

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

SEPTEMBER

15¢

•
"The Valley Stronghold"

A novel by

GREGORIO SOMERS

•
"Lady of Spain"

by

WILLIAM MAKIN

•
FULTON GRANT

H. BEDFORD-JONES

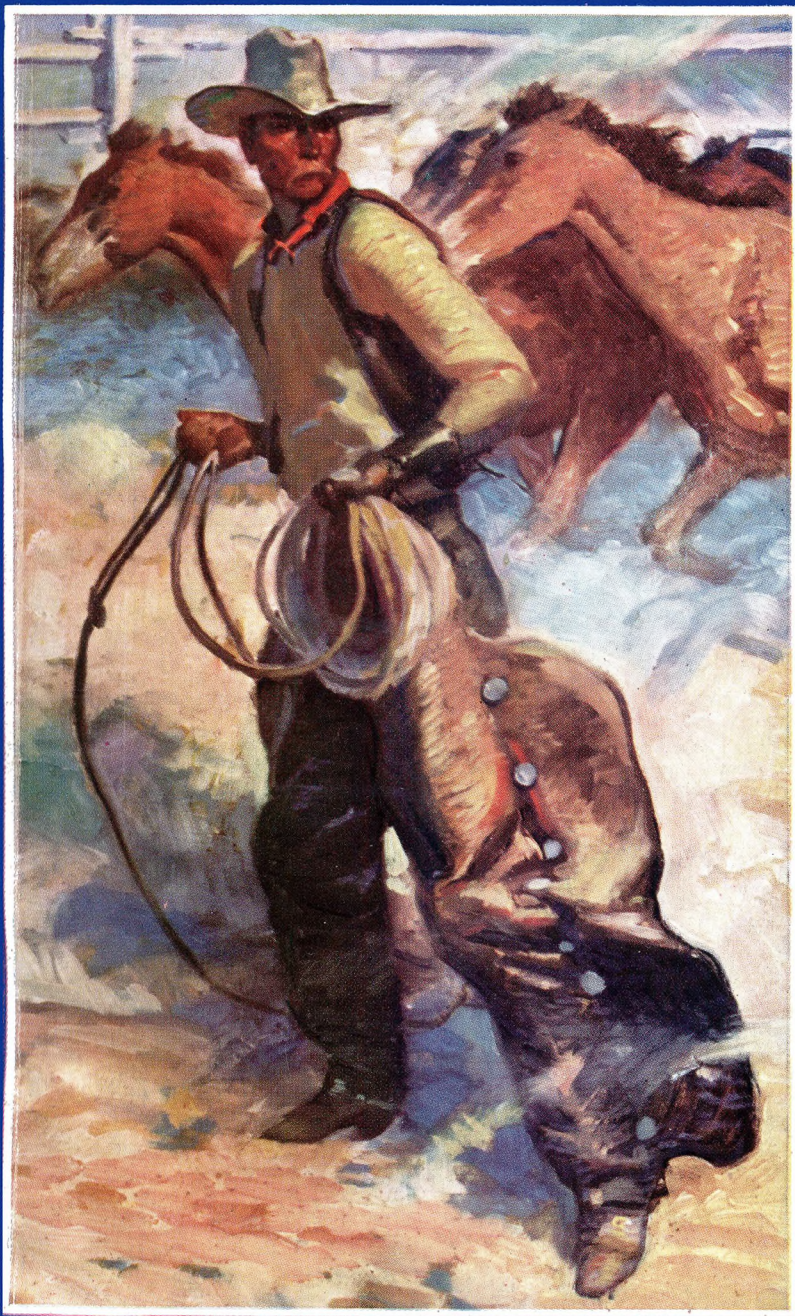
JAY LUCAS

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

•
"Murder Mesa"

A novelette by

H. C. WIRE



Fully Illustrated

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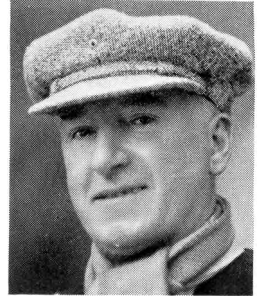
THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 65 No. 5

Who's Who in Blue Book

JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

THE author of "Caravan Treasure" and, in this issue, "The Wild Girl," was born in inland Australia, but has been a great wanderer, and has lived in thirty different countries. Recently he crossed the Sahara to Timbuktu, continuing through Guinea to the French Congo, and at the present moment he is just back from a voyage to the Hoggar country. He has recently completed his autobiography; and some high lights from this fascinating record, "A Wanderer from Out Back," follow on page 4.



KENNETH PERKINS



KENNETH PERKINS ("Piping the Devil" in our July issue, and "From Hangtown to the Sea" next month) was born in a hill station of British India—in the Madras Presidency, and had his boyhood schooling in the same region, surrounded by jungle-covered mountains, where there is plenty of big game even to this day. This early life in India gave him a taste for atmosphere and color which could be applied in interpreting the life not only of India but of the American Southwest, of Louisiana and Central America, about which most of his stories are written.

He went through high-school in San Francisco, and spent his summers on the ranches, learning to use a lariat, ride horses and punch cattle. Thence to the University of California, where he received a Master's degree. He taught English for two years at Pomona College, amid the mesquite and sage and sirens of Southern California.

Working as ordinary seaman, he obtained first-hand acquaintance with the scenery and life of the Pacific—Hawaii, Guam, Japan and the Philippine Islands. His brother also loved the sea, and was a wireless operator on the *State of California* when she went down in Gambier Bay in Alaska, in which wreck he gave up his life. Both brothers inherited their predilection for the sea from their grandfather, a pioneer of the gold-rush days, whose barkentines and schooners were known for years on the San Francisco waterfront.

During the war Kenneth Perkins was a lieutenant in the field artillery, and in Camp Taylor was a teacher of equitation. His present home is Atlantic Highlands, but every winter he travels with his wife and daughter—usually to California.

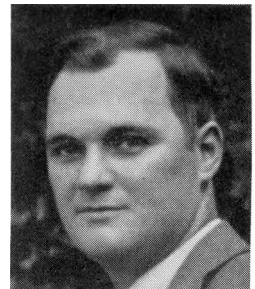
JACK LEONARD, *alias* GREGORIO SOMERS

I WAS born in Sandwich, Massachusetts, 1903, and was brought up on Cape Cod, in Arizona, North Carolina, and various suburbs of Boston. I was graduated from Harvard in 1925 and started writing as soon as I got courage to quit my first and only job, with the *New York Times*. Under my full name, Jonathan Norton Leonard, I wrote four books of popular technology and one of travel, but switched to fiction three years ago. ("The Valley Stronghold," beginning on page 28.)

My interest in Latin America probably began when I met my wife, who is a Peruvian; but both before and after marriage I spent a lot of time in Spanish countries. By this time I speak the language well enough to find out what the people are thinking about.

My first magazine story was based on an actual political event in Venezuela, so I signed it "Gregorio Somers," thinking I'd like to visit the country again and return undamaged. But now that Dictator Juan Vicente Gomez is dead, I've taken off my false whiskers.

My personal life is not as violent as my stories. I spend my time on Cape Cod, in New York, or at large. My hobbies are gardening, machinery, and other people's business—the common hobby of all writers.



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BLUE BOOK



SEPTEMBER, 1937

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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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Published monthly, at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—September, 1937. Vol. LXV, No. 5, Copyright, 1937, by McCall Corporation in the United States and Great Britain. Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897. Subscription Prices, one year \$1.50, two years \$2.00 in U. S. and Canada; foreign postage \$1.00 per year. For change of address, give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization. Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in the Blue Book Magazine will be received only on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

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



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A Wanderer

By JAMES FRANCIS

WHEN I was five years of age I lost faith in the honesty of the world. One evening just before the night fell, a man came to my father's farm. He was riding a broomstick and leading another broomstick by a piece of string. He asked if he might put his two "horses" in our lucerne paddock.

My father thought him mad, and laughingly gave him permission. Next morning when we got up we found two great draft-horses munching the last of the lucerne. The man with the broomsticks was leaning on the fence watching them, a grin of delight on his face. "I asked your permission, an' you gave it," he said to my father, as we chased the horses out of the field. My father's language is unprintable. There was a drought at the moment, and a handful of lucerne was worth its weight in gold.

Australia was a fine romantic place in those days "when the world was wide." My father and mother came out as emigrants, and on the ship was another fortune-seeker of the same name. I find the name of the son of that other Dwyer in the English "Who's Who." He's a bishop in New South Wales. A land of great opportunities was the big island at the end of the world!

I was born on the estate of Macarthur Onslow called Camden Park, some thirty miles from Sydney. Sir William Macarthur received the grant of land for bringing a score of merino sheep to the country. It is said that he received as much land as he could ride around in a day. The estate is some six miles

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SHERWIN CODY

from Out Back

DWYER (Continued from inside cover)

across so he must have used his spurs. Still, considering what Australia profited by his importation, he deserved it. When I was a boy, it was a sort of feudal domain, some hundreds of families working and living on the estate. Viewing the film "Mutiny on the *Bounty*," I recall that Macarthur was one of the military men who arrested Bligh when he was Governor of New South Wales.

The other was a Captain Johnstone. There was a small dwarfed pine tree on the Johnstone estate, one of a number making an avenue. It was said the tree didn't grow because convicts had been tied up to it and lashed!

TWO well-dressed young fellows called at our farm when I was a boy. One carried a big ledger, with an ink-bottle slung around his neck; the other had a memorandum book containing names of farmers in the vicinity.

They checked my father's name, then proceeded to question him regarding his stock. How many cows, sheep, and horses? All entered carefully in the big ledger. Even the brand. The business was done with great finesse and a contempt for time.

They made calculations. Sixpence for each sheep, a shilling for a cow, two shillings for a horse. Registration for the Stock Department. . . . Nine pounds, eighteen shillings.

My father hadn't it. My mother came on the scene—a shrewd, blue-eyed mother. She asked a question. *Would they take half of it?* They talked together. Yes, they would.

Mother smiled—and unloosed a bad-tempered bulldog that hated strangers. The two fled for the road. But they did well elsewhere in the district, collecting some ninety-odd pounds from farmers they bullied.

"Governments," said my mother, explaining why she set the bulldog on them, "never want half a pelt. When they go out to skin you, they take the whole hide." (Please turn to page 140)

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A radio amateur mobilizes an army in a good cause, and hell breaks loose. . . . By the author of "Death Song in Spain" and "The Devil Came to Our Valley."

By FULTON GRANT

ANYONE who has never been present in the city-room of the State City Free Press at the moment when its editor, J. Niles Ballum, was having a tantrum, has missed something in the subtleties of higher, more involved insanity. . . . Not that Ballum, speaking generally, isn't a decent, civil, competent and entirely presentable sort of fellow whom the staff respects and ad-

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



mires. But there comes, now and then a moment of stress—a moment usually coincident with the last half-hour which precedes the deadline of the first afternoon edition—when Ballum loses control, takes the wraps from his dignity, and becomes a raving, stamping, swearing, hell-raising maniac. And if the members of the staff did not know him and love him and understand him,—aware that when he refers to their favorite ancestors as a flock of bachelor monkeys, or worse, it is only a temporary aberration,—they would not work for him at any salary, let alone the modicum to which they quaintly refer as their “weekly insult.”

But like him they do, and respect him so they work and grin and bear it. An sometimes, unobtrusively, they do more than grin. . . .

“All right, mug, get on yer pins. You’ll get yours, over by the pond. Get goin’, now—get goin’!”

Ham Band

It was during the late afternoon of the day when the Voude story broke that Niles Ballum had one of his spells. In the first place the State City *Star* had scooped the *Free Press*, soundly, utterly and gleefully, on the story of the Voude kidnaping. Not only was Dr. Harson Voude, father of the little girl victim, a leading citizen of the upstate metropolis, but he was a national figure and a man important enough to spread the tragedy over the press of America. To be scooped on a story like that, was a bitter pill indeed for Niles Ballum.

In the second place, the fault—for fault there was—lay at the door of Barney Dow, the *Free Press*' hand-picked, nurtured and much-touted star reporter. Another man could have been fired out of hand, but not Barney Dow. . . . Dow was, in his way, extraordinary. Trained on New York dailies, he had "retired to the sticks," as he phrased it, and had loaned his usually competent services to the *Press* for a salary which doubled any other staff member's, save that of Ballum himself. A good man, Dow, but he had a weakness, and that weakness was contained in bottles. Seldom indeed did his drinking interfere with his job, but there were times, and this was one of them.

It was part of Barney Dow's daily routine to call at the great free hospital of which Dr. Voude was founder, and there to check on the prominent citizens who might be ill or dying. But on this day Barney had been interrupted by a friendly glass. The glass led to others, and when he came back to the office, he was able only to look at Niles Ballum with a sleepy grin and drape himself in his chair and fall asleep.

SO the *Star* scooped the *Press*, and Editor Ballum had a bad day. And the brunt of Ballum's outbreak fell upon Little Billy Boles.

Little Billy had been delinquent. He had come in an hour late, had spoken out of turn, and had got fired. Little Billy was a glorified copy-boy, a wistful, rather pathetic young man of nineteen or so, who had held down the copy job for two years. No longer "little," the name still persisted because of his remarkable resemblance to Du Maurier's drawings of his male ingénue character in "Trilby." The diminutive signified the staff's affection for Billy.

Little Billy's trouble was radio. He was radio-mad. He was a "ham." He



was one of those hobbyists—there are sixty thousand or so of them, if you believe the statistics—who would rather listen to what the short-waves are saying over a two-tube receiver, built on a bread-board, than have a date with a blonde. He was bursting with radio. He ate and drank and thought and talked radio. Especially he talked it, unendingly and constantly, until the staff members of the *Free Press* began to wonder whether the boy's brain were super-heterodyne and if those were kilowatts on the back of his neck.

That afternoon Billy did not show up until six-thirty, albeit his job began at five o'clock, when he was supposed to rush proofs of the inside pages up to Niles Ballum for final checking. When neither Billy nor the proofs appeared, Niles Ballum growled and smoldered. And when, at six-thirty, Billy appeared breathlessly in the office, a pair of headphones dangling from his head instead of a cap, Editor Ballum just saw red.

"Oh, Mr. Ballum!" began Little Billy. "Oh, Mr. Ballum—I think I got something on the ten-meter band—"

And that was the alpha and the omega of that.

Niles Ballum needed only that touch. He jumped up and down like a rubber toy, and beat the air with his hands, screaming words which we cannot reproduce here save one intelligible phrase:

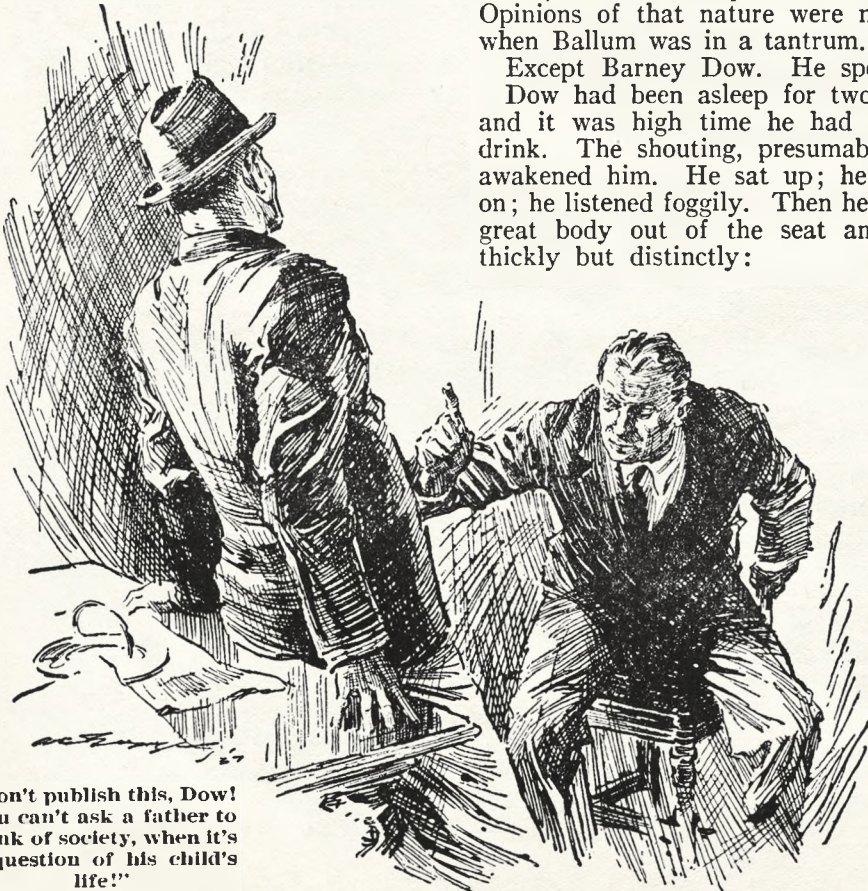
"You get out . . . Get out! You're fired. You're through. You blankety-blank so-and-so, get out!"

WELL, it was too bad. Everyone on the staff liked Little Billy and felt sorry for him. And he needed that job. His father had been janitor of the *Free Press* building for twenty years, and when "Old Bill" had died, the publishers had given Mrs. Boles a low-rate lease on the little flat where they lived, almost next door, and had given Little Billy his job. It was the least they could do.

It was a pathetic thing to see the lad standing there, his mouth open and tears trickling into it, not able to believe what he had heard. And it was more pathetic to see him turn suddenly and run, to hide those same tears, uttering one cry of hurt anguish which was hardly human. Pathetic, but no one expressed an opinion. Opinions of that nature were not safe when Ballum was in a tantrum.

Except Barney Dow. He spoke up.

Dow had been asleep for two hours, and it was high time he had another drink. The shouting, presumably, had awakened him. He sat up; he looked on; he listened foggily. Then he got his great body out of the seat and said, thickly but distinctly:



"Don't publish this, Dow! You can't ask a father to think of society, when it's a question of his child's life!"

"'S a dam' shame. Heluva newspaper! Whyn't you fire me? Me, I fire easy. Th' trouble with you, Ballum, is you're a tyrant! Jus' a tyrant. I got scooped on a story. So what? So you fire the kid, tha's what. So nuts to you! So nuts to the paper! So nuts to all newspapers! Me, I'm goin' to get a drink—"

And he staggered out of the door, while Editor Ballum ranted, stamped, swore, screamed, spat and—and said not a word about firing his best man, drunk or sober. Not, perhaps, an entirely moral or ethical situation, but life is often like that.

Barney Dow took his thirst and his zigzagging feet to the door of Pat Mooney's saloon, which was conveniently situated next door to the *Press*. Just as he was about to push the door and enter into that sanctum of Pan, he heard a moan. He heard, he looked about, and even through the gray fog which beclouded his sight, he saw Little Billy, the copy-boy—now an ex-copy boy. Billy was sitting on the stoop of his tenement which adjoined Pat Mooney's, crying his eyes out.

"S'matter, kid?" inquired Barney, having already forgotten the incident of the city-room. "Mustn't cry like that, son. Be a Boy Scout. Be a li'l hero. Keep the stiff upper lip. Don't let 'em get you down. Man may be down but never out. Wassamatter? Tell Barney!"

IT was no secret on the *Free Press* that Barney Dow was a subject for hero-worship, being what he was, a man of the world and a newspaper man of the big cities. Nor was it a secret that among the worshipers at Barney's shrine was this same young Little Billy Boles. Ordinarily, if Barney had addressed Billy even as casually as to say, "Hey, you, gimme those proofs," it would have been an inner thrill in the heart of Billy Boles. But when the great Barney Dow, drunk or sober, showed an active interest in the troubles of his youthful adulator, it was stronger even than Billy's woes. He lifted his head hopefully. He started on his dirge. He said bitterly:

"Oh, Mr. Dow, I was only tryin' to tell him—honest I was—I was tryin' to tell him what I heard. I gotta scoop. I *think* I gotta scoop. It was on the 10-meter band. . . . Those kidnapers, Mr. Dow—I think it was them—"

Now Barney did not focus rapidly, but that word "*kidnapers*" was a sound he recognized.



"Heluva newspaper! Whyn't you fire me? Me, I fire easy. Trouble with you is, you're just a tyrant."

"Wassat?" he demanded, pulling himself together. "What kidnapers? Who'd they kidnap? You?"

"No sir, I mean the Voude kidnapers." Then it penetrated.

"Tha's a fac', son. There's kidnapers all around. Took Doc Voude's kid, they did. Took her an' scooped me on a story. 'Magine that—scooped ol' Barney Dow! Why, I—"

BUT Little Billy had started talking radio and there was no stemming the tide of his rapid words.

"It was about four-thirty, an' I was tryin' to work X5XQR . . . that's a feller out in Guthrie, Oklahoma. We talk every day about that time on 11.4 meters. Well, I was listening for him to come in, see? His name is Jimmy Butler—and I could only get a sort of hash on the air."

"Say, what'n hell you talking about? Hash? Maybe I'm drunk, see, but don't try'n' kid me."

"No, listen, Mr. Dow. . . . There was a lot of interference, only I could hear Jimmy Butler's voice pretty badly garbled. He's got a fifty-watter and he always gets through, but there was something wrong then. So I switched off and gave him the QRM signal and listened again. Well, there was another voice—loud and tough, it was, and somebody was awful mad. 'Get off that, you punks,' he says, just like that. 'Get off the air, see? Or else—' Well, I know no real hams would talk like that. It's

against the rules of the League, and it made me mad, too. So I listened to see where he came in from."

Little Billy had stopped crying now and was as happy and excited as a boy at a circus.

"Well," he went on a bit breathlessly, "those fellers switched over to another wave-length, but I followed 'em. I picked 'em up again on 14.2 meters and now they were talkin' to somebody. The tough voice was saying: 'Okay, Doc, but it'll cost you another twenty grand, see. Put her on, pal. Let the Doc hear her.' And then there was a little voice—like a little girl's—and it said: 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy! Oh, I'm so scared . . . I'm way up here in the—' And then it stopped and there was nothing at all. . . . Oh, say, what's the matter, Mr. Dow?"

The matter was that Mr. Dow had been suddenly taken sober. Newspaper men are like that. You can paralyze them but you can't kill that sixth sense that means news. And out of all this chatter, the thread of an idea was born in the Dow brain—a consciousness that in that kaleidoscopic pattern of sounds which was fighting its way into his thought, was news.

"**W**AIT," he said, grabbing Billy by the arm. "Now don't say a word—not a word, kid! And don't worry about your job. You haven't lost your job. I'll get you your job and then some. But just repeat all that for me again. Slow, now, on account I'm not so good—yet."

Billy repeated.

"And the big part of it," he added this time, all proud and burbling with excitement, "is that Dr. Voude is a radio amateur. Yes he is. He's X2AFD—that's his call-number. I've heard him lots of times. He's a member of the League, and he's a real ham. Lots of important people are amateur radio hams—senators and movie actors and things—"

But Little Billy was in the air. Barney Dow had plucked him off his feet and was carrying him into his dark vestibule.

"Listen, kid," Barney was saying. "Now get this: You and me, we're partners, see? We gotta pull a fast one. Nobody ever scoops Barney Dow, kid. Gotta fix that scoop. Maybe you got something there. Have to find out. So you wait. You go upstairs and you wait. That's all you do. And don't you dare go into the office and tell anybody. Because if you're wrong they'll hand us the bird, and if you're right, we've got a

thousand dollars' worth of story. Get it?"

Little Billy had got it. He saw his hero running. Life swam hugely before his eyes, adorned in brighter colors. "I'll be back," his hero had said, "in half an hour. Then we'll go places, maybe."

So Little Billy waited.

And Barney Dow ran. He ran for a trolley which was to take him down Cyclorama Drive to the great limestone mansion where the noted Doctor Voude resided. He ran, and although he was not aware of the fact, he ran straight for a sea of trouble.

A solemn butler looked down his long nose at Barney Dow, probably catching wind of the fumes which lingered on the reporter's breath if not in his brain.

"The Doctor is not in to the press, sir," he said haughtily. "You newspaper men have caused us enough trouble as it is—"

He got no farther. Barney Dow's big hand pushed him in the middle, and the butler gasped, staggered and collapsed. Dow had been in the Voude house on previous stories and had a general idea of the place. He was aware that the Doctor maintained a private office on the second floor, and he mounted the stairs and hurried down the corridor. . . . The office door was open, and Dow could hear fragments of tragic sentences spoken by the Doctor in a shaken, tired, anguish-laden voice. Through the door he could see another man sitting with Voude, but even that did not retard his news-getting haste.

"There's nothing—nothing at all," the Doctor was saying. "I can't stand it. . . . I can't go on like this. Why don't they ask for money? I'll give money. . . . I'll give all my money. The police think it is some enemy, some vengeful person. God knows, Clyde, I don't believe I have an enemy—who could it be? Who could wish us harm? What have I done? And Margot. . . . She's still unconscious, you say? Good God, is there any crime worse than this thing? Are such people human? If anything should happen to my baby—Look at the Lindbergh case. Look at—"

BARNEY rapped at the door. The Doctor started and stared.

"Sorry, Doctor," Barney said, entering without invitation. "I'm Dow of the *Free Press*. Wouldn't bother you except it's important." It was the other,

younger man who stood up, indignantly, saying:

"Dammit, man, haven't you reporters any decency? Isn't it bad enough without your playing ghoul—"

Dow recognized the man—a promising young medico named Clyde Browley who had worked under Voude for three years and was now assistant director of the hospital. Not a lovable type, Browley, but efficient and reputed to be a fine surgeon. Rather the society doctor type, and definitely a climber in State City.

"Watch your language," Dow cautioned him. "And don't jump at conclusions. Can I see you alone a moment, Dr. Voude?"

"Anything you have to say can be said in front of Dr. Browley," Voude told him. "Get on with it."

The younger man took his hat, saying:

"Never mind, Harson. I'm leaving. These reporters rile me, anyway. I'll call you from the hospital if there's any change. Meanwhile, if there's anything I can do—"

And he marched out, glaring at Barney Dow.

Dr. Voude was curt.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I just overheard you tell Dr. Browley that you had no communication from the kidnapers—no demand for ransom. Is that true?"

"Certainly. I made my report to the police and the *Star*."

"You're absolutely certain?"

"Yes, I am. What are you getting at? This is brutal. You newspaper men—"

"Wait a minute, Doctor. You're a radio fan, I gather? You have a short-wave station?"

The Doctor reddened.

"Why—yes, I have. It's been a hobby of mine for years—if that's any news to you. Why?"

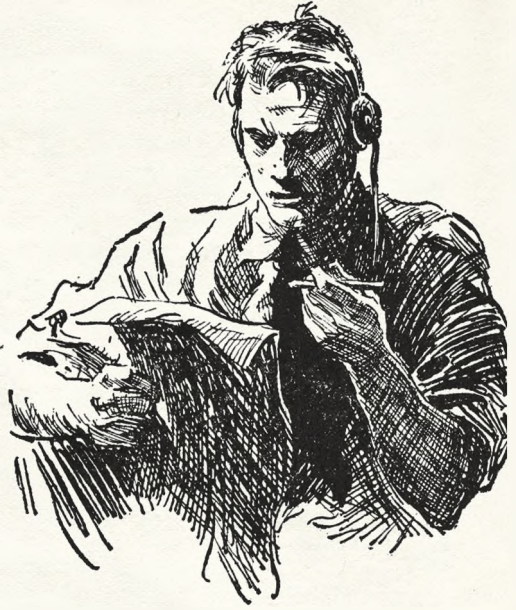
Dow closed the door and sat down, studying the Doctor's face.

"Then you haven't reported to the police that you talked to little Mary on a short-wave band about four-thirty? . . . No, wait a minute. I don't blame you. I'm not trying to hurt you, Doctor. I'm trying to help, but you've got to come clean."

"Why—why, this is absurd. What do you mean?"

"Just that. Somebody was listening in and picked you up."

The Doