as quickly she was dry-eyed again. For gazing down upon her, expressionless as the Sphinx, stood the man who had performed the miracle of their present salvation. A mighty tide of gratitude



and confidence surged through her. Though their perils might yet be multiplied like the trees of this forest, here was one who could hew the way safely through!

Though she choked upon words which would not come, that long look of hers was reward enough for Kioga. And the curious light in his own eyes, could she have but known, was the light of pride —a white man's pride—in a good deed well done.

BUT their lead over the savages was slight. Realizing that to outrun the Shoni would require a quick start, Kioga lifted Kendle into the canoe, followed with Beth, and pushed out into open water, with a haste eloquent of their danger.

For a little time the canoe moved stealthily onward. The junction of the Caiyuta and the Hiwassee rivers was reached without event. But at a sudden cessation of the paddling, Beth looked back.

Hawk's gaze was fastened upon the river-bank about fifty yards to one side. Following his glance, Beth saw a small canoe drawn up on the bank. Beside it stood an Indian woman—Heladi, pausing here to rest a moment in her search for Kioga.

Standing tense, she gazed across the water into the face of the Snow Hawk, her eyes alight with relief and wild happiness at seeing him safe and whole.

Beth's wondering eyes took in all her loveliness at a single glance. She knew that long speaking look to be a wordless

message straight from a woman's soul. Was the girl loved in return? Beth glimpsed Hawk's face over her shoulder, tried to read the answer in its strong outlines, but could not.

And then, as the eyes of the girl ashore met her own, their expression changed. Slow understanding darkened them. The eager smile faded. The slender fingers clenched into small palms. Heladi's breast swelled on a deep-drawn breath and her head went up in cold challenge; but her quivering lips betrayed her.

As she turned a flashing glance upon Kioga, he touched a hand to his brow and extended it toward her without a word—a gesture of farewell.

The paddle dipped. The canoe moved forward. And on the bank, its wavelets lapped at knees to which Heladi had sunk like a stricken deer. She knew now where the Snow Hawk had been all these long hours and what had motivated him to destroy all he had so painstakingly built up. She covered her face with her hands, her heart dying.

As Kioga's craft passed from the Caiyuta into the rushing currents of the Hiwassee, a long inhuman whoop reached their ears from somewhere behind. They were not yet seen, but their trail was discovered, and their intentions probably determined by the cunning savages.

For all Kioga's mighty strength, one lone paddler in an overloaded canoe could not long distance twenty blades dipping as one in each war-canoe behind. At a fierce and triumphant cry Beth threw a glance back, to see three longboats momentarily cutting down their lead. Soon the contorted features of the pursuers were visible. A shower of arrows whispered past. One dug into a gunwale, vibrating an inch from her arm. Others clipped into the water round about them.

Behind them came savages more cruel in her eyes than the bloodthirsty red men who with fire and tomahawk ravaged the white settlements of early New England and left smoking death-filled pyres behind wherever they passed. No enemy Mohawk or plains Comanche had ever uttered more savage cries than marked every gain by the forging longboats of the Shoni.

YET even as she watched, with bated breath, accident befell the foremost craft. Where the smaller canoe had gone safely, the deeper-draft war-canoe was suddenly ripped from stem to stern by a submerged rock, its occupants hurled struggling into the now rushing river. Of the remaining visible pursuit one canoe avoided a like fate by turning back while yet there was time, to be joined by many other slower craft from upstream. The other, realizing too late the trap into which it had been lured, now fought the mighty current which drew it into the unknown watery areas above the caldrons. The quarry was forgotten, and Beth could barely hear the Indians' shouts of consternation over the mounting roar of the waters.

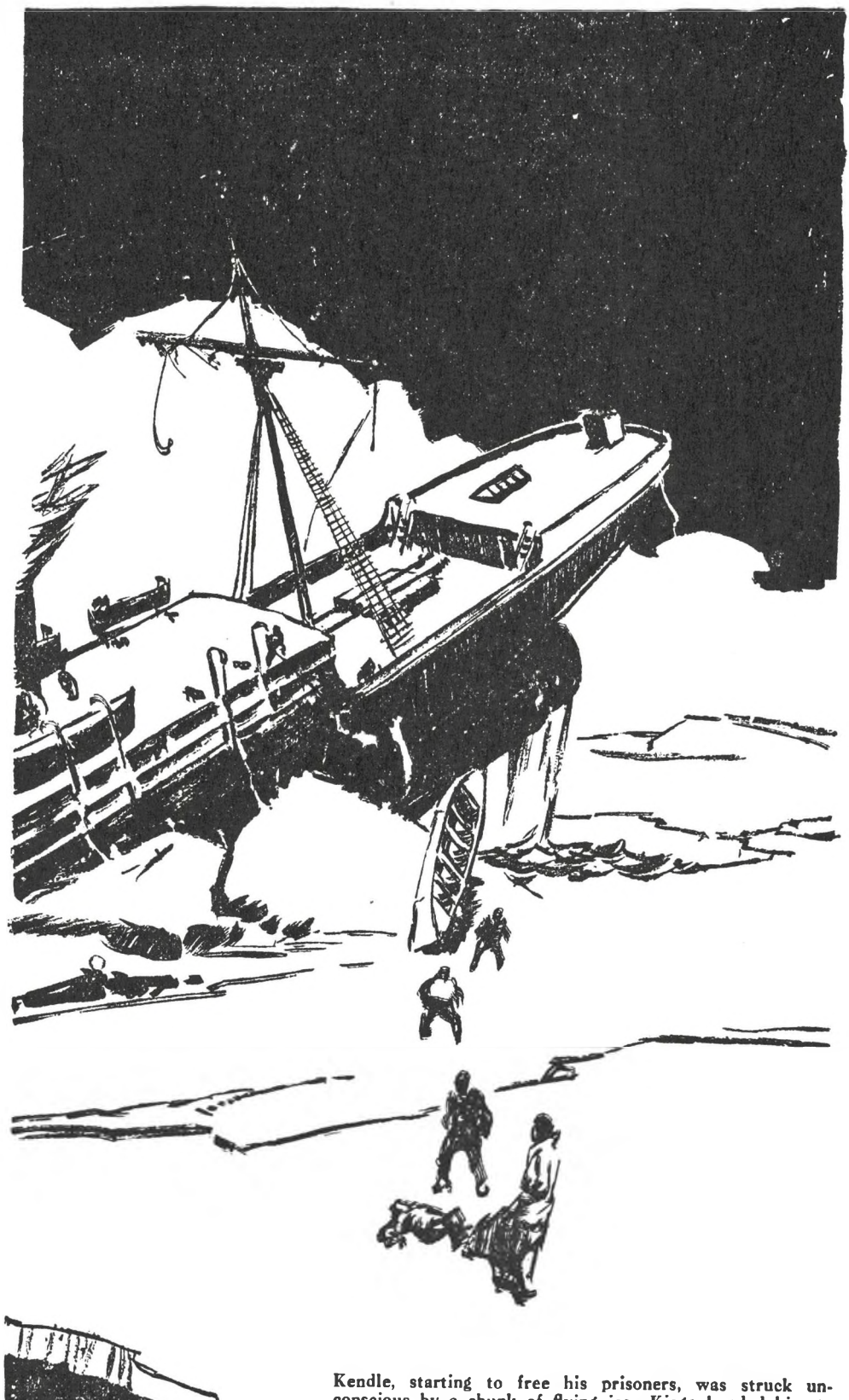
NOW the black walls of a dark cañon raced past. The stream narrowed to a series of flumes, sweeping past high walls of black rock. The flumes became suddenly one roaring mill-race, which drained with terrifying abruptness over a smooth shoulder of water into a tossing wilderness of rock-torn shallows. Amid these jagged upthrust needle-like perils they flew chip-like through the foaming white water, only held to their course by the broad paddle manipulated by the Indian astern.

Following Beth's gaze, Kendle could dimly see the Shoni craft in the toils of the current.

But the worst was not yet. At sight of what lay ahead, Kendle's face drained white. They were looking upon the swirling, boiling Caldrons of the Yei, the dread Untiguhi. Came a sudden rip of the waters, and a heavy leap of the straining canoe. For assurance, the girl looked back again, catching one glimpse of Hawk's face in the spinning mists. No fear was written there and her own melted away. The Shoni canoe had vanished when the Caldrons swallowed them into its maw.

Like an arrow the craft shot through the hell-gate of flying foam and stinging spray that led to the approaches above the Great Falls. Steady thunder filled the air. Every choking gasp in that wet mist was like swallowing a saturated sponge. Then Beth glimpsed the falls directly ahead, and stark terror had returned, striking to her marrow.

Deep-grooved channels of racing water testified to the swiftness with which the torrent poured over into the clouds of spray toward which they were directly headed. Hawk's paddle bent under his heaviest pressure. The canoe paused, shuddering, before giving a final nerve-racking leap. Then, by contrast the more unnerving, it darted suddenly



Kendle, starting to free his prisoners, was struck unconscious by a chunk of flying ice. Kioga handed him to safety from the sinking vessel.

into one of those by-ways of the main stream, carved into the solid rock by ages of erosion before the river had changed its bed.

They were safe now, but Beth's reaction was not only of relief but of exhaustion. She heard the hammering of her heart in her ears. Her hands were in violent pain from straining at the gunwales of the craft. Ahead, an unearthly flush cast over it by the low-hanging sun, lay the turbulence of a thundering cataract—behind, the tumultuous Caldrons. She wondered what could have happened to the other long-boat. Almost with the thought she caught a last view of it, as it were a ghost-canoe, filled with shades of men, ghastly beneath their paint, yet riding stoically to their doom, aware of the futility of further struggle. For a second it poised at the brink of the abyss, then tilted—and was gone, engulfed.

BESIDE Beth stood Kioga, looking with gloomy eyes upon the tragedy. He would be reproaching himself, she knew, blaming himself for this catastrophe to his former followers. Her gratitude mingled with a powerful desire to console him. She was about to lay a hand upon his arm when a movement in the water at their feet caught her eye.

Painfully a brown-skinned human being, wearing the bedraggled feathers of a warrior, stretched forth a hand for succor. It was one of the Indians from the overturned canoe which had first met with disaster.

Unhesitatingly Hawk extended his grasp, preparatory to hauling the man to safety. Then the savage's pretended exhaustion fell away. Treacherously and without a word he aimed a mighty knife-blow at his chieftain. But Hawk was the quicker; he fended off the blow without injury, caught the wrist in an iron grip and wrenched away the copper blade.

And then Beth and Allan Kendle were witness to the summary retribution of savage men. Too well Hawk knew the Shoni nature to expect more than further violence from this inflamed Indian, did he permit him to live. Too much was at stake to permit of the mercy he might otherwise have shown.

Retaining his grip upon the lean throat, quickly and inexorably he passed the blade into the struggling body, left it there and allowed the waters to claim the corpse.

Now bearing Kendle again in his arms, and with Beth on his left, he struck off into the wilderness toward the sea-cliffs, which they attained after several hours without further mishap.

Soon he was roping the injured man down the steep face of the cliffs, and another hour found all safe once more on board the ship—and owing existence itself to this wild Indian chieftain.

FOR the first time Kendle understood their sudden lurch on leaving the village. As he was helped into his cabin, he saw the Indian pull the broken feather end of an arrow from his side, beneath the shoulder, and toss it into the sea.

Young La Salle, still pale from the effects of his wound, but recovering rapidly, received Beth with open arms and a hundred questions. During their happy reunion, Kioga stood back in silence, until at last Beth turned to him, and spoke to her brother.

"I mentioned Kioga, Dan. That's an Indian name. His real name is Rand—Lincoln Rand—" Thus for the first time Hawk heard himself introduced as a white man and addressed by a civilized name. The features of La Salle were solemn as he gripped Hawk's extended hand, and his voice rang with heart-felt sincerity as he acknowledged the introduction.

"Lincoln Rand may be your name, but we'll always know you as Kioga. What you've done—for my sister and all of us—won't be forgotten by the La Salles."

"We shall be friends," answered Hawk simply, and with conviction. Beth was pleased to see that in this, his first formal contact with a civilized man, he did not suffer by the comparison.

As she went to her stateroom, Dan was making Hawk known to the various members of the crew.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The River Hunt

WITH a few words of explanation to La Salle, the Snow Hawk returned to the forest. He knew it would be useless to go back to the village in the hope of rescuing the sailor. No human aid could avail that poor limp thing which had hung smoking upon the other torture-stake when he had rescued Kendle.

Nor could he bring himself to face Heladi again—Heladi, the depths of whose love had led her forth alone upon

the treacherous rivers, to seek him in the wilderness at the risk of her life.

Yesterday he had been master of this mountain realm which no living monarch would have scorned, his word law, his every command obeyed. How good had been the taste of power and leadership after his long outlawry! Today he was the stag again, defiant of the pursuing wolves, renegade to his people and his office, back at the beginning. And all this for the sake of a slim gray-eyed creature who belonged, by her own words, to the man whom he had at such cost saved from the consequences of his own actions.

Behind him was a life stranger, wilder than ever man has lived before on this earth; before him exile, which would be the more bitter for its contrasts.

But it was that memory of Heladi, her happy eyes suddenly filled with the agony of a woman whose love is rejected, that haunted him, and would forever. What but the hatred he deserved could now abide in her breast! With leaden heart he proceeded on his way.

HE knew there was still a method by which he could with one stroke cut the knot he had tied, and still observe the primitive Indian law, or the even harsher wilderness decree that might makes right. In his heart for the first time since he had last killed to avenge his dead, he felt the virus of black hatred at work. He could willingly slit the throat of this handsome Allan Kendle!

Every instinct rebelled at allowing aught to stand between him and the beautiful white girl. Yet at the same time he knew that as a white man he could do nothing which might be justifiable under Indian law. . . .

Arrived at his cave, he forcibly dismissed these thoughts, in order to prepare for his departure. Into a small chest he had built he put a quantity of the gold, covering this with his folded picture-hide. Upon this he heaped double handfuls of precious stones from his great store, which was little diminished thereby. Atop these he laid the *Cherokee's* log-book and the never-opened steel box. Then he shut and secured the bursting chest with a flat strip of rawhide. That he burdened himself with the gold or the gems at all evidences his mental preoccupation, for he had little idea of the value of either.

Now he looked about him for the last time in the cave which had sheltered him for so long—a gloomy place without the presence of her who had graced it these past days. Closing and fastening the barrier securely behind him, he made his way to the nearest stream. Constructing a wide raft, he was presently poling along downstream.

Back from the coast, he came upon the body of the bear which Kent's rifle-fire had wounded. The animal had dragged itself toward water, but died in a deep ravine before reaching it. Scattering the croaking scavengers, he was amazed at the bear's condition. One shot had partially torn away the upper jaw and caused partial blindness. Another bullet had torn a huge hole in the mighty breast, as big as a man's head. He noted this in amazement, before proceeding on his way.

A little later Dan, who awaited his return, heard a hail from the cliffs above, and looked up to see the chest turning slowly in midair as Hawk lowered it by means of his rope. The *Alberta* had drifted closer to the cliffs, and by means of a boathook La Salle grappled the chest over upon the deck. Kioga immediately followed.

During his absence a conference had been held, at which several problems important to their escape had arisen. Of these Dan now informed Snow Hawk:

Though the warmer season had minimized their hardships, the vessel was not sufficiently provisioned to brave a possible winter locked in the harbor. Meat was an immediate need. Further, the warmest apparel on the ship would not suffice for protection against the low temperatures which they would encounter here or upon the high seas, should they successfully reach open water beyond the shoals.

AT another season the problem of meat would have been solved by killing walrus or sea-lion near the shore. But the fall migration had begun, and only a few animals remained, wary and alert, on the far wave-combed rocks. These would be inaccessible in any kind of craft. Time was an element to be considered, and though hunting inland might bring the Indians down upon them, it seemed the only way. In this Kioga concurred, and agreed himself to procure enough meat for many months, as well as furs already made into clothing. He stipulated the single condition that he be permitted to leave his belongings on board the *Alberta*.

Fitzroy, one of the ship's men, who had come up in time to overhear a part of this, answered: "Your things will be taken care of, and any plans you make for hunting will be followed out. Those are our orders from Captain Kendle. Most of us know how to handle a rifle. How many men will you need?"

By preference, Hawk would have hunted alone, unencumbered by men unfamiliar with the terrain. But mindful of the wounds inflicted upon the bear, and thinking with the aid of the powerful guns vastly to increase the bag of game, he chose Fitzroy and another sailor to accompany him. Dan's wound eliminated him, much as he desired to go along.

Followed by the sailors, each bearing a gun, Kioga ascended the cliffs. Then, explaining the impenetrable nature of the neighboring wilderness, he outlined the strategy of the hunt.

The actual killing of game would be child's-play compared with the labor of getting it aboard. They would utilize the raft which he had hidden, as a vantage point from which to shoot upstream further inland, where game was most plentiful. By floating back with a load of meat, they would lessen the distance of the overland carry to the ship. This plan was put into instant execution.

WITHIN the first hour Fitzroy foolishly gave two bullets to a buck drinking at the stream's edge. By the standard of another world, he had considered the animal huge. In reality it was a comparatively insignificant creature, a paltry catch, taken at the price of startling every animal within sound of the shots. For some time they paid the penalty of Fitzroy's ignorance, seeing no other game, though Snow Hawk repeatedly winded elk or moose but recently vanished.

Impatient at this delay which they could ill afford, he at last took to the bank, and in a few moments was padding along the dark game-trails with roving eye and alert nostrils, keen as a wolf on the scent. In a dewy thicket he started a great stag, felled it from above with the quick efficiency of long practice, and left it where it dropped. Near the edge of an inland marsh a score of wild geese fell prey to the hunting lash, to be strung upon a limb awaiting his return. Two fat wild turkeys, gobbling noisily in the brush, wilted in their tracks, spitted upon his silent arrows.

The white hunters might have sought in vain during this short interval so much as to flush the quarry. Hawk, with his intimate acquaintance with these wilds, knew almost infallibly the haunt of every animal within them. His companions were startled when they saw the geese being lowered from a ridge overhanging the stream. But they could scarce believe their eyes when these were followed by the turkeys and the huge stag, still warm and in full antlers.

These, added to the slain buck, represented a fair catch, yet hardly enough to fill their needs. It was decided, however, to pole the craft to the point of embarkation, cut up the meat, carry it to the ship and return for another hunt.

AS they proceeded downstream, Hawk gave a sharp signal to halt. Near the bank he had caught sight of a blue-tipped horn, for whose mate he looked in vain. Cautiously approaching the shore, it was seen to be that of a dead wild bull, lying with one horn buried in the mud. The neck was twisted at an angle which identified it to Hawk's practiced glance as the new kill of a tiger. Here was a stroke of fortune, almost to double their meat at the expense of Guna, doubtless startled off the prey by the rifle's stunning discharges.

Laying aside his pole, he stepped cautiously ashore. A great rent, running the full length of the belly, had opened the big carcass. With his knife Kioga swiftly completed the skinning already begun by the killer's talons, and emptied the cavity of its viscera, to lighten the load which must be carried. His nostrils were filled with the smell of meat and blood to the exclusion of all else.

He had freed the great skin, rolled the carcass over, and was dragging the hide from under, when he heard the sailors' yells of warning. Wheeling, he saw the bright orange and black streak of a prodigious tigress. At top speed she charged at an angle along the bank. Water dashed into spray about her flanks as she leaped roaring at the lone man standing above her kill. To those on the raft it seemed that she was fairly upon him before he moved.

But Kioga leaped aside quicker than either of his companions had believed a man could leap. Carried forward by her momentum, the enraged animal's forequarters fell across the raft. Two shots reverberated but were ineffectual because of her inconceivably swift and ferocious

onslaught. Sailors and guns were hurled headlong into the stream.

Neither would have offered a farthing as the worth of their lives when they regained the surface, clinging to the raft, which rocked to the efforts of the snarling tigress to come aboard.

But in full view behind them there transpired a scene the like of which neither had ever dreamed.

Quick as Kioga would have been to avoid attacking a full-grown tigress without his spear, he now realized what must happen if the powerful beast got into a position favorable to the use of her fangs and talons. With a cunning plan half-formed he gave her a dozen cuts with the whip, the while he shook out the folds of the wild bull's skin.

The terrific roars of the tigress thundered along the stream, as in response to the stinging torment of the whip cracking against her side, she turned back to the man ashore. The flat head hung low; the iron muscles of her shoulders and legs ridged up into bulging coils, as she crouched belly-deep in the water. Then she sprang.

ONCE again the scorching thong caught her, in mid-air, slightly altering the equilibrium of her leap. As she alighted, Hawk's hand jerked up a wet expanse of raw hide, enveloping her head and shoulders. The curving talons clutched into the first skin they fell upon—but it was that of the dead bull, not of Kioga. A moment she fought blindly in the smothering blanket, striving only to free herself now. But her long hooks, once sunk in, were not easily withdrawn.

As she threw herself splashing about, two hundred pounds of bone and brawn fell upon her. Sinewy fingers felt for the little space between the neck vertebræ. A fang of steel, six times the length of her own, was thrust in to its guard, and came out deep in her throat. A quick excruciating leverage on the hilt completed the severance of the spinal marrow. Then Hawk rolled aside to avoid the final convulsions that accompanied the tigress' end. . . .

Fitzroy had served Allan Kendle on many a hunting expedition. He knew that the black Masai of Africa hunted the lion with spears alone, falling beneath their shields to evade the death-agonies of the prey, and were justly called brave. He had seen a maharajah of India pursue the royal tiger with the aid of hundreds of beaters and a troop of ele-

A sailor glimpsed the gleaming bullion; he spread the news—and there was a sudden rush for the companionway as several of the crew abandoned their appointed tasks. . . . There was no stopping them.

phants, from whose broad backs the killing shots were fired upon the dreaded quarry.

But surely never before had one lone man dared to bait the mightiest killer on earth with such weapons as a knife and a thin whiplash!

As if mesmerized, the sailors watched silently while the Indian cut away the beast's claws. Without a word they helped him to haul the carcass of the bull aboard, then poled away from the bank, still unable to comprehend that their tall companion had dispatched, unaided, that striped monster which now lay silently awash in the stream behind them. Loaded to its full capacity, the raft continued down-river.

The good red meat was a welcome sight to the members of the *Alberta's* crew, and many hands made light work of getting it aboard. Long since, the deck had been cleared of the grisly reminders of the pirate attack, and order had replaced the recent confusion.

WITHOUT explanation Kioga again disappeared inland.

Captain Kendle, still weak, but greatly restored by rest and first-aid treatment, emerged to find two of his officers excitedly expatiating on the remarkable strength and courage of their absent hunter. He learned how Kioga had lured the tigress from them who would have been easy prey, and what had happened afterward.

Meanwhile, the crew were engaged in salting the meat, to preserve it.

Kendle also observed the chest containing Hawk's belongings. On being informed of its ownership, he personally supervised its storing below. Three men strained at the comparatively small chest. This, combined with the fact that the lid was partly sprung, induced him to examine the contents. As captain of the *Alberta,* this was not only a right, but in one sense a duty.

The first objects he saw were the logbook and the steel box. These interested him only an instant, as with a gasp he bent lower over the remaining contents. Scattered to the depth of several inches were countless gems of value, from whose facets played a constant steady, brilliant glow—a kind of heatless iridescent halo hanging like a little rainbow above the exposed compartment. Lifting a corner of the skin partition, he glimpsed the dull gleam of gold, and thus accounted for the weight of the chest.

Whistling softly, he slowly refastened the lid and went on deck, wondering, not unnaturally, how their friendly English-speaking savage had acquired so priceless a hoard. How came he to speak English at all? Whence the battered logbook, the rusted steel box?

Coming into the open, he saw a great bale of skins drop to the deck, skins which Hawk had snatched from a fur-trading canoe, destined for the more northerly tribes. This was followed by the figure of the Indian himself, toward whom Kendle advanced to make him welcome.

It was the first time he had met the other on anything like equal terms. A tall man himself, he found it necessary to look up into the face of Kioga, a face of mahogany brown, uncorrupted by any of the vicious or self-indulgent marks common among civilized men, and stamped with every sign of strong will and keen intellect. The eyes were wide, faintly oblique, startlingly brilliant in the deep orbits beside the straight bold nose. They lent him an almost predatory appearance, which was denied by the sensitive mobile mouth.

Kendle noted, as one whose gaze was brooked by few, the imperturbable steadiness of those eyes, and the ease with which they engaged his own, which were first to waver. The product of totally different worlds, each recognized in the other one accustomed to command without thought of disobedience.

KENDLE was all that an active life, inherited authority and great wealth can make a man—strong, yet considerate of the weak, handsome, polished, educated, a citizen of the world—a man who, under different circumstances, must have been the model after which Kioga would choose to pattern himself.

Hawk, by comparison an untutored savage, contemplated with mixed feelings the man he most detested. Despite an aversion to doing so, he took the hand which Kendle extended.

"We owe our escape to you," Kendle began cordially. "You took a terrible risk on my behalf. I'll never forget the look on those painted faces when you spoke to them. What the devil did you say, anyhow? I thought," he continued with enthusiasm, "that you were about to knife me yourself!"

"The people of my tribe sometimes adopt an enemy to save his life. It was the only way," came the quiet reply.

"And you did that for a total stranger," said Kendle, in amazement. "I don't see why, you know."

Hawk did not reply, an omission which Kent ascribed to some native disinclination to pursue the matter. Accordingly he did not press for an explanation. Suddenly he had another thought.

"But—I say! You can't very well go back to that village, can you?"

"Not very well," agreed Kioga without expression.

"I see," asserted Kendle. For a moment he walked the deck, silent and thoughtful, then turned back to Kioga. "Look here. You've done so much for us—what can we do for you, in return?"

HAWK'S answer came promptly. "I wish to go to America."

"To America!" Kendle's face expressed genuine regret at appearing to cavil at this first request. "So do we. But it looks pretty hopeless right now. We don't know our own position. How we ever drifted in here is a mystery. And how we're to get out without charts or preliminary soundings, I don't know."

Kioga knew nothing of the language of an ocean vessel, nor of the nautical terms which Kendle used. But Kendle's manner, more than his words, suggested a problem which he himself had once wrestled with and ultimately solved—the location of a channel seaward.

"I have been to the open sea many times," he suggested.

"Then you must know where the mainland lies," Kendle said eagerly.

"No. I know the way to open water. After that—" The broad naked shoulders shrugged.

Kendle was jubilant, however.

"That knowledge may be our salvation. Once at sea, we have only the ice to contend with. Bad as that may be, it's nothing compared to the threat of those reefs. If you help us get through them, the time may yet come when I can make you some return for all you've done for us."

Hawk waved this offer aside. Kendle determined to prove his gratitude at once, conducted the other to his quarters, where he urged him to select whatever apparel he desired.

At the man's visible unfamiliarity with the strange garments, Kendle assisted as best he could, wondering anew at the mystery of a white man's presence and influence among the fierce unknown inland tribes.

It was not Kioga the Snow Hawk who emerged from Kendle's cabin, but Lincoln Rand, a civilized and undeniably handsome man. Yet days passed before he felt anything but constraint and discomfort in his white man's clothing. . . .

Filled with thoughts of the imminent departure of his ship,—literally a treasure-ship now—Kendle congratulated himself upon having so successfully concluded an adventure so badly begun. The treasure, of course, concerned him not at all. But the prospect of making safe passage through the reefs to the sea again put a period to what had been the most disagreeable fraction of his life.

To the best knowledge of living man, the *Alberta* was the first vessel ever to find her way to the open sea intact after having once been trapped in the foggy reefs about Nato'wa. Trusting implicitly in the knowledge of Kioga, she put to sea with the Indian signaling the direction by hand in the all too short hours of day, and by lantern-light thereafter, while from the wheel-house, Kendle relayed orders to the engine-room.

Headway was maddeningly slow. Thrice they anchored while the rushing crests of the rising tides went foaming swiftly past. Not until many hours later, when the *Alberta* had conquered the tortuous serpentine channels of the outer labyrinth, did those aboard her draw their first breath of relief.

Though the ship came through the ordeal with several deep skives along her water-line, these were as nothing compared to the damage she had sustained on her way in, many days earlier. But for the keen guiding eye at the prow, disaster must have overtaken her within an hour of leaving the sea-cliffs.

And on the rail, looking back, Kioga watched the vague headland of Nato'wa drop slowly beneath the bulge of the horizon. There sank all the strange life of which he had been a part. Ahead was the Land-Where-the-Sun-Goes, the world, that mystic place of many marvels, of which he had read in his books and learned much about from Beth during those happy hours beside his fire.

CHAPTER XXIX

Shipwreck

IN their race with winter the *Alberta* had threaded her way through ever less frequent lanes between the ice-floes which were now closing in on every side

about her. Midnight of the fourteenth day found the ship trapped in the pack. A great hummock forced up by the terrific pressure of the closing floes towered over her port side. There seemed no hope of further progress—and little likelihood that they could survive where they were.

In the deck-saloon, young La Salle had found the commercial radio receiver in good condition, and had been applying his limited knowledge of electricity in an attempt to get the transmitter functioning again. At first glance it had seemed irreparable, as if the mutineers had silenced it forever. A maze of wreckage and disconnected wiring had first greeted his eye. Salt water had also entered here, breaking down the insulation. But days of labor had corrected much of that. While two of the crew strung up a new antenna, Dan reconnected the wiring for the hundredth time and went over the set with a test lamp, seeking a sign of life—a live circuit.

All who could be spared from their posts now gathered aft, hanging upon Dan's every move, awaiting the word that would inform them whether or not their plight could be made known to an anxious outer world. Kioga was one of those who watched the repairs being attempted. Gradually it came to him that he witnessed a marvel greater than any other upon this wonder-craft. Not all her magnificent fittings and throbbing machinery could compare with this complicated contraption of wires and metal before which Dan knelt as before a god, the while, with blundering fingers, he sought to establish the mysterious circuits by which the radio functioned.

AN hour ago the ship's machinery had been stopped when ice-conditions made further navigation perilous. Kendle now appeared at the door, a wrinkle of anxiety between his brows. Anticipating his query, Dan wiped sweat and oil from his eyes and shook his head. The growl of the ice-pack closing in around the ship drowned his words as he tried another connection. And suddenly—the test lamp glowed. . . .

When Dan had made his final adjustments, the transmitter gave out a clear note of good quality, indicating that the set was in exact resonance. The *Alberta* had received a heart-stimulant and had come alive, its electrical blood-stream aflow. A last test with the lamp, and Dan straightened up with the welcome news: "Juice in all circuits! Let's go!"

Unable to get an astronomical fix because of fog and weather conditions, Kendle had calculated their position by dead reckoning as approximately between 68 and 69 deg. N. and 170 deg. W.

Jotting the figures on a slip of paper, he slipped it under Dan's elbow. With a silent prayer, Dan sent out his message: *"SOS SOS SOS Alberta"*—following with the ship's call-letters, thrice repeated, her approximate position as indicated on the slip, and the nature of their distress. Repeating this procedure several times, he listened intently, but caught only the bedlam of several ships somewhere down in the Pacific, communicating back and forth.

Recalling something the ship's operator had told him, he glanced at the clock. It was fourteen minutes past two in the morning. In another minute the entire world of ships, great and small, would be a silent listening-post tuned in on 600 meters—the SOS radio band—and sending no messages. The antenna was radiating, he knew. His signals would be detected then, if ever.

PROMPTLY at 2:15 the signaling ceased; he heard only the peculiar hissing sounds caused by the Northern Lights. Somewhere an operator opened up, only to be assailed by a buzzing chorus: *"Quit sending! Silent period!"*

Redoubling his efforts, Dan shot out, *"SOS SOS SOS Alberta"*—repeated it, and listened. There was a moment's pregnant silence. Then suddenly, crisp and sharp, came the high staccato of an answering signal, too fast for his unpracticed ears to decode.

"Send slower," he begged. Again came the signal, slow and distinct, and while a dozen pairs of eyes looked over his shoulder Dan printed out the call-letters of his own ship, thrice repeated, the word *DE*, then the call-letters of the acknowledging operator three times followed by the group *RRR* and the signaler's position.

"Cut the jargon," tapped Dan on his own key. *"I'm a greenhorn. Who are you?"*

"Whaler Bearcat," came the answer. *"Coming all speed your aid. Hang on."*

"Hurry," answered the *Alberta*. *"Ice-pressure alarming."*

"Give your position again," came from the *Bearcat*. Dan rapped it out. The *Bearcat* cut in with, *"You're getting weak. Is that best you can do?"* Once again Dan tapped out his figures.

"Think have it," came the reply. *"Try once more."* And once more Dan tried, but this time felt his generator dying. In another moment it would stop, and the set would be dead. Straining his ears, he heard a last call:

"Hello, Alberta. Are you abandoning? Hello, Alberta—"

He began to signal *"So long, Bear-cat,"* but discontinued as the generator's humming ended. Removing the head-phones, he glanced at Kendle. "That's all. We're finished. Batteries exhausted."

"And you too, old boy," replied Kendle. "Go and get yourself some sleep."

BUT there was no sleep for Dan this night. Close on the heels of that encouraging contact with the outer world came final disaster. Kendle was issuing orders to be ready on a moment's notice to abandon ship, when the crisis came with devastating suddenness. Under the growing pressure of the ice, the stanch *Alberta's* straining outer shell gave way with a crash that echoed thunderously through the ship. Sea-water poured through her previously damaged bow-plates, and yells of fear echoed from the forecastle in which the remaining mutineers were imprisoned.

Acting upon Kendle's general commands, Kioga had arranged his possessions convenient to hand, and at sound of the break, leaped from the bunk where he had been resting, fully clothed. Abandoning the heavy gold altogether, he snatched up the skin containing the balance of his treasure—gems, log-book and other belongings, and ran on deck.

One glance assured him that the *Alberta* had received a death-wound. Several sailors worked feverishly at the fastenings supporting the remaining life-boat, which was to be lowered to the ice in the hope of reaching open water later on. Hawk leaped to their aid.

Not so, however, with others aboard the stricken ship. A sailor coming close behind Kioga had glimpsed the gleaming bullion. Having seized a few ingots and coins, he spread the news among the others; and there was a sudden rush for the companionway as several of the crew abandoned their appointed tasks. The lifeboat smashed to the ice, stoving a huge hole in her bottom.

Kendle knew and cursed the instincts which drove his men, and with drawn pistol blocked their passage.

"Stand back! We're going down!" he thundered. "Stand back!"

"Kioga's cleared out, too," Kendle asserted. "I don't believe it," said Beth with spirit.

But there was no stopping them now. Weary of violence and loath to fire upon his own men, Kendle toppled before their rush and lost his weapon in the scuffle.

All this Kioga noted in amazement as he lowered Beth into the waiting arms of Dan and those of the crew who stood on the ice. The ship was listing sharply. The rumble of the floes was suddenly punctuated by a crash. A great block of solid ice loosed from the overhanging hummock smashed down upon the companionway through which the sailors had entered the ship. Appalled by the fate awaiting his prisoners, Kendle had started for the forecastle-hatch, intending to admit them to the deck and freedom. But now he rolled down the deck like a dead man, struck unconscious by a chunk of flying ice. Kioga handed him to safety as he had Beth.

All was now confusion on the sinking vessel. Already her forecastle was under water, the cries from that quarter stilled. Her stern had lifted higher in air. One propeller, lazily spinning, clanged against a pinnacle of ice astern. From within

the doomed hulk came the hoarse yells of the entrapped sailors. Something had gone wrong with the engine-room bell, and it was ringing furiously, muffled by the unbroken wail of the siren. The floe creaked as the *Alberta* shuddered and lurched sickeningly forward, then down —slowly down—one light-port after another sliding into the frigid waters. Her bell and siren were choked off in full voice, creating an overpowering silence. Her visible propeller came to a stop, and for one moment it appeared that the sheer pressure of ice on either side would grip her stern, hold her afloat. Then, with a rush, she sank from view, and behind her the jaws of the fissure clashed grinding together where she had hung. In five minutes the footing over the ship's grave was solid as bed-rock.

But for that sudden stampede by the crew in answer to the lure of gold, ample provision and ammunition would have remained to console the shipwrecked party. As it was they were reduced to a single rifle and a pocketful of cartridges, and a belt-ax. The boat's broken boathook could serve as a weapon when repaired, and under the canvas cover a sealing harpoon was fastened, with its length of rope. The warm fur garments on their backs came from the armload which the Indian had thrown overboard with his own things. Otherwise, to all but one among them, the outlook was hopeless indeed, rendered more so by the gloom of night.

Once again Kioga was faced by civilized man's lack of resource when deprived of his base of supply. But this intrigued him less than the—to him—inexplicable passion which had sent those men to their death, a desire for the yellow stuff he had left behind.

MORNING poured over the icy chaos of desolate floes in golden glory, lighting their cold white world with the warmest colors of dawn. Rolling up like a dull red wheel, the sun painted the ice with the softest pastel tints. As it rose yet higher in the blue dome, the ice like a field of dazzling brilliants flashed back the slanting rays. It was a scene which gave the party new courage.

The broken lifeboat offered little promise as a way of escape. But from its remains they fashioned a crude sledge; upon this they laid the wounded Kendle. The canvas cover was carefully folded for later use.

Then, between them, turn and turn about, the handful of men dragged their rude conveyance southward as beasts of burden would haul against the yoke, while Beth alternately trudged alongside or rode with the injured man. Fair progress was made in the short period of daylight.

That greatest boon of northern travelers, fresh water, was found in frequent sparkling pools under a skin of new ice atop the floes; and so they did not thirst. Hunger, however, was soon upon them, sharpened by their labors of the day.

So long as the floes remained unbroken, the prospect of securing food was remote. None realized this better than Kioga, for in all the hours since the sinking of the ship, not once had the scent of edible flesh crossed his keen nostrils. Upon all that vast expanse of snow and ice, no other living thing existed above the surface of the ice. Accordingly he favored pushing on while their strength lasted, in the hope of reaching open water, where a seal or a white bear might be shot. This plan was adopted.

BUT after the day of unceasing toil, mutterings of dissent rose from among the crew. The sledge was heavy, the added burden of the wounded Kendle more intolerable hourly. Three of the men presented themselves before Kioga and Dan, some little distance from the others. One, electing to speak for the others, stood forward.

"It's no use fooling ourselves," he began. "Either he walks hereafter, or we don't pull on the sledge."

"Aye," came from behind him. "He's been joy-ridin' long enough. Let him walk—or stay behind."

The third sailor, who had remained gloomily silent until now, started and looked up with inflamed unnatural eyes, out of a face rendered haggard and hollow by hunger. "Leave him behind?" he echoed, before suddenly relapsing into moody contemplation of the ice on which he stood.

With a start of horror, Dan realized what was meant. Kioga, also, caught the telltale glance of a famished animal. With narrowed eyes he looked from one to the other of the sailors.

"W'y not?" whispered the first speaker. "We all have to go one way or other." Then, in a wheedling tone, to Dan: "There's the young miss to think of too, and—" But he never finished. Dan knocked him sprawling with a single blow. Without another word the

sailors picked up their companion and withdrew, remaining apart from the others. The first rift in the little colony on the ice had formed and was widening.

Neither Dan nor Kioga slept that night. La Salle sat with his back to the shelter they had made for Beth with the tarpaulin. He held Kendle's rifle across his knees and kept watchful eyes upon the group of three who knelt huddled together. Kioga whittled in apparent idleness at a long strip of wood chopped from the sledge, and in a little while with harpoon in hand and ax at belt, he slipped forth into the darkness alone, saying no word of his intentions.

Again he was the hunter, every sense occupied with their bodily needs, impatient of explanations in the need to find meat. He searched now, as he had done unnumbered times before, in the winter shore-ice about Nato'wa, for a seal's breathing-hole. At every snow-covered spot in the floe he probed with the harpoon, seeking the hollow vertical chamber, gnawed open from the sea below, through which the sleek seal rises for a breath of air. It seemed a slender forlorn hope, and hours passed without rewarding his patience. But at last the harpoon sank deep in spongy ice. Withdrawing it, Kioga felt the blade. It was wet—with salt-water. Into that hole he now inserted his long stick, with its flat wooden disk at one end, in such wise that the top end of the stick must move if the water were disturbed below it. Then he sat down to wait and to watch.

He knew there would be other breathing-holes near by, and he might wait the entire night without luck. But sooner or later the seal would rise to breathe at this hole. Hours passed, dragging slowly, and nothing happened. Rigid as stone, Kioga kept his eyes glued upon the vertical rod. Then of a sudden the indicator trembled. The seal was still some feet from the hole, unseen and unheard. But the wave-motion created by its underwater approach, transmitted motion to the stick, betrayed its coming.

WITH harpoon vertically poised beside the stick, Kioga stood tense. Beneath the ice the seal rose to press its nostrils to the breathing-hole, forcing the wooden rod upward. Then, with lightning swiftness, the man drove the weapon down.

An invisible, noiseless struggle endured for a moment, as working swiftly he chopped away the spongy ice to enlarge the seal's hole. A moment later he drew it out thrashing upon the ice. The harpoon had gone in beside the jaw, roving deep toward its lungs. He ended its struggles with a blow, and turned back to the camp.

AS Kioga approached the shelter, dragging the seal behind him, the three sailors, upon whom young La Salle had kept unbroken watch, were deserting toward the south, staking all on the possibility of rescue in that direction.

Beth had awakened in time to hear of this and to shudder on being told the cause of disagreement between Dan and the men.

"How long has Kioga been gone?" inquired Kendle.

"Hours," answered Dan.

"That means he's cleared out too."

Dan did not answer. He was almost ready to believe Kendle right, that Kioga had at last determined to strike out alone while his strength lasted. Of them all Beth's voice was the only one raised in denial.

"I don't believe it," she said with a spirit which was later to give Kendle cause for thought.

"That doesn't alter the facts. He's gone," insisted he, with the weariness of a man to whom salvation or death no longer greatly matter. "Like the others, he'll try to save himself first."

He had scarce uttered the words when a darker shadow loomed out of the night. It was Kioga, dragging his seal upon the harpoon-rope. Straight before Beth he brought it, as if it were an offering. She could not tell whether he had overheard Kendle's words, but she felt a mighty sense of gladness that she had not lost her faith in him. . . .

Cleaning and quartering the animal, the Indian proffered the raw meat to his companions. The others wasted several precious cartridges in fruitless attempts to ignite wood-shavings cut from the sledge. They wanted their meat cooked. Shrugging, Kioga partook sparingly of the uncooked flesh and renewed his strength. Later on the sailors were glad to eat their meat raw; even Beth steeled herself to taste it, finding it better than no food at all. Stronger in spite of their distaste for the raw meat, the party set out once again for the south.

Desperate indeed is the situation of the castaways in this frozen waste. Be sure to read the tremendous climax of this novel in the forthcoming October issue.

The Glove of the Fox

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

An American scientist plays a poor hand well when captured in Manchuria—by the gifted author of "The Shadow of the Wind."

The men began to hurl clods and rocks at the man in the pool. In an instant of light, Carson saw that the infant was white.

THE grim black ravine of the roaring Hu-wi-kiang broadened at last to a lush valley of checkered millet-fields; in the pearly haze of evening Carson could see a walled village coiled in a bend of the river. The fastnesses of the southeasterly ridges of the Great Khingan were behind him. His waterproofed packs contained the excellent results of seventeen months' work; the railway should be about four days' distant, easy marching, and to be reached somewhere near Sia'khetse.

It had been a good expedition. Carson had found a stunted variety of honey locust, something possibly akin to *gleditsia triacanthos,* but with more conspicu-

Illustrated by
John Richard
Flanagan

ous and brighter flowers; he had discovered a new wild indigo which might some day bear his name; there were hundreds of curious rare primroses, root and seed, in the metal containers; he had gleaned iris and narcissus and digitalis and dwarf quince—and best of all, he had justified the judgment of those men who had insisted that Red Carson could really keep his temper and deserved an expedition of his own. He hadn't lost that temper even when one of the coolies had stolen his last cigarettes! The caravan had come through without hint of trouble.

He was a tall, lean man, younger than any of his Mongols. His skin was burned brown by sun, cold and winter wind; his hair was as fiery red as ever. If his eyes were tired, they were bright enough now. For the rest of the way would be easy: a man could let up. Harbin, Mukden, the sea, home. As simple as that. Carson, away from the world for almost a year and a half, thought of the cities as being in Manchuria, not Manchukuo. A good many things had happened in seventeen months. . . .

Khai D'ui, Carson's caravan leader, had halted his shaggy pony. He was grinning as he waited for the white man to reach him.

"Tonight we will eat until we are red

in the face," said Khai D'ui. "Is it not so?"

"And tomorrow," jeered Carson, "you will think you have ten devils in your belly. Of course it will not be from what you gobbled."

Khai D'ui agreed calmly. "I am always sick at the end of a journey. It must be because the gods of starvation become angry that I have again escaped them." He lowered his voice: "It will be well to give each man a piece of silver, Number Two size. There are undoubtedly women in this village—"

"No trouble tonight, Khai D'ui!"

The caravan leader scratched his chin. "You are as bad as a missionary," he grunted. "You want no woman; you do not fight. Tell me; why are you alive? It is— *Hai! Ma' t'en ki'!* Thunder?"

Carson took in cloudless sky and peaceful village in the same glance; he said: "A gun. What is there to hunt?"

"There is no hunting. We will find the answer in the village." Khai D'ui gave the word to advance. The little bells on one of the pack-animals tinkled as the caravan moved forward, Carson, Khai D'ui, Sui Chong, four coolies, the cook, their animals and the ponies with packs.

Darkness dropped down swiftly; once Carson said, "There are few lights in the village," as they came nearer to it.

"They sleep early," Khai D'ui announced. "We will soon wake them." Curiously: "Must you always have fear, lord? To you, a herder becomes a bandit, a mendicant priest appears as a *hunghutzu*—although these raiders have disappeared for many years. Now, because the village has no lights, you become fearful. Do not say that we will camp by the river, and not visit the village until morning! If— *There!* You see? They come to welcome us."

THERE was indeed a glare of torches at the gate. The caravan was near enough so that hoarse shouts could be heard, suddenly growing louder as all of the torches moved in the same direction, not directly toward the caravan and along the path, but at a long angle. Even as the light approached, it was difficult to determine who the torch-bearers might be. Their faces, glowing darkly under the flames, were the faces of Asiatics; but there was a complete lack of the usual predominant blue in their attire. It appeared to be earth-color, brown, drab.

Khai D'ui slipped abruptly from his pony and jerked his rifle from its ornamented leather scabbard. Perplexed, he said sharply, "There is a something happening here which I do not understand," and coming beside the white man, watched closely also. His breath came through his teeth. The Mongol was a fighter.

The brilliance converged, until under the glare the watchers could see lurid color reflected in a black pool about a hundred yards distant. Here the torches and the men who carried them began to circle the pool; there were continuous shouts and cries, loud and angry. Sui Chong muttered something involving a pursuit of demons at the pool; but Khai D'ui, older and wiser, said that no villagers had courage enough to hunt devils.

"Are they villagers?" Carson demanded.

Khai D'ui said, "They must live somewhere, lord," and looked to see if there were a shell in the firing-chamber.

SEARCHERS dragged heaps of dried millet-stalk to the edge of the water, and thrust torches against them; flames shot high, turning the black water to a bloody hue. The screaming Orientals danced about, this way and that, demoniac figures around a hell's caldron. It was the white man who refrained from staring at them, and sought instead to see the object of their excitement.

He said to Khai D'ui: "In the pool—see? That is not an old stump. It is a man."

"A man," agreed the caravan leader. "I wonder what he has done?"

Sui Chong suggested: "Perhaps he has used the food-money for himself. I recall an officer who gambled, and when the time came for us to be fed, he—"

"So you believe they are soldiers?" growled Khai D'ui. "I also. If— *Hai!* What does the man hold in his arms?"

The men around the pool had finally discovered the dark figure, whose head and shoulders only were above the water, and began instantly to hurl clods, curses and rocks at him. A few were already in the water, advancing slowly, feeling their way out; some carried guns, some clubs; there was the zigzag flashing of knives also. The man in the pool was surrounded; there was no escape for him.

Carson, after Khai D'ui's snapped question, stared; he saw only a white splotch which the Asiatic seemed to be

holding out of the water—a bundle of some sort: probably what the fellow had stolen. Then, as the hunted man ducked away from a stone, Carson said aloud, suddenly cold: "A child, Khai D'ui?"

"Yes." The caravan leader pulled out Carson's rifle and held it in his right hand. "A child. What sort of child, lord?"

Flames spattered as some one hurled a brand at the bowed head; in the instant of brightness before the torch hissed out, Carson saw that the infant was white. He voiced his thoughts: "The child was stolen, Khai D'ui; these men recover it. Or—if that were true, would they be throwing rocks, which endanger the baby? If—"

"Yes, lord?"

Khai D'ui handed him the rifle.

In Carson's head were his orders: "Keep out of trouble, Red! Don't go looking for it. Your job is to get what you're after, and return safely with it. It's your real chance, and apt to be your last one if you mess it. Watch your step!" He remembered this as he said quickly: "You and I will go, Khai D'ui. Sui Chong, take the caravan back up the path. Wait until I send for you."

KHAI D'UI raised his gun, the sights on a ponderous Oriental who was hurling dirt-clods at the man in the pool; he said: "We had better send these fools a message to inform them that *men* are coming."

"No shooting. No fighting."

"No?" grunted the old Mongol. Under his breath he added: "We will see. I think these are Manchu dogs, from the way they howl. If I am right, there is going to be death this night."

The hunted man had both arms wrapped about the child. A rock took him full in the face, so that he wailed in terror and pain. The horde shrilled delighted approval. Carson caught a word or two: "*Sha!* None must escape!" He began to race for the pool. A man in brown turned, stared, and tried to thrust his torch into the white man's face. Carson knocked him down with his gun, and seizing the fallen torch, held it over his own head. He shouted, "What is this?" and Khai D'ui calmly emphasized the question by firing between the distant legs of the big Manchu. If his master had disobeyed the instructions regarding fighting, he himself could do no better than follow the example. *Hai!* He had known there was courage in the Red One!

Yelps and snarls, and a hurled knife which fell short, answered Carson.

The white man demanded: "Where is the chief of this village?"

"His head hangs by the hair in his own yamen," some one shrieked; "and that is what will happen to you also, *t'u fei.* There are only two of them, brothers! Let us therefore—"

Khai D'ui had seen a man crawling on hands and knees, blade between his teeth. He had waited until the Manchu was a dozen paces away, and then fired. Before the echo had clattered into silence, the caravan leader yelled: "There are only two of us! Who comes *next* to seize us? You have no children here!"

Carson was cold as ice now. He knew what to do: Make a show of complete fearlessness, as if he and his man dominated the situation. "We kill the first man who moves," he asserted. He would have liked to add, "I have men on the path, waiting the word to kill you all," but he had promised to get the specimens through safely. . . .

Khai D'ui made Carson's statement more emphatic by sending a quick shot into a Manchu who had been stealthily raising his own gun. So, for a full two minutes, two men held thirty in check. Carson dared not order the Asiatic in the pool to come out. Such action would probably be the signal for an attack, and also result in the death of man and child. Khai D'ui slipped shells into the gun's magazine to replace those he had fired; he chuckled: "This gives me an appetite, lord. For my dinner—or for dying."

CARSON asked, eyes never leaving the men about the pool: "What do you think it means, old one?"

"They are dressed like soldiers," Khai D'ui said, "but I do not know the uniform. You know they are Manchus, and therefore cowardly dogs. *I* think the thing to do is to start with that ugly-faced one over to the left, and one by one, exterminate them like the rats they are. I will take ugly-face, and you—"

"And they will swarm over us, and you will never have food again," Carson told him. "Some of them have guns; I wonder that they do not try—"

"I took the heart out of them," grinned the Mongol. "The first one who did try went kicking into the seventh hell." He said alertly: "Some one is coming out of the gate, lord. What happens now?"

Two torches advanced. Between them walked three men.

Khai D'ui fingered his weapon.

"Wait," Carson commanded. "They must be the leaders. I'll talk some sense into them."

"A bullet would be better," Khai D'ui grinned.

Carson called to the advancing group: "Is this how peaceful travelers are welcomed in this province?"

in the water was moving slowly, steadily, toward the one spot on the opposite bank where no torches gleamed.

The leader, a man with colored shoulder-straps on his uniform, whispered a moment with one of his companions, and then, halting, announced: "Peaceful men do not carry weapons, nor shoot good soldiers. Who are you?"

A half dozen of the nearest Manchus all began shouting at once: The white man had come upon them without warning and had started shooting. Li Weng Chung was dead, shot in the back. The white man had said he would kill them all and flay their carcasses. He had (explanation of their own cowardice) more men somewhere behind him—a hundred men, a thousand; and therefore resistance had been impossible.

Carson saw that the fellow standing

As is proper, Khai D'ui answered for Carson: "Who? Are you blind? My master is the Red One, and—"

Carson, unprepared, barely had time to strike down his caravan leader's gun. The man in officer's uniform ran toward him, arms outstretched in a gesture of obedience. Three feet away he stopped, and said hastily: "We did not recognize what you were. How sorrowful I am! But who would expect to see a real Red One here!"

The man in the pool, with his living burden, was out of the water to the waist now; the Manchus were all engaged in watching their leader and the white man.

"And why are we here?" the Manchu leader asked of himself. *"Ai!* We were caught between the Japanese and the southern troops, and the fighting became too hot for plundering; we vanished, and here we are, where all is quiet, and where there is a fat mission ready for looting. We will feed you well tonight!"

"Since when," the Asiatic demanded, "have Red Ones a love for religion?" He was frowning with thought; he went on: "This is, as you have said, hardly the way to welcome you. Come. We will go to the village, all of us."

A Manchu had an idea: Let the red-haired one be tortured first, since he would last the longest.

"So?" said Khai D'ui.

The political happenings in the Orient, centering about Manchuria, were unknown to Carson. He was perfectly satisfied to be left in the dark, so long as the coolie in the pool managed to escape during the conversation. However, the business concerning a looted mission bothered him; he said quietly: "Since when do soldiers loot the houses of God?"

The Manchu stared at him.

The man in the pool, step by step, was trying to get out of the muck. The going was not easy; slime and ooze sucked at his feet as he lifted them; Carson could see the man, by now, only knee-deep in water.

"Come," the Manchu repeated. "I am General Wei F'ong—or I was, once. Now I am simply Wei F'ong, and I love all mankind. All men are my brothers." He called out: "O brothers, some of you come and help escort the Red One."

Torches moved toward them. The moving lights illuminated the body of the man in the pool as he strove to mount the slippery bank. He was fairly caught, and when the first howl went up, he wailed, hurrying the end.

Carson said sharply: "Look here—"

Wei F'ong had a gun against his side. "Answer me this," the Manchu snapped, as Carson saw the man in the pool go down, saw some one seize the child and hold it in the air: "Tell me: why are you called the Red One?"

Carson was no fool, but before he could get out the important lie, Khai D'ui again answered for him: "He is called the Red One from his hair, O dog, and because he has seen the blood of every enemy he has ever met."

Wei F'ong snarled a command, and some one in the rear clubbed the caravan leader to the ground.

"You supposed I was without sense," the Manchu shouted. "I! Wei F'ong! When you objected to looting the mission, I knew you could not be one of us. Well, we will now kill you along with the others. What have you to say *now?*"

"There is no reason to murder a child," said Carson.

The big Manchu chuckled. "You are all fools, you white men. Why should you care about a child?" He yelled a command, and the renegade soldier who had been about to hurl the baby back into the black water paused, and came trotting with it to Wei F'ong. "It looks like a white slug," said the leader. "Save it, brother. It can accompany its mother into hell, furnishing us with much entertainment."

Khai D'ui, on the ground, blood in his throat, snarled: "You were always dogs, you Manchus."

Wei F'ong began to laugh.

"No bullet for you, old man! I am not angered. *Hai!* This will be better than a play, any day of the seven. Now, brothers, it comes to me that white men love comfort and fat living. Would this one be wandering alone? No. Therefore, not far away, you will find his caravan, loaded with delicious food. Go find it, brothers, and bring it to me. There will be a share for all."

NOT once had the Manchu taken his gun from Carson's side. A soldier had already grabbed the white man's rifle, and as a supreme joke, had substituted the whimpering infant. Head high, but heart cold, Carson was escorted toward the village. He was disgusted with himself, not because he hadn't avoided the village, but because he had done no good. He did not entirely understand the Manchu's position, save that the fellow was a Red, a renegade, and in some manner mixed up in fighting which had been too deadly for his taste. Why the Asiatic had come to this village Carson did not see, unless it was to find a place in which to rest securely.

He asked one question: "What good will a child's death be to you?"

Wei F'ong, laughing again, spoke the truth. "It will assure me a comfortable winter. Suppose the coolie, who is now dead, had escaped with the child. Suppose he had taken it away. Then there would be questions, and sooner or later a strong force of men would be sent here, and—well, I am a wise man. I take no chances. I am not called the Fox for nothing." He boasted: "I concealed what was in my mind, white man, and fooled you. You could not see the claws of the fox under his glove, eh? It should be a lesson to you!"

Carson said quietly: "It is, Wei F'ong!"

"But," the Manchu grinned, "it is a lesson from which you will not have opportunity to profit."

"Perhaps not."

THE Manchu was pleased; he became confidential as they walked gateward. "I hope you have good things in your packs. Especially tea! I am sick to death of army tea, tea shaved from bricks. I am very fond of excellent tea."

Red Carson said soberly: "I have very fine tea, Wei F'ong."

"Good!" He gave the white man a nudge with the gun-muzzle. "If it is really as fine as you say, I myself will do you a great favor. I will shoot you when the pain becomes bad. You see, I do not especially believe in torture, but these Manchus of mine are not of a high class, and there are certain things which they expect. And a good leader always thinks of the happiness of his men."

As they passed through the gate and under the wall, Carson saw that the villagers had put up some sort of defense. A dead man festered on the ground; there were a few ancient weapons lying where they had been dropped, an old Mauser, a Tower rifle, a sword, a few spears. . . . Here and there, as they advanced, were signs of looting, although it must have been controlled, for only one shop-front had been ripped away. On the ground before it were the remains of food, devoured on the spot. Wei F'ong's men had been hungry.

"We came a few days ago," the Manchu said placidly. "Everything has gone

as I hoped. The women have been divided. I myself will sleep where there are neither flies nor fleas, and—

"You see? There is my new palace."

The mission was a single-story building, white; there was a peach-tree in the compound. Some one had set out the flowers of home, a few straggling blooms which had managed to survive the summer. Two soldiers lounged at the gate; Wei F'ong greeted them with, "All is quiet, brothers?" And the men nodded without saluting. In the same gentle voice the leader said: "That is good. If anyone escapes, as the coolie did with the child, I will strip off your skin inch by inch. So!"

He turned to Carson. "I think of everything," he said. "I am not satisfied with locking doors; I make sure. That coolie worked away until he released a few bricks, and escaped in that manner with the child. Now I have men all around the mission, and it will not happen again. . . . Ah—enter my winter residence, my friend."

There was another soldier at the door, an ugly man with a bayonet, a misfit, lashed to the barrel of his gun; he stood aside as Wei F'ong inserted a key in the outer door.

For a moment, in the large room of the mission, Carson stood very straight; then he heard a terrible laugh, low and deep, which almost at once ran the scale and ended on a shrill, broken note. . . .

He heard some one, a man, say: "Saved! Saved! And our baby also! Oh, Mary, cannot you—"

The awful laugh again.

Carson said: "I'm sorry. They got me also."

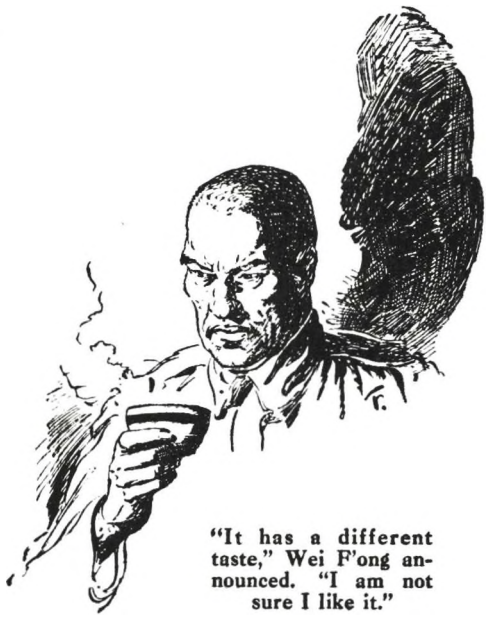
A third time the woman laughed; Wei F'ong kept her company, although he did not understand the English words.

"I will leave you here, white man with red hair," he chuckled. "They will tell you all about me. And for your part, hope that the tea will be to my taste. Otherwise I will let your torture finish without interruption."

Carson said: "What of my man, Khai D'ui? He is only a hired caravan leader."

"He called me a Manchu dog," snapped Wei F'ong. He stared about him briefly, and then said: "When your caravan arrives, I will sample the tea. This is a great honor for you. I hope you appreciate what the Fox does for you."

Carson handed the child to the missionary; he said tonelessly, in the proper form: "It is very poor tea, Wei F'ong—"



"It has a different taste," Wei F'ong announced. "I am not sure I like it."

"It had better be the finest I ever tasted! Or—"

"Few men have tasted anything like it," said Carson. . . .

The moment the Manchu left, the two white men in the room began talking at once. What had happened was easy to imagine. The Manchus, renegades, theoretically Reds, had apparently been caught between the fire of the Japanese and Chinese armies. They had escaped, had decided to find a quiet, remote village and spend the winter in it. The missionaries, when the brief fighting had begun, had remained in their quarters; but the horror they had seen could be understood by what had happened to the woman. She had raved herself stark mad. The other missionary's wife tried vainly to comfort her, as did her husband. The disappearance of the child—the one thing to which she had managed to hold—was the final blow. The idea had been for all of the beleaguered whites to follow the coolie who had carried the child, but the Manchus had come into the room from which the escape had been planned, and overpowered everyone except the escaping native.

Young Dr. Remson asked: "Do they intend to keep us here?"

Carson said: "No. That's too dangerous. They intend to finish us all."

The missionary glanced at his wife. "Better that—than this," he said. He

sighed. "You—you will do—whatever is possible?"

"The best I can."

The other missionary, Mr. Howe, a man in his sixties, said: "He calls himself the Fox, Mr. Carson. He's—a deadly man. An evil man."

Red said softly: "Agreed. He has one fault, however: he boasts too much. If—"

Remson said: "You think something can be done, sir?"

Shrugging, Carson said: "Maybe. If I don't mess it up."

"He is a fiend, sir!"

"Been kidding you, has he? That's his strong point. He likes to talk about it, too. Iron hand in the silken glove. Concealed claws of the fox. The gloved hand."

"Yes. He would build up our hopes, and then—it's been horrible! If my wife hadn't gone mad, he'd have—have—"

"Let's talk about something else," Carson suggested.

A HALF-HOUR passed; outside, they heard the tinkle of bells as the Manchus drove the caravan into the village; once there was a shot and a scream, and then Wei F'ong's voice demanding orderly behavior. A lamp burned in the mission room; Carson could see the few household treasures of these whites so far from home. The child was sleeping now, held by Mrs. Howe; Mrs. Remson sat on the floor, rocking back and forth. At the slightest sound, she would break into her weird laughter until her husband could stand no more, and head on arms, began to cry heartbrokenly. The infant woke, and began to whimper. . . .

It was like this when Wei F'ong stamped into the room, followed by his men. The Manchu rubbed his nose, jeered: "How ungrateful! Well, man with red hair, in which pack do I find this magnificent tea?"

"How much is needed? Enough for you alone, or—"

"Have I not said that these men are my brothers?" shrilled the Manchu. "What is mine is theirs."

"There will be enough for all," Carson told him. "You will find one pack marked like a fish on the side." He made an explanatory gesture with his finger, tracing a 9 in the air. "Bring that pack to me, and I will show you the tea of which I speak."

Wei F'ong repeated this as an order; he went on: "While we drink, we will be entertained. Oh, nothing involving death as yet—that comes later. We merely wish a little amusement."

'You just show us the gloved claws of the fox?"

Wei F'ong nodded. "And tomorrow you will perhaps see the claws. I—Good! Here is the pack. Come here and open it, and remember that my gun is at your head while you do it, in case you have a weapon in the pack!"

"There is no weapon." Carson quietly began removing specimen tins, closely akin to tea-packages prepared for shipment; he selected one of the tins, worked a moment to release the tightly-fastened lid, and then exposed the contents. . . .

"They are large leaves," Wei F'ong said, poking at the dried leaves. "This must indeed be tea fit for mandarins. Get hot water! Bowls! Let us taste of this beverage immediately!" He picked up the tin, and taking the gun from Carson's head, asked: "Should we use very little, or is this better if brewed southern-fashion? Wait!" He took a leaf and sniffed it. "I believe it will need a considerable quantity to bring out the flavor. Is that not right?"

"It is correct, Wei F'ong."

"You see? I know many things!" A soldier handed him a bowl; the Manchu put a thick wad of dry leaves at the bottom, poured in hot water, and stirred it with a chopstick. The color slowly changed to amber, to the color of tea. He gave it one sip, said: "It is indeed of different flavor, but as yet it is weak." Then a half-frightened, crafty look came into his eyes. "It may be poison," he snarled. "I see a light in your eyes, white man! Here! You drink the cup, and then I will know— No—not you!" His eyes roved the room; he said to the younger missionary: "Give this to your mad woman, and we will see what happens to her."

REMSON looked at the Manchu. He looked at Red Carson. He said uncertainly, in English: "If—"

Wei F'ong cried: "Hurry, fool, or I will give it to her myself!" Bowl in hand, he took several steps toward the crazed woman, and the mad light in her eyes grew until those eyes were intolerable to watch.

"Give it to me," Remson whispered. In English he said: "She shall not be hurt again."

Carson, watching silently, knew that the man was praying. He himself now was rigid, stone, in face of drama.

No trusting look, no recognition, came into the woman's eyes. She drank the proffered bowl, staring past her husband at the Manchu.

Wei F'ong lit a fat cigarette; he squatted down comfortably, watching. It was a full ten minutes before he said: "So! Nothing has happened. Now I am satisfied. Brothers, help yourselves to this mandarin tea. . . . Not so generously! Oh, well, it is just this once, and we have been without real tea for weeks. . . . *Hai!* Lo Seng! Is it necessary to fill your cup so full with it?"

"In order fully to enjoy the flavor," Carson suggested thoughtfully, "it is the habit of those who have taken it before to drink it swiftly. This tea brings a great price, Wei F'ong."

The Manchu gulped it down.

"IT has a different taste," he announced. "I am not sure if I like it. Perhaps it is because I am not used to it." He filled a second bowl, saying: "Did you see the foxy way I had the woman try it? If you had taken it, and the tea was poisoned, you would have escaped torture. I remember a man who was to have been beheaded, and who bribed his jailer—"

Suggestions as to the best way to proceed were made. Carson was delighted when Wei F'ong refused to have purple brandy brought for the men. A Manchu with a scar on his face had the idea most in favor: let the big red-haired one be tortured first, since he would undoubtedly last the longest. Gradually, later, torture could be applied to the rest, and they might all bet on which would die first. Wei F'ong agreed. Carson was stripped to the waist, and an iron bucket filled with glowing coals was carried into the room.

The hiss of a coal on flesh set the woman screaming with laughter. Twice she shrieked; the third time she half rose, and then fell face forward in her husband's arms. Carson, face glistening with sweat, nails digging into the palms of his hands, heard her husband cry in English: "Dead! She is *dead.*" A new and terrible strength seemed to flow into the tortured man. His muscles obeyed his brain. Pain no longer made him writhe; there was something almost uncanny about it. He lay on the floor, stock-still.

"He has had enough," Wei F'ong growled. Not once had he removed his eyes from Carson. "Leave him until morning, brothers." He added, a little in confusion: "I have an aching in my head. I am tired."

The Manchus padded out behind him, some of them grumbling that the excitement had made them dizzy. Carson, himself dizzied by pain, sat up when the room emptied; he said: "That place where the coolie escaped—where is it?"

"A guard is always there," Mr. Howe groaned. "We know that." In a trembling voice he asked: "Did you know what would happen to Mrs. Remson if she drank this—this tea? She is dead, sir. Dead."

Carson stood up. "Isn't it better so? I assure you she didn't realize what happened. Excitement, noise, heaven knows what, caused the quick action."

Dr. Remson looked up. He said clearly: "You are trying to help us. What more can we ask of you?"

Veined hands clasped tightly, Mrs. Howe said: "I'm glad. For Mary—for you. It was ordered. This young man was merely the instrument." Her voice dropped. "The Manchus drank it too," she whispered.

Carson said: "Yes. We've got a chance. I don't know how good. I—I tried to do what—seemed right."

THE room became very silent. Carson waited. Time passed slowly in this room with the dead woman, the child, the husband. What was Wei F'ong doing? How did he feel? And Khai D'ui, the courageous and defiant; was he living? A clock ticked in the room—*tick-tock, tick-tock.* . . . "My grandfather's clock"—mustn't think of the damn' song—*tick-tick-tick-tock.* . . . Couldn't the clock maintain its proper rhythm? . . . *If* they got away, what should be done with the dead woman? Couldn't leave her here. . . . *Tick-tock* —sounded like a lama's prayer-wheel, clacking, clacking. . . .

A bell in the temple sang out, long, slow, slumberous; into the echo came a high scream, like that of a stabbed horse, yet human.

Carson stiffened. Should he try, this moment, to get through the hole in the mission wall—and be potted like a rat?

The door was flung open while he was weighing the chances; Wei F'ong stumbled in, and Carson turned to meet him. The Manchu's eyeballs bulged. There was a bluish-green tinge to his entire face. He looked like a caricature of a water-demon.

"I sicken," he squealed.

"No," Carson said. "You die."

"You have—"

The white man said: "You gave a bowlful to the woman, Wei F'ong. She is dead. You were too busy watching me to observe what happened to her. And you forgot, O most wise, that all poison is not as fast as those you know!"

"Give me a medicine!"

Carson said softly: "I am to save you, after you tortured me? If I did, I would indeed be the fool you thought me. I—"

"Talk! Talk! I can hardly stand while you say words! *Hai-ee!* There is a gnawing in my shoulders, and my legs. . . . The pain in them! If—if you do not give me a medicine to save my life, I will have my men hack you in a thousand bits—"

Red held up his hand. "Listen!"

THE bell was silent now, the echo faded into the hills. For a moment Wei F'ong, ears dulled, heard nothing; then he was able to make out a sound as of men moaning in pain.

"You all drank," Carson reminded him. "Call your men, O Fox of the Manchus!"

"My heart! It beats like a drum."

Carson walked over to him, and quietly unbuckled the gun from Wei F'ong's belt; the Manchu hardly knew what was being done. "You will do as I say," Carson ordered, voice low. "First, have every man go to the temple, where they are to stay, and you with them, reciting whatever prayers Manchu dogs may know. Wait one hour, and then send one man—some fellow who was on guard, and who did not drink—along the river path. I will wait for him, and tell him what can be done to save your life. One thing more: where is Khai D'ui and my caravan?"

Wei F'ong whimpered that they were inside the walls, beyond the compound, and that Khai D'ui and the others were still alive.

"That is a good thing for you," Carson informed him. "Remember; if you do one thing save sit in quiet prayer, you may die instantly! If you send more than a single man after me, you will assuredly die. Now—get out!"

"But I need medicine now. I am weak. My bones have become powder. And there is pain in me everywhere."

"There is pain in my back also," Carson said flatly. "On your way to the temple, send me my leader and coolies."

"I—"

"Out!"

Wei F'ong wavered; he fell to his knees. Carson half kicked him through the door.

Mr. Howe said: "You speak hill-dialect so fast—"

"We'll be out of here in a few minutes," Carson explained curtly. "Get your things together. As little as you can. I've a heavily loaded caravan."

"And my wife?" choked Dr. Remson. "Must I leave her—"

"We'll manage," Carson said gently.

Khai D'ui, clothes covered with filth which had been thrown at him, came into the room quickly. There was blood on his face; his lips were bruised. He said, "The Manchu dog has his tail under his body. What magic have you performed, lord? He fell twice in his haste to reach me. Did you take him in your hands and break him apart, or—"

"He told me what to do," Carson said. "I kept my claws gloved. With his own words he brought his death. I would have never considered what was done, unless he had talked so much."

Howe said: "What do you mean?"

"He boasted about 'the glove of the fox.' I thought—foxglove! I'd collected a considerable amount of it—seed, root and leaf. The scientific name is digitalis. I didn't know how much'd be necessary to cause death." Suddenly Red Carson began to chuckle. He said: "I agreed to tell Wei F'ong how to save his life. I'll keep my word. He should stick his finger down his throat. Drink great quantities of strong tea. He'll think that's merely my form of humor—the sort of thing he would do himself. After drinking tea, he ought to have brandy as a stimulant. And when the Manchu he sends after us sees me, and returns with my message, Wei F'ong will—well, his fear and excited movements and anger will be the means of killing him. He'll die because he won't believe the truth."

KHAI D'UI remarked: "Is the talking ended, lord? Shall I have the packs gathered? I am sick to death of this village."

Carson looked at the old Mongol. "We march as soon as these people are ready," Carson agreed. "You and I—we march together again, old one."

Khai D'ui grinned. "We march," he repeated. He laughed. "It is good to be alive," he said. "You have done a thing this night, lord!"

REAL EXPERIENCES

Because most of us have had at least one adventure so exciting as to be of interest to everyone, we print each month five stories of real experience. (For details of this contest, see page 3.) First comes this grimly realistic story of bandit brutality.

Six Die in Vain

By FRANCIS IDE

IT happened many years ago; but to this day I can shut my eyes and see the whole thing as plainly as if I were standing on that very spot again: the grotesque, twisted bodies of the poor hanged miners; the ribald jests of the ragged, dirty outlaw crew as they watched the poor devils kick and jerk their last on the end of a rope; the wolfish cruelty and childish conceit of their leader's face; Leavett's calm, quiet courage—and the frightened thudding of my own heart. . . .

Discharged from the army in the early part of 1919, I found myself in Los Angeles with a few hundred dollars in my pocket and a pair of very restless feet in my shoes. I had tried several different jobs without being able to settle down to any of them. Then one day I ran into Carlos Munoz, a Mexican chap who had been in my class at prep school. He was up in the States on business. Sensing my discontent during the course of our conversation, he suggested that I visit him in the near future at his home in the city of Chihuahua. His subsequent splendid hospitality and the fine treatment afforded me by his compatriots have no part in this story.

During the first few weeks of my stay in Mexico I met Sam Leavett. Sam had been in and out of Mexico for a good many years in his capacity of mining engineer. At the time I met him, he was in charge of the San Pedro mine, located in the Sierras some twenty miles out of the city. Prices were low that year, and the mines and smelters were all shut down. Leavett was living at the mine and had six men (Mexicans) on the job doing the necessary maintenance work against the day when things would open up again. When he invited me to spend a few days with him at the mine, I gladly accepted.

Early the next week we climbed on our horses and headed out of town.

Sam was a natural-born yarn-spinner, and during our ride he amused me with accounts of various hair-raising experiences he had had during the revolutions. I was surprised to have him tell me that the hills were still alive with bandits, who were continually swooping down on outlying ranches, stealing everything that took their fancy and disappearing into the hills again. There had been such a raid just a short time before.

WE were in the midst of breakfast-getting next morning when we heard quite a commotion outside—voices talking shrilly in Spanish, some gruff laughter and the *clop-clop* of horses' hoofs. Sam raised his eyebrows questioningly at me, and we both stepped over to the door and looked out. Coming up the road about fifty yards away were Sam's six workmen, completely surrounded by about twenty horsemen. It didn't mean so much to me at that minute, but it did to Sam. He laid his hand on my arm.

"Listen, kid," he said as quietly as if he were asking me the time of day, "let me do the talking; and don't make any false moves."

We stood there as the crowd moved slowly toward us. It was the dirtiest, raggedest, toughest outfit I have ever

seen—before or since. They stopped in front of the house. One man dismounted and walked over to where we were standing. It was the first close look at his brutish, evil face that started me to thinking that we were in for some real trouble.

After the usual polite Mexican formalities were out of the way, Sam asked this *hombre* what he could do for him. It didn't take him long to find out. Our caller informed us that he had heard recently that there was a fortune in gold bullion cached at the mine, and that he and his men were there to get it in the name of liberty, and the living the world owed them. He hoped that we would listen to reason so that there would be no unpleasantness—*but!* That *but* implied in no uncertain fashion that he intended to get the gold—or else.

Sam told him very politely that he regretted the trouble the brave captain had been caused by an idle rumor, for there wasn't an ounce of gold of any description on the place.

The captain, still very polite, complimented Sam on his loyalty to his employers, but hinted that to die for any amount of gold was foolish—especially for an American, when it was common knowledge that all Americans were rich.

Sam went right on regretting, this time that the captain doubted his word, and suggested that he search the place and satisfy himself that he was on a wild-goose chase.

IT was at this point that the captain shed his cloak of politeness. He got red in the face; his ragged mustachios fairly bristled. He was hopping mad, and he meant business. He banged on the desk and informed us that he, Manuel Pascual Guzman, was sick and tired of arguing with a couple of bad-smelling gringos, and that he would give us five minutes to produce the gold, or he would hang every damned one of us. With this pleasant bit of information, he turned and stalked out of the door.

By that time I was not only worried: I was out-and-out scared. When Sam informed me that, so help him, there wasn't any gold on the place, I wasn't scared: I was petrified. Sam seemed to think that this lad was chucking a bluff, and that if we would sit tight, all would be well outside of losing everything we had there except our shirts—and maybe those. To resist, would have been foolish. We were too greatly outnumbered. So we just sat and waited for our pal to come back.

Back he came in a few minutes, with two of his men carrying rifles. Somewhere outside, the captain had found his lost politeness. He told us that he felt sure two such intelligent men had seen the futility of resisting an irresistible force, and were ready to dig up the goods.

SAM explained patiently and at great length that there really was no gold at the mine—that there never was any bullion at a mine, only ore. I was watching the captain's face as Sam talked, and his expression convinced me that he was going to be hard to get along with when it finally percolated through his thick head that his dream of riches was disappearing into thin air.

About this time his nibs cut Sam short with a good round Mexican oath and motioned for us to go outside. Sam shrugged his shoulders and started out, with me right behind him. In a minute we were one with the surrounded miners; and at a command from the captain, the whole detail started back down the road. Even then the tragic seriousness of the thing escaped me. It was so unreal, I felt as if I were watching some one else.

Sam started to talk to me, and one of the riders slashed him across the face with a quirt. I think the sight of the blood trickling down his white face was the thing that really brought home to me the realization of our predicament.

There was a narrow-gauge railroad that ran from the smelter to the mine. Our procession halted directly under a trestle. The boss man of the show talked to us all. He told us that unless some one told him in one little minute where the gold was hidden, he would start in and hang all eight of us to the trestle. The miners crowded around Sam and me, imploring us to give these *ratones* what they wanted—to save their lives. When Sam told them that he did not have what the bandits wanted, they turned to the captain and almost in a chorus implored him to believe Señor Leavett, whom they knew to be a truthful man, or at least not to prey on honest Mexicans who knew nothing of the gringo's business.

The captain raised his hand for silence, but the men were too excited to stop. He bellowed for them to hold their tongues, but still they chattered on. So quickly that I hardly knew what was happening, he drew his six-gun and shot one of the poor devils through the head. I admit, I nearly fainted on the spot. It

was a pretty stiff dose for a twenty-year-old kid to stomach. The sight of what had, only a moment before, been a living, breathing man lying with his dead face buried in the dust just about finished me.

The next thing I knew, Sam had leaped over and stood facing this murderous thug. What he called him was plenty. He invited him to fight it out man-to-man. He was so mad that tears were streaming down his face. Among other things, he told him that he was a personal friend of the President of the United States, and that if he dared to kill an American, our troops would chase him and catch him if it took forever. This seemed to make some impression on the captain, but it didn't last long. I think he believed he had Sam on the run, and that a little more pressure would wring the desired information from him.

He turned and gave a command to one of his men, who untied the rope from his saddle and scrambled up the bank onto the trestle. He tied the rope to a cross-tie and dropped the loop down. One of the other men led the riderless horse over under the rope. Two others grabbed one of the miners, dragged him over to the horse, pushed him up into the saddle and placed the rope around his neck.

The captain called to Sam. He reminded him that he had caused the death of one man, and that if he didn't speak up, there would be another one in a minute. Sam bowed his head and half raised his arms in a gesture of futility. The captain reached over and struck the horse on the rump with his quirt. There was a ghastly sound of strangling; the rope twanged like a guitar-string. Then I was violently sick.

WHAT occurred during the next few minutes was like a transported portion of hell. The coarse laughter of those fiends, the stolid courage of those innocents awaiting their turn to die, will remain with me to my dying day.

After each hanging the captain would call to Sam and give him one more chance to come through.

As they kicked the horse out from under the last Mexican, Sam turned to me. I'll never forget what he said:

"There isn't much I can say, son. I wouldn't have got you into this mess for the world." His turn was next—and he was thinking of me! He stuck out his hand and grasped mine. Some of the courage must have run out of that stanch heart of his into mine. I felt on the instant that even after he had gone and I was left alone, I would get through somehow without weakening too much.

I glanced up at those five grotesque figures swaying gently in the brilliant sunshine. When I looked back again, the man who was responsible for this unspeakable thing was standing in front of us again.

HE offered Sam his last chance to save his life. Sam told him he had killed these men for nothing—that the gold he sought was not there. He told him he would have given up all the gold in the world to have saved the life of one of those who had just died. I expected an instant order from him to hurry Sam on his way, but it didn't come. Sam's earnestness seemed to penetrate for the first time. The captain stood in deep thought for a while, then struck an heroic attitude.

He asked us to behold the future savior of Mexico. He told us that he was the head of a movement, already well developed, that would place the entire State of Chihuahua in his hand, and that in time he would be the ruler of all Mexico—a greater man even than his one-time chief Pancho Villa.

His delusion of grandeur was a marvel to behold. He implicitly believed every word he said. He seemed interested in the fact that Sam was a personal friend of President Wilson's. He questioned Sam closely about this, and Sam elaborated on the subject in detail.

I nearly dropped over when, after some more heavy thinking, the captain next spoke. He asked Sam if he would do something for him if he spared our lives. You can well imagine what the answer was. This thing he wanted Sam to do would have been good for a long loud laugh under less tragic circumstances. This insane leader of a ragged band of half-starved peons offered us our lives if Sam would give him his word of honor to go personally to President Wilson and try to sell him the idea of secretly backing a man-sized revolution with the captain in charge.

It is hard to believe that anybody could be so ignorant and childish as to have been in earnest about an impossible thing like that. I only know that Sam Leavett and I owe our lives to the crazy whim, the infantile twisted reasoning of this insane mind.

Ten Years in the

The Legion fights wherever there is rebellion against French authority. With Syria pacified, this American Legionary was transferred to Indo-China—then to fierce battling in Morocco.

THERE is a rule in the Legion that after two years of foreign service, you have to go back to Bel-Abbès. Foreign service is any place outside of Africa. My time was up. I was sent back to Damascus.

The city was a wreck. The Street called Straight was a mass of ruins. But the rebellion was over. We could walk the streets without any danger of being killed. No one was fighting except the Legionaries themselves.

We always fought among ourselves. Pay-day was the time for the worst battles. It came every fifteen days. Then, dazed by wine, men would fight over nothing. I have seen knives used, men knocked down and kicked almost to death. There was one exception. Let any of the other troops attack a Legionary, and we all joined in a common cause. But while I was in Damascus, waiting to return to Africa, I saw the worst fight of my ten years in the Legion.

It began over nothing. The place was a little shop. The back room was filled with members of the Legion, and native women. Two Germans were sitting at a table. I did not know them. Both were drunk. One was a brute of a man, the other was small. The little man asked the other for a cigarette. It was refused. The fight started.

Most fights in the Legion start like this—over nothing. I have known a man killed because he said it had been a cold day, when in truth it had been hot —have seen men cut to bits over a matter of five cents.

It was the little man who started this fight. He crashed the table to the floor. A knife appeared. In a second they were battling, knives out, kicking with their feet. And it was not the men who were injured. One of the women, rushing across the floor, brushed against the little man. His knife was descending at the time. It slashed open her throat, slid down her body. As she fell to the floor with a scream, we rushed out of the place.

I never heard what happened to the woman. The next morning, with thirteen others I was sent on a train to Beirut. Two years before, one hundred and twenty of us had left Marseilles. Fourteen were going back.

We sailed from Beirut on a passenger boat. They gave us the usual quarters —the hold of the ship. As we were returning after two years' service, our guns and equipment had been taken away; all we had was one blanket apiece. We slept on the iron bottom of the ship. The heat was terrific.

I had seventy-five francs when we reached Marseilles.

I stayed three days at Fort St. Jean. Then came the trip to Oran. At Bel-Abbès I was first given a rigid medical examination, to make certain that I had brought back no fever. After that I was around the barracks for two months. I heard a good many stories of the Riffs.

While I had been in Syria, the Legion in Africa had been fighting the Riffs. We all believed they were led by an ex-Legion sergeant named Klime. The story was that this man, on duty in a desert post, had for months smuggled rifles to the tribesmen. Then one night he deserted. He became a leader of the Riffs, married the daughter of one of their chiefs. Later he was captured and sentenced to life imprisonment.

I WAS supposed to have two months' rest. I was on fatigue duty; that is, all day long I lugged stones for buildings or whitewashed walls. I worked from six to eleven, and from one to five. True, I was excused from drill. But that only meant that every three days I stood guard for sixteen hours.

I began to think it over. If this was rest, I'd better be in active service. Lifting stones, I had developed a strained back. I went to the doctor. He did not even look at my back. But he did yell at me:

"Hell! You fought the Druses for two years. Now you complain of your back. Get out!"

I had a new "*copain.*" Edmund was Swiss, about twenty-five years of age.

Foreign Legion

By ORVAL CHENEVOETH

Quiet, not much of a talker. Like myself, he did not drink wine. His father was fairly well off.

His father was a cabinet-maker in Lucerne. So was Edmund. He had fallen in love with a woman, wanted to marry her. The family objected. He got in debt. One day he sold a machine which belonged to the shop, a machine that had not been paid for. Then, afraid, he rushed to France and joined the Legion.

Bel-Abbès is the main depot of the Legion. I thought the crowd was even worse than before. Edmund and I started to discuss what we should do. Get out of the Legion we could not—though my mother at that time had an idea: She wrote that she had taken the matter up with high officials in America. They said they could do nothing—that is, unless she could prove I was crazy. She wanted me to go before a doctor. I was to act as if I was insane. I was willing; in fact, when I thought it over, I decided I must be—else why had I joined the Legion?

But nothing ever came of the idea.

There was another thing I didn't like. Every three days I was standing guard at one of the two powder-houses of Bel-Abbès. These were outside our barracks. They contained all the ammunition for the troops. Sixteen hours at a stretch I guarded one of these places. Again and again I saw guards go inside with lighted cigarettes. I didn't like it. To be blown up did not look so good. So Edmund, who was also standing guard, and I decided to volunteer for foreign service.

I saw they wanted volunteers for Indo-China. I did not know where it was. But I, with Edmund, volunteered.

And now I did get a real medical examination and I was passed. The shots of vaccine were not pleasant. They gave us five: for typhoid, even for tuberculosis. We were sent to Algiers, and there took a boat to Indo-China—the *Quancy*, a freighter, over sixty years old. It took us fifty-eight days to reach China. And the boat was crowded. We had a battalion on board. There were all races, more French than usual.

Going through the Suez Canal they locked us in the hold for eighteen hours. It was hot, and we were crowded. The canal was narrow, and on previous trips Legionaries had jumped overboard and swum ashore. Once there, the English soldiers guarding the canal helped them to escape. There were even small boats which followed the ship; for five dollars they would pick up any soldier who leaped overboard.

You can't put a thousand men on a boat, keep them there for fifty-eight days, and not have trouble. We had plenty. Fights began to break out. One morning a sergeant was found stabbed. Some one took a shot at a corporal. Men fought over cigarettes, over wine.

To get out of the hold, I volunteered for duty in the kitchen. For days I peeled potatoes, washed plates. Thousands of plates there seemed to be. And though it was hot outside, well over a hundred, the kitchen was even hotter. The hotter it got, the oftener the chefs decided to have hot soup.

WE reached Indo-China at last, and landed at Saigon. It looked like Paris. There were cafés, with chairs on the sidewalks. But we only stayed there an hour. Marched to a train, we were sent at once to the province of Tongkin. It took a day and a night to reach our destination.

We had been sent to a fort, two miles from Hai Phong. To my surprise, it was not as hot as I expected. Our uniforms, however, were different. We were issued a helmet of cork, and heavy. And our clothes were thin.

Our hours of work were different. We rose at four in the morning, drilled until eight. Then from eight until four in the afternoon we were ordered to remain in the barracks. On our arrival we were made to stand in line while a captain told us what the sun would do. If a member of the Legion was discovered with his helmet off, he was punished. Five minutes without your helmet, and you were sunstruck. The treatment is a

deep gash at the back of your neck. If not done at once, it means death.

After three days we were sent to Amin. You will never find this town on the map. It was small and many miles in the interior. We took a train for twenty-four hours. Then for three days we marched, six hundred of us. The heat was terrific. The country was flat, covered with thick jungle. Our new quarters were good—large stone barracks. For the first time in my service in the Legion we had servants. They were Chinese. Maybe that is wrong. They might have been Annamese. But they looked Chinese to us. They cleaned our rooms, did the usual detail we had always done. It seemed odd.

Another thing seemed funny. We were told that we would be allowed to get married—to native women, for twenty-four months. It was a left-handed marriage. At the end of twenty-four months we would be shipped out of the country. Many accepted the privilege.

I BEGAN to realize what was the greatest evil in Indo-China: dope—opium and cocaine. Both were sold freely. These drugs got many members of my company.

I remember one, an American, who told me he was from Ohio—a big chap, with a smile. The dope got him.

I tried it once. The taste of the opium was sweet. The smell was worse. Lying back on a couch, I smoked pipe after pipe. You only take at the most three puffs from a pipe. Then I passed out. My dreams were far from good. Tigers were pursuing me. All night long they chased me. When I woke, I was sick. I never tried the drug again.

The other American, however, seemed to like it. He started with opium, and ended by sniffing cocaine. Then he began to go to pieces. He became thin and yellow. At last they sent him back to Africa. He was raving when they took him on the boat. Months later I heard that he had died three weeks after getting back to Bel-Abbès.

While I was in Amin another American, called Sullivan, not only deserted, but managed to get away. That was a miracle. I met him once or twice, though he was not in my company. An American battleship visited the coast. Some of the sailors came to our village. Why, I do not know. Sullivan deserted; the sailors aided him. It was said that he was the only person who ever deserted in Indo-China, and got away.

After some weeks in Amin my company was sent into the hills to collect the taxes. When after eleven days of marching I saw the little cane houses of the natives, I wondered how they could pay a tax. Evidently our officers thought they could. Our procedure was simple. If they refused to pay the tax, we burnt the village.

Nothing really happened. We were simply serving as police. True, we marched miles and miles. But the Annamese never put up a fight. They were terribly poor; we felt sorry for them.

Most of the time my company was on expeditions to the hills. The work was easy. Nothing exciting ever happened—that is, the people didn't bother us. The tigers did, however.

It was on one of these tax-collecting trips that a soldier had an experience with a tiger. The jungles are filled with the beasts. This man was attacked in the early morning. The beast leaped on his back. The soldier happened to be carrying his blanket roll; that saved him, for the tiger's claws became entangled in the cloth. The soldier managed to kill him with his bayonet. Others were not so fortunate. Back from the coast were great jungles. Often as we were standing guard we would hear the beasts in the bamboo thickets. At least a half dozen Legionaries, who were on guard duty, were overpowered by tigers which crept up on them. In three cases we knew the men had been carried away into the jungles—to be eaten, without doubt. In others the men were killed, but after playing with them as a cat does a mouse, the tigers left them.

THE oddest thing I saw in French Indo-China were the tattooed men of the Tai tribes. From shortly above their waists, to below their knees, they have pants tattooed on their bodies. It is done with blue ink. Around their bodies the tattooing looks like a great sash. And there are lions, scores of them, tattooed into their skin. This is to give the man the courage of the lion.

Most of my twenty-four months were spent out in the hills. Nothing happened to me. Many of the company died. Some were killed by dope. Others could not stand the heat, the terrific shock of the bright sun. But I was not sick for a moment. I was thinking, however, of how I could get out of the Legion.

I had no money. When I returned to Africa, my time would be up. The French

authorities would send me to France if I did not reënlist. I would be given an old suit, and five francs. Once in France, I would be allowed forty-eight hours to get out of the country. Having no money, I knew when I got back to Bel-Abbès I would have to reënlist.

The two years being up, what was left of the seven hundred who had come to China started back for Africa. There were four hundred of us. Three hundred had died. At least half that number on the ship were crazed by opium. As the men ran out of their supply of the drug, they became crazed. Three managed to reach the deck and leap into the sea. One ran amuck. With a knife in his hand he rushed into a group of soldiers and stabbed twenty before he was overpowered.

It was not a pleasant trip. It took forty-two days. When these ended, we were back in Africa. A few hours after landing we were once more in the barracks at Bel-Abbès. There I reënlisted. There was nothing else I could do. To get out was impossible. I enlisted for another five years.

AFTER I had reënlisted I discovered I was going to Morocco. We were to be sent to the Atlas Mountains. The French were engaged in a desperate conflict with the tribesmen called the Ksurs. The lieutenant mentioned them.

"You will see some real fighting—fighting beside which your two years in Syria were a picnic. Life will not be so monotonous."

How right that lieutenant was! But he was almost the first one to be killed after we reached the Atlas Mountains.

From Oran we took a train to Fez. Edmund and I had been assigned to the Third Regiment. Morocco is a better country than Algeria. Fez was the finest town I was in, a city of about a hundred thousand people. There were white-walled houses, tiled domes and thin towers of the mosques. Flowers and trees were everywhere. Orange groves and dark green olive groves, mostly.

We had fine barracks here. Stone, and clean. For a few weeks we drilled, and secured new outfits. The Legion in Morocco were all dressed in old American uniforms. No doubt the French had bought them after the World War. But our overcoats were the same thick cloth we had always had, with the same flaps to button around our waists when we wore them on the march.

I stayed there for a few weeks, then was sent with a detail to Casablanca, a seaport town on the Atlantic. It is a show town. In a few years after conquering it the French had rebuilt it. It has wide paved streets, telephone service, modern lighting and sanitation. There were great big hotels, many large theaters. It was a glittering modern city.

I stayed in Casablanca three days, then went back to Fez. My company, a machine-gun one, was ordered to a little post called, I think, Timied. Many of these isolated posts have no names, save what the soldiers gave them.

WE marched most of the way, over five hundred miles. We would start our marches around four o'clock in the morning, swing along at about three and a half miles an hour. At noon it was impossible to march. It was too hot. So we rested until four in the afternoon. Then we started out again. The food and supplies were carried on mules.

The Atlas Mountains cut Morocco in two. On the side that goes down to the Atlantic, you have grass, trees and streams. On the other side you have desert. The mountains themselves are very high, always covered with snow. There are only two places you can cross them. Their sides are filled with ravines; they have no roads at all.

The tribes were fighting all the time. It wasn't like the warfare against the Druses. Here it was all sniping, and sudden night attacks. They had a habit of greasing their bodies, then creeping up on a sentry in the dark and cutting his throat. The soldier would be found dead in the morning, his gun gone. It was the guns they were after.

The little post where we were sent was on the top of a hill.

These mountain forts are all alike, though they may be different in size and number of men inside. They are built of stones and mud. All have four little towers and a flat roof. The Legion built most of them, sleeping in tents while doing it, carrying stones and earth all day, fighting most of the night.

We stayed here only three days. The occupants of the fort filled us up with stories of the fighting men of the tribes. We were shown a knife taken the evening before; a tribesman had tried to slip up on the sentinel, and had been discovered. They shot him at once.

The knife was a wicked weapon. It had a long curved blade, and was sharp

as a razor. It was said the tribesmen could cut off a head with one blow of the knife. They preferred knives to guns.

It was at this fort we captured a spy.

There were many deserters out in the hills. Members of the Legion slipped out of the forts by night and joined the tribes. By and by they got to be chiefs, and married native women. And there were about eight thousand of the native troops who had deserted. The man who came into the fort was one of these. Some one recognized him. He was tied to a cannon-wheel. One shot ended him.

The next post was twenty-eight miles farther in the mountains, as lonesome a place as I ever saw. Snow fell most of the nights. There was no fighting, though we did have one man killed. He was on a fixed post—that is, for two hours he was not allowed to move. We heard a shot—then silence. He had been killed. His gun was gone.

These fixed posts were not pleasant. Every fifteen minutes an officer would come and ask if there was anything to report. You would have at your feet two machine-guns. They were crossed over each other. You stood there, staring, listening. It would be dark, so black you could not see your hand a foot away. And you were listening, waiting for a sound, never knowing when a tribesman was creeping up on you. I have been asked if I was ever afraid. I certainly was—most of the time.

Many a Legionary went *"caduc"*—broke under the long marches, the tension of guard duty in the mountain forest. We had two typical cases in our battalion. One was an American. He simply went crazy. Tried to shoot up the fort. I don't like to give his name. His family was well-known in his home city. An Englishman shot off two fingers. He thought they would kick him out of the army. They did. But he got two years at hard labor first.

IT was cold in our mountain fort. Winter had come. I stood guard duty at a corner of the fort. The wall had fallen a few days before, due to a heavy snowstorm. There was a gap at least ten feet across. Through it snow had drifted, waist-deep. The wind howled over the top of the mountain in inky darkness. I almost froze. But if I had moved even five feet, and been discovered, death was the penalty.

And every fifteen minutes Lieutenant Fritz came to ask:

"Any report?"

"Non, Lieutenant."

Then came a time around three, when his words changed:

"You must be cold. Wait, I will bring you something that will fix you up."

Fifteen minutes passed. When he returned, he had a thermos bottle. It was filled with hot coffee, laced strongly with rum. I drank it. To this day I think of his kindly action—something no other officer ever did for me.

Most of the time at this post we were cutting wood. A mile below us were forests. Every day we went down among the trees and sawed and chopped them down, then dragged them to the post. But before we became snowed in, we were relieved by another company.

NOW we went to Taza, not far from Fez. From this town, only a few months before, two nieces of the Governor-General of Morocco had been kidnaped. A ransom of a million francs was demanded. The authorities were told that if soldiers were sent to bring back the children, the girls would be killed. A young lieutenant volunteered to take the ransom money and go into the mountains and bring back the girls. No one thought he would get back. No one believed the tribesmen would keep their word; but they did. The lieutenant received the Croix de Guerre.

We stayed in Taza two weeks. Then we were ordered to an outpost called Noure, a big post. There were four companies of us there. The place was in the mountains, and it snowed every day. There was not a night that we weren't called out, and rushed to the walls. There would be a shot from out the darkness; we would reply; then would come silence. A dozen times a night this was repeated. The walls were low, and most of us slept in tents. It was a machine-gun company, with one gun for every six men. One night we were ordered to the walls. We took our places, then noticed there were only five of us instead of six. When we went back to the tent, we found our sixth man. He was dead. His gun had been taken. His head was almost separated from his body. How his assailant got into the post we never discovered.

But we did not stay in this post long. We were ordered farther into the mountains, to Post Fez Fez. There were no roads here. Even the trails were bad.

The new post was on top of a hill. About seven miles away, was another

Legion post. It could be plainly seen from the platform where we stood guard. The two lieutenants who commanded the lonely forts were friends. Every few days one would take a number of soldiers and march over to the other's post.

And one day the commander in charge of Post Fez Fez ran into trouble. He was on his way back to his own post. It was late in the afternoon. With him were about ninety men. As they came through a ravine, they were suddenly attacked by almost two thousand tribesmen. All but five were killed. One sergeant was taken alive. The chief of the tribes saw the decorations on the sergeant's arm and chest and thought he was a high officer. He was captured and kept alive for three days. At the end of that time the chief discovered the sergeant was not an officer and ordered him killed. His head was cut off.

But it was this massacre which brought about one of the most heroic deeds I ever knew of. On the platform at Post Fez Fez had been a sergeant. He could see the progress of the returning soldiers, see the attack. Though he had no authority to do it, he put a soldier at his post on the platform, and with a machine-gun under his arm rushed to the ravine over a mile away. Alone, with no one to aid him, he brought back alive four members of his company. They were the only ones saved. For his deed he was given the Legion of Honor and made a lieutenant.

POST FEZ FEZ was not a good post. After we arrived, it was constantly under fire. Because it was winter, the passes were filled with snow. It was difficult to receive supplies.

Most people think of Morocco as being warm. They should be out in the Atlas Mountains during the winter. It grew colder day by day. There were many nights when I stood guard at twenty below zero. Outside the post the snow would be five feet deep. You might think on such nights there was little to fear from the tribesmen; but the wilder the night, the more certain we were of an attack.

These were strange attacks. Never did they try to storm the place. Their method would be something like this: One night I was on guard on the north side, on the roof of the building. It was a flat roof, with a low wall around it. Suddenly out of the darkness came a bright flash, then the sound of a gun. I called out that it was an attack. *"Aux armes!"* yelled the corporal. All rushed to their stations. Then we waited.

Nothing happened for a while. Then from the darkness came a series of rifle-shots. We could hear the bullets spatter against the walls.

Though we waited, nothing else happened. There was no attack. Yet while they were holding our attention at the north, several tribesmen had crept up on the other side of our fort. We found two of our men killed, their guns gone. Their throats were cut.

Every night we had to guard against this sort of warfare. Despite all our efforts, before the winter ended we had four killed and twenty wounded. Save for the two whose throats were cut, all the injuries came from sniping.

ONE day in late winter we were startled to see a company of the Legion struggling through the snow. Our relief had come. We set out that very day. Six hundred miles of marching, through snow, down mountain passes, yet glad to go. At last the snow vanished, the air became warm. One day we reached Meknès, a big town with four barracks. It also had a slave-market.

It was the first I had ever seen. One could go through the market and not know what was going on, yet women were being sold there—young girls, mostly sold by their fathers. Some of them were not bad-looking. The good-looking ones are about fourteen. In Morocco a native woman is old at twenty. The prices were not high—from forty to four hundred francs. Sometimes a man sold his wife.

One of the lieutenants in the tirailleurs bought a slave girl. I never before heard of any white man doing this. But he did. She was a beautiful Berber girl, about fifteen, of what tribe I do not know. Slim she was, with beautiful hair and eyes. The lieutenant bought her for four hundred and fifty francs. And what do you think he did? He sent her to his parents in Paris to be educated. A year later he went to Paris and married her. I saw her after they returned to Meknès. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

Meknès was not only a base camp; it was the base hospital camp for the Third Regiment.

Many in my company were put in the hospital to act as orderlies. There were many wounded. Many had been sent back from the mountains with se-

vere cases of frostbite; and many died. These were buried in the usual way, without a chaplain. There are no chaplains, no priests with the Legion. The battalion commander spoke a few words. . . .

Then, just as spring came, and everything began to be green, I received the softest assignment of my entire Legion career. I was ordered to go to Kinefria, to report to the 31st section of Pioneers. When I started I did not know for just what I had been detailed. The Pioneers were the skilled workers. They might build roads, bridges, barracks, houses, anything. All I had built in the Legion had been walls every night, and help to build the few forts where we had been sent. At Kinefria I found out I was to be a carpenter.

It was not a bad detail. Every few days I stood guard. The rest of the time I built doors, windows and cabinets. I never discovered where the doors or cabinets went. Certainly they were not used in the little mud-house town. The work was not hard, and I liked it.

But there was plenty of fighting for the others that spring and summer. We were in an isolated place, but rumors came to us. The French were having their troubles. But for eleven months I was out of it. I even gained in weight —two pounds. In the Legion, that is considered a miracle. Then at the beginning of the next year I was ordered back to my company—to Ouezzane.

Ouezzane was northwest of Fez. It is a railroad center, also a great artillery camp. I knew hardly anyone in my company when I rejoined it. They had been out in the hills, and been badly cut up. Edmund was there, still uninjured. For a few weeks we unloaded *matériel* from the trains, assembled guns. Then one night the corporal spoke:

"Well, your play is over. You are going into the hills. This time it will be real warfare!"

We were not pleased. It was winter. The snow would be deep upon the mountains. The nights would be cold. But we started next day. In about three weeks I took part in the most desperate battle of my life. Out of two hundred and thirty in my company, only ten of us managed to escape! And it was in this battle I heard a lieutenant issue a command that is rarely given in the Legion: *"Every man for himself!"*

Mr. Chenevoeth describes the most desperate of his battles in the concluding installment—in our forthcoming October issue.

How it feels to be held as hostage by a robber—and to bring about his capture.

THIS all happened about five years ago when I was cashier and part-owner of a bank in a little village about fifteen miles from Colfax, in northern California. My partner was in the south on a vacation, and I was alone.

When I had finished breakfast on this particular morning, I turned away from the table and began to sharpen a pencil. My wife called to me from the kitchen to look at something; and as I turned, my knife slipped and cut deep into the flesh. My finger bled profusely for a while, and when I looked at the size of the bandage my wife had arranged, I said:

"Lucky I didn't cut the finger of my writing hand."

"Nothing about it was *lucky*. You sharpen a pencil like a schoolboy."

I've had a hunch for some years that my wife secretly likes the idea of my acting like a schoolboy; so I didn't argue the point any further, but kissed her and went down the street to the bank.

There were several men from one of the near-by lumber-camps waiting to get their checks cashed; but after that no one came in for about half an hour. I went about the business of opening windows, getting ledgers out of the vault, arranging cash in the cage, and so forth.

Then I noticed a long gray roadster stop in front of the bank. A young chap dressed in a dark blue suit and wearing a slouch hat came hurriedly into the bank.

"Good morning, sir," he smiled pleasantly. "I wonder if I could interest you—" While he was saying this last, he looked out into the street. There was no one else in sight. Then he turned to me again and pushed forward the lower right pocket of his coat. "I've got something here besides my finger. Put 'em up, brother! Yeah—this is a hold-up," he added, seeing my surprise. "Now turn around and walk into the vault. One false move, and you'll be sorry for it."

I'll confess I was dumfounded. I had never believed that anyone would be crazy enough to hold up our little bank. We kept very little cash on hand, rarely

Banker's Luck

By VICTOR STANDING

more than fifteen hundred dollars. And the only road out of the place led to Colfax. To catch a thief in that vicinity seemed child's play.

"You'll never be able to get away with this, man," I said to the fellow. "The sheriff will have you before you're five miles out of town."

"Think so?" His eyes grinned at me as he said it. "Well, you let me worry about that. Come on—into the vault."

After I had turned around, he jumped over the railing and followed me into the vault. There seemed nothing to do but gather up the money and give it to him. I put it all in a paper bag he handed me. Then he ordered me to get my hat and walk out of the bank and get into his car.

"You see, you're going to drive me to Colfax," he explained.

I clutched my hat so forcibly that my finger began to bleed again. I was doing a lot of thinking, but I didn't say a word as we walked out of the bank. I hesitated a moment when I reached the car, but felt a prod from the rear, and so got in and slipped over into the driver's seat. As I put my hands on the wheel, I noticed the bandage on my finger was very red and very wet.

"Hurry up—get started," the fellow urged, a bit nervously. But there was no mistaking the authority of his revolver. He now held it under his left arm, pointing straight at me.

HANDLING the wheel made my finger bleed still more. So I rested my hand on the side of the car except when I had to shift gears at a crossing. When I came to the block where we lived, I saw my wife out in the yard watering the lawn, and I noticed that she was facing the street. I slowed up as much as I dared. I did not look at her, but I wiped the side of my face with my bloody finger and then slipped my hand over the side and smeared my blood on the side of the car; it must surely attract her attention if she was looking toward us at all.

In my excitement I almost lost control of the car for a moment. My companion uttered an oath.

"Step on it! Open her up! What do you think this is, a funeral? Come on, there—get going." He gave me a prod with the gun.

By this time we had passed the last of the houses and were in open country. I tried not to think of what would happen to me if my wife had not noticed me.

Speeding, it didn't take us long to reach a service station; we had covered eight of the fifteen miles. I didn't know what else to do, so I kept on driving. But we hadn't gone much further when an automobile coming toward us turned in the road and stopped lengthwise across the highway. I saw four men in it, and as I drew closer, I noticed the two men in the back seat had pistols leveled at us. I stopped the car. My bandit put his gun in his pocket, and out of the corner of his mouth, snapped at me: "Keep your trap shut!"

The men ordered us to get out of the car. They searched us and found the bandit's gun. As soon as I saw he was unarmed, I told my story to the men, who proved to be deputies from Colfax.

"Yes, your wife telephoned us a bit ago and said she knew something terrible had happened to you, and that she knew you'd not act the way you were acting as you passed the house if you had been in your right mind." We all laughed except the young stranger. He gave us a demonstration of expert cursing.

They took him into custody, and one of the deputies was climbing in to drive me home in the gray roadster when suddenly the sound of a siren told us the sheriff from our town was coming.

My wife was with him. She jumped out of the car and ran to me.

"Oh, Vic, are you all right? Here, let me look at you."

I assured her that I was all right.

"My, wasn't it lucky that you cut your finger this morning!"

I could only stare at her. But I didn't say anything just then about luck.

The Warning

They started out mounted on elephants to shoot tiger. Failing to find "Stripes," Mr. Galloway shot a deer—but it was still another beast that was dangerous.

By
F. W. GALLOWAY

"SOMETHING awful is going to happen," said the placid Mrs. Sykes. I gazed at her in amazement: The words fell like a bomb into the quiet peace of the breakfast-table.

"You're not feeling ill, old girl? What's it all about?" asked Sykes.

Mrs. Sykes gave no immediate answer, and my wonder increased.

From the veranda of the forest bungalow there sounded the voice of the havildar assembling the beaters. It was the last day of the shoot, and we were making a final attempt to round up a tiger. His mate had fallen early in the week, and her skin was pegged out drying in the sun. After many years in India I was hoping to secure my first tiger, and the omens were favorable. All the previous day Sykes and I had been stalking cheetil in the glades of the forest, and had returned home late to find that news of a kill had come in, and that the intrepid Mrs. Sykes had gone out alone to sit up. That took nerve, and it was a quality that the lady had in rich measure. Now she sat with a curiously white face as if stricken by a sudden illness. Nothing had occurred to cause the slightest alarm, and her remark had come in the midst of general conversation.

"I cannot explain, but I had a sensation of evil. I spoke on the impulse of the moment."

"That is the Highland ancestry behind you, lady; but if your second sight is to be of any use, you will have to amplify the warning."

"I simply can say nothing at all, except it was some danger from above."

"Doesn't sound like a charging tiger, and that's the worst that can happen," mused Sykes.

"Might be a falling tree, but I've never known one to come down at this time of year," I said.

"You stay here," said Sykes, "and I don't see that anything can go amiss."

"I shall go out as usual," asserted the stanch lady.

"Suppose we give it up altogether," I suggested—but I hoped my idea would not carry. It did not; and half an hour later the procession set out. . . .

It was in the north of Bahraich on the borders of Nepal, and the jungle ran down unbroken from the outer fringes of the Himalayas. In the clear morning air the giant hills stood out, and beyond them in majesty towered the inner range, gleaming white against a blue sky. We threaded along a trail with our two elephants leading, and the beaters strung out in a long tail behind. They were armed with spears and axes, and were sturdy in spirit if weak from habitual malaria. They were chattering like monkeys, hopeful of putting up the tiger and securing the usual reward. As we drew nearer to the locality of the first beat, word was passed along the line for silence, and thereafter only the soft padding of feet broke the silence, with an occasional creak of the elephants' girths. I remember marveling that the pattering of human feet made more noise than the great beasts.

The time came when the beaters swung off on another track and we waved encouragement to the shikari. There were deer in that beat; there were pig, and many of them; numerous peafowl treading on dry leaves caused a quickening of anticipation. But when the beaters closed in, there was nothing to report. The tiger had not lain up near the kill.

We sat down to luncheon near a forest pool, and the beaters crowded round the stagnant water. The inevitable hookah was passed round, and a handful of cigarettes circulated from man to man. Each took a few puffs, grinned, and gave the cigarette to his neighbor. In a group apart there sat in conclave the shikari, his trusted associates and the havildar, discussing the next move. Presently the havildar came forward with the recommendations: Two more beats would be tried, on the off chance that the tiger would be lying up near a stream. But there was too much water about to render any certainty of locating him.

Again we headed along a jungle trail. Again the beat finished blank; so before the last beat started, we agreed to fire at any panther or good stag that might show toward the close of operations.

I was posted up a tree on the right of the line, and Mrs. Sykes was in the center a short way off. From my position I could see her and her protecting havildar.

The sound of the beat drew near, and I noted a stag with a fair head break cover, and come my way. I tried a galloping shot, and the stag stumbled, but recovered and went on past me. Listening intently, I heard the crashing in the jungle slow down, and a thud sounded. Marking down the direction carefully, I waited a little longer, and as the first beater showed through the trees, slid down the tree and made off to retrieve the stag. Why I followed this unusual course I do not know. The obvious thing was to remain, and let the army of beaters find it in due course.

THE progress of a deer through the jungle and that of a human are somewhat different. A stag lays his horns along his back and crashes through cover that to a man is either impracticable or impossible. It was some little time before I reached the spot where I was certain the animal lay. At last I saw it, lying close to the foot of a tree at the edge of a natural glade. I went forward and was about to stoop down, when from immediately behind me sounded the roar of a gun; and as I whirled round, there was a shrill scream. Mrs. Sykes had seen me leave the tree, and all unsuspected by me had followed with the havildar by another route.

As I gazed at her in bewilderment, she fired the second barrel of her shotgun over my head, and I fled madly into the clearing. As I went, I heard a long slither through the branches, but when I swung round, there was nothing except an excited havildar and a more excited lady, who was feverishly reloading.

I came to a hasty conclusion that she was mad, and left it to the havildar at her shoulder to disarm her. In fact, I yelled instructions to him to do so, and slid behind a tree. But he merely urged the lady back and made no attempt to take the gun. Presently she fired both barrels again; and coming to the conclusion that she had not fired at me in the first place, I ran up.

Before I reached her, Sykes came bursting through the cover like a rogue elephant, dropped his rifle and seized her gun. He then started to open fire, and I dodged behind a tree once more. The orgy of firing was punctuated with screams, in the midst of which the massive havildar laid hold of Mrs. Sykes' arm and half carried her into the open.

I could see nothing of what Sykes was firing at in the undergrowth, nor could I imagine what it was. The continued firing had brought up the beaters, who were equally puzzled. The whole affair appeared to be a lunatic proceeding which must be stopped somehow. I closed in on Sykes; as I reached him, he shouted, "Got the brute!" and ceased fire.

The mystery was then explained. Sykes took a few steps forward and pointed at something that seemed to stretch into eternity. It was an enormous python, less the head, which he had completely blown off. When dragged out by the beaters, there was still twenty-three feet of the horror left.

That was the danger from above. The python had been coming down the tree to the fallen stag. Intent on scanning the ground, I had not seen it; but Mrs. Sykes had noticed the reptile just over my head, and fired at once. It had slithered to earth where I stood. The morning incident had been completely forgotten except by my hostess, on whom it had made a deep impression. She had not seen what I fired at, but on noticing me come down the tree ladder, had at once followed, against the protest of the havildar. What would have happened if she had not taken a prompt hand in the business is open to conjecture.

A Son of the

"Catch 'Em Alive Jack" takes Theodore Roosevelt on a wild wolf-hunt.

I WAS living on my homestead, situated near Cross Roads, fourteen miles northwest of the town of Frederick, when President Roosevelt and his party arrived in Oklahoma for the famous wolf-hunt. Mrs. Abernathy and the five children remained at home while I mounted Sam Bass and with the wolf dogs, six in number, was off for Frederick.

I had engaged George Nichols of Frederick to aid me in caring for the trained dogs. A cage was placed on an Indian hack to be used in hauling the dogs to the hunting-grounds, for every effort was made to conserve the strength of the dogs till time to enter the chase. Nichols was an experienced wolf-chaser.

I arrived at Frederick about noon on April 5th, to be the star performer on a six-day hunt—the most novel event ever staged in honor of a President. Frederick was a town of about two thousand population, in 1905, and was at the edge of Comanche County. The town was just six miles west of the boundary of the Big Pasture reserve, containing four hundred and eighty thousand acres. Having been requested by the President to arrange for the chase, I had already selected a site for the hunting camp at a point located eighteen miles east of Frederick, on Deep Red Creek. The grounds were picturesque. The Deep Red Valley had been noted for years as being in a district where wolves, deer and an occasional bear could be found.

Soldiers from Fort Sill were on duty, patrolling the border of the Big Pasture Reserve. This was done to halt crowds of curious spectators who might interfere with the President's entertainment. Newspaper men were not included in the party; nor were photographers either, though two members of the President's party carried cameras. Reports of the hunt were furnished the papers, and a large number of photos were taken during the event.

President Roosevelt arrived in Frederick, about two o'clock on the afternoon of April 5, 1905. A large crowd of citizens had gathered in a grandstand that had been erected especially for the occasion. A two-seated carriage was waiting, and the President was whisked off to the grandstand two blocks away. I had several wagons at the train and supervised unloading the baggage and hunting equipment for the President's camp.

By the time I mounted my horse and rode to the grandstand, the President was making his speech. I rode up toward the grandstand on Sam Bass, and the crowd gave way, affording an opening. I rolled out of the saddle, dropping the bridle reins on the ground. Climbing the grandstand steps, I made my way to a point within about five feet of the President. Colonel Lyon, seeing me, interrupted the President in his speech, exclaiming:

"Here comes the wolf-catcher, Mr. President!"

President Roosevelt, turning to me, said:

"You look like a man who could catch a wolf. I want to congratulate you, for I know you are going to do what Colonel Lyon says you can do!"

President Roosevelt then gave me a hearty handshake, and the entire throng cheered. The President then resumed his address. An hour later we were off to the wolf grounds. Everything was in readiness for the party when the camp was reached that night. Dining-car waiters and cooks from the President's train furnished the meals at the camp. A long table was spread in the dining-tent.

About fifteen tents were in the camp. A street was laid off, the President's tent

Frontier

By JOHN ABERNATHY

being on one side adjoining a tent occupied by myself and C. B. McHugh, who was a banker at Frederick. In the President's tent, he and Dr. Alexander Lambert slept. Across the street from these two tents, the others in the party slept, on single army cots, two men to each tent.

Dinner was served about seven P. M. Following the meal, a big wood fire was built between the two groups of tents in the street. All members of the party occupied seats around the fire. About a wagon-load of wood was used that night and each succeeding night during the hunt. The nights in April of that year were cold.

President Roosevelt led off with the story-telling the first night. He told of his early day life as a cowboy and ranchman in the wilds of North Dakota. He told of how he went West in the early days in order to regain his health. It was during the time spent on the frontier of the old West, he said, that he became infatuated with sports, and gained a wholesome respect for Western life.

I was amazed at the knowledge the President possessed relative to wild animals, snakes and even the smallest of reptiles and insects. . . .

About ten-thirty everyone went to bed.

HORSES were fed and saddled, ready for us as soon as breakfast was over.

President Roosevelt and all the rest mounted their horses, riding south of the camp about a mile and a half, when we sighted a coyote. There were about twelve riders in this race. We had not been racing more than ten minutes till this coyote jumped into Little Red—into water about four feet deep. A wolf can fight better in water than on land, and seems to have an advantage over dogs.

I was glad the first event was staged in water, in order that the President could see how a wolf could conquer a dog. This wolf cut several of the dogs very badly and came near drowning one of them. The President rode within twenty feet of the wolf and dogs and was watching every move made, and I was standing at the edge of the water watching the fight. About ten minutes after the fight started, the dogs killed the wolf.

I took the lead alongside the President as the riders started again traveling south. Two gray wolves were sighted about a half-mile ahead. This was destined to be the first demonstration for me in this hunt in making a catch with my bare hands. After another mile and a half of chasing I leaped from my horse and caught the wolf by the under jaw, holding the animal up so that the President could see.

"Bully!" he exclaimed. "I haven't been skunked. This catch pays me for the trip to Oklahoma and corroborates Colonel Lyon's statements. . . . But say! Isn't that wolf biting you?"

"No, it is hurting a little, but the teeth are doing no damage," was my reply. The President examined the wolf's lips and saw the position of the hand, with the canine teeth in front of it.

"Oh, I see," he said. "But how do you get your hand behind those teeth?"

"By practice, Mr. President."

The jaws of this wolf were then wired and the animal was placed inside the cage on the dog hack, after which the party met the chuck-wagon and lunch was served on the prairie, about twelve o'clock. The air was cool and the day was ideal.

In the afternoon another wolf was caught in a similar way. After I made the second catch, there was considerable discussion among the riders as to just how the catch could be made each time. My reply was: "It is practice."

President Roosevelt said: "I can't quite understand just all about this yet."

To which I responded:

"Well, Mr. President, you must remember that a wolf never misses its aim when it snaps. When I strike at a wolf with my right hand, I know it is going into the wolf's mouth. I believe I could shut my eyes and do what you see me do, for I have caught two wolves in my life in inky darkness."

On returning to camp that night, dinner was served and all the riders ate heartily, including the President. It was the first day of strenuous exercise, and all had good appetites.

THE next morning the riders got an early start, all being in the saddle at sun-up. The President on this ride was alongside Al Bivins, a wealthy cattleman who had made a bet with Colonel Lyon that he too could catch a wolf. Bivins took nine dogs along with him—six greyhounds and three staghounds. I thought that the dogs would eat Bivins up because there were so many. After about a mile and a half had been traveled three coyotes were sighted. The chase was on, Bivins starting at breakneck speed, followed closely by the dogs. They singled out the smallest coyote of the three, which is something unusual.

I was not supposed to take the lead, and was having trouble holding Sam Bass back. But Sam Bass wasn't in the habit of letting other horses beat him, so I arrived on the scene of the fight about a hundred yards ahead of Bivins. I turned sideways after stopping, watching the nine dogs try to kill the little coyote. The coyote was wet from slobbers from the dogs when Bivins leaped from the horse. He tried to thrust his left hand into the coyote's mouth, but the animal shut down on Bivins' thumb before he could do so. He grabbed the coyote with the right hand, pulling the thumb out and splitting the nail. Doctor Lambert leaped from his horse and attempted to throw a right hand into the coyote's mouth as he had seen me do, but he appeared to be too slow, for the coyote buried the canine teeth into the fleshy part of his right hand. The Doctor jerked his hunting-knife with the left hand, stabbing the coyote to the heart.

We started again in a southeasterly direction and I sighted a wolf going toward Red River. I knew if we kept riding we would make close contact. I had sighted an eagle over to the west and asked the boys to watch it closely, because it might be a wolf. I did this to keep them looking, for I didn't want them to see the wolf I wanted to catch. I wanted a short race, for neither of these dogs had ever caught a wolf.

My scheme worked successfully, and we got within a hundred yards of the next wolf before the boys noticed it. Just as they hallooed, I spoke to my two little dogs and they went out like bullets, speeding after the wolf. As the black greyhound passed in front of the wolf so fast that it could not turn, the wolf hung its canine teeth in the hound's shoulder and split a gash six inches in length. The President saw and heard the stroke, which sounded like tearing a piece of heavy cloth.

When I leaped to the ground, the wolf sprang at me, and I took the animal at arm's length. This was one of the prettiest catches I ever made in my life.

The President ran up and said:

"Abernathy, this looks as if it were mechanically done!"

Doctor Lambert was present with a camera. The President asked all the boys to stand back, saying:

"I want this picture with just Abernathy and myself in it."

The Doctor said: "Mr. President, you can say that this picture was snapped about a minute from the time Abernathy started the chase and made the catch."

"Yes, the wolf caught the dog instead of the dog catching the wolf, for I saw it all," the President replied.

ON the fourth day of the wolf-hunt, I noticed some members of the hunting party in a group, some distance from us, and who were waving at us. President Roosevelt turned aside and rode over to the place where they were congregated; here he dismounted and I presumed that he had done so for the purpose of killing a rattlesnake, these serpents being more or less numerous throughout the Big Pasture country. I was right; he had tackled a rattler which was over five feet long. This snake was capable of making a lengthy strike, but the President killed it skillfully with a short quirt.

When President Roosevelt rejoined me, he said that he had just killed one of the biggest rattlesnakes he had ever seen; whereupon I said:

"Well, Mr. President, I just saw one of the biggest wolves go right under the hill over there into the big wild-onion flat."

"Bully!" shouted the President. "Let's go get it!"

Accompanied by the President, I went on over the hill. We were within one hundred and fifty yards of the wolf before it broke and ran back west toward Little Red Creek. Had the ground been smooth, the catch would have been possible before going a mile, but the ground was full of cracks, very dangerous for the horses, and we could not race full speed. One horse fell, throwing his rider.

Just as the wolf plunged into the water in Little Red Creek, my horse Sam Bass hit the water and fell. A horse will fall nearly every time if hitting water at too fast a speed. I had my feet out of the stirrups. I got a good ducking as I fell, the water being about four feet deep.

I was almost on top of the wolf when I fell, and when I came up I made a grab, landing the wolf quickly. The President stopped his horse on the bank, and as I came out with the wolf he whooped and hallooed.

"That shows the difference between man and dog in water with a wolf," shouted the President. "Abernathy, I believe it is easier for you to catch a wolf in water than on land, but it does not seem to bother you, in either place."

FEW people who have not had experience in handling domestic animals can realize the amount of intelligent understanding and the almost human confidence and courage and even affection with which they will enter into trying service that makes possible an almost perfect team-work between man and brute. The truth of this assertion was never better exemplified than in the fidelity, skill and never-failing courage of Sam Bass, the gray racing horse, which I preferred to ride to all others, in coursing and catching wolves, and of the little blue greyhound bitch, each of which is so frequently mentioned in the exciting scenes that are recounted in these pages. If ever any human being had perfect understanding and perfect coöperation in action from comrade and friends that ran on four feet, I had it from these two.

Around the campfire that night I told the President of my greatest danger in catching a live wolf. This occurred about a mile and a half from where our camp was then located. The story of this incident was substantially as follows:

"It was about four weeks ago, Mr. President, I came over here in a wagon with a trailer hitched on behind containing a wolf cage. I brought Mrs. Abernathy and the five children with me, also Jim Wylie, my nephew. I spent five days over here, catching only thirteen wolves, and I had the thirteenth wolf in the cage. I decided my wife had enough of camping for a while, so I planned to take her back home Friday.

"We were starting for Frederick early the next morning, when I said to my wife: 'I am going to take the two little dogs, drop south a half mile and capture one more wolf. I don't like to leave on Friday with thirteen wolves.'

"I was about three-fourths of a mile from the wagon when I saw three wolves. I had left instructions with Mrs. Abernathy that when she saw me wave my hat, she should send Jim Wylie, on an extra horse, to follow and help me. I told her to stay right where she was, with the children in the wagon.

"I took off my hat and waved, after I located the wolves. We were off for the race. I was riding Sam Bass and had the two dogs. Going on over the hill to the south, a distance of about three hundred yards, the wolves hit a draw that led back north. Had my wife kept driving, she could have seen me and possibly saved me from danger, but she obeyed my orders. The wolves kept running up the draw. Just as I crossed the road, Sam Bass was thrown by hitting one of the dogs, killing it instantly. Sam fell to his knees but did not turn over. I did not fall off.

"WHEN we got straight again, my little blue bitch was running neck and neck with the wolf. I ran up by her side, begging her to take hold, but she seemed to keep looking back for the dog which my horse had just killed.

"I was riding for dear life, and just as we went out on smooth ground, I rolled almost over both the dog and wolf. They snapped each other and fell. I made a quick leap to the left and had the wolf, sitting astride the animal. My horse went on as hard as it could go. Just then the second wolf ran in and snapped me through the glove on the right hand a half dozen times, apparently trying to force me to turn loose the first wolf.

"I yelled, and kicked with my foot that was free. I reached into the left pocket of my pants and found my knife, opened it with my teeth, and as the second wolf attacked me again, I cut a six-inch gash in the shoulder, breaking

off the short blade. The blade remained in the wolf's gaping wound, as blood streamed. The wolf backed off about ten feet and crouched upon the ground. Upon my left I noticed a third wolf, crouching as if it were ready to spring upon me. I thought to myself: 'If this wolf attacks me, I am a goner.' My little blue bitch was upon the ground back of me, panting.

"I started for the top of the hill, taking the first wolf in my arms. This hill was the highest point around there. When I reached the top, I was startled as I observed a herd of four or five hundred head of jingle-bob steers that had just been shipped into the pasture from New Mexico. These steers were of the wildest, and would even fight a man on a horse. When these wild steers saw me with the wolf in my arms, they lost no time in charging toward me. When they were within about six feet of me, I fell down on top of this wolf, gripping the animal by the lower jaw. I was lying as close as possible to the ground. The steers bawled and pawed, the whole herd being around me. I could feel their warm breath upon the back of my neck.

"I was ready as a last resort, if necessary to save my life, to pry loose with my left hand, from the wolf's jaw. My right hand was inside the wolf's mouth, holding the lower jaw. I planned to mount one of the steers by grabbing the horns, forcing it to carry me to safety. I hoped to be able to do this, since I had on spurs with the rowels tied. At least I could have stampeded the herd.

"I MUST have been surrounded by the wild steers at least ten minutes, though it seemed like half an hour. During this time Jim Wylie had gone south quite a distance and then returned back to the wagon, having failed to locate me. He reported to Mrs. Abernathy, saying: 'I believe Uncle Jack has run clear out of the country.'

"Mrs. Abernathy stood up on the dashboard, holding to the top of the wagon bow. She was able to see the big herd of wild steers, located to the west a mile and a half. She jumped down, handing my six-shooter to Jim, saying:

"'Jim, take this six-shooter; your Uncle Jack might be right inside that big herd; go to him quickly!'

"I heard a pistol ring out six different shots. The cattle jumped, broke and ran. When Jim reached me, I was lying there unhurt, holding the wolf. This was such a narrow escape that I thought it was a miracle!"

When I finished telling this story to the President, he said to me:

"Abernathy, I want to go and see the identical spot where this took place."

Accordingly, on the following day, the President accompanied me to the place. This was before the riders started on the wolf chase, on the morning of the fifth day of the hunt.

"Abernathy, promise me you never again will take a chance like that," said the President, after visiting the scene of the near tragedy. "You have other work to do."

DURING the rest of the six-day entertainment, I continued to catch wolves for the President. On the last day Mrs. Abernathy and the five children, accompanied by my father, an ex-Confederate soldier, drove out to the camp in a surrey drawn by two horses. The President had expressed a desire at the beginning to meet the rest of the Abernathy family, so word had been sent home for the family to make the trip. President Roosevelt expressed his great satisfaction at what I had been able to accomplish in catching wolves, to both Mrs. Abernathy and my father. About an hour was spent in the visit. Then the President and I rode to the chuck-wagon, while the Abernathy family returned to Frederick, as the camp was breaking up.

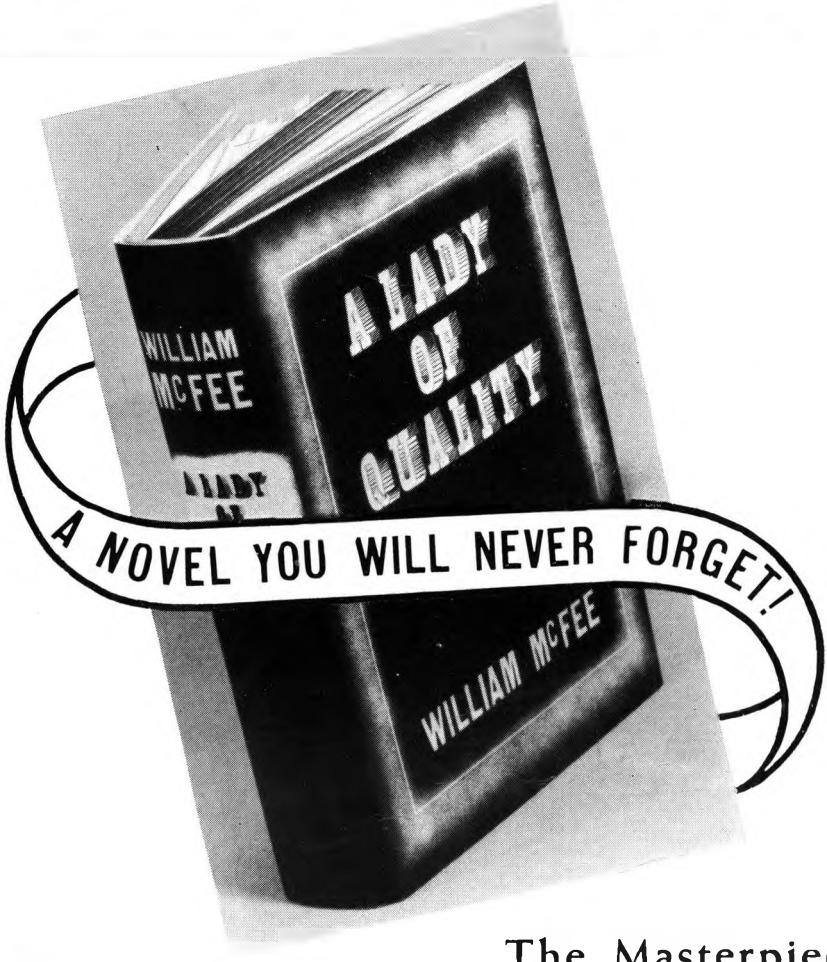
On the way to the special train, the President raced down Main Street of the town, accompanied by myself. The evening meal was served at the chuck-wagon before he rode to the train.

President Roosevelt invited me to accompany him to Colorado, where he went to hunt big game for a few days. "I would like to have you go along," he said, just before time for the train to depart. "I want you to be with me when we are hunting bear."

"Mr. President," I replied, "I have been away from Mrs. Abernathy longer on this wolf-hunt than I ever was away before at one time. I promised her faithfully that as soon as the wolf-hunt was over, I would return home."

"Well," replied the President, "I guess you are right. You have the sweetest wife and prettiest children that I ever saw and I don't blame you."

Theodore Roosevelt was so well pleased with Mr. Abernathy's ability that he called him to Washington to handle a dangerous job. In the forthcoming October issue.



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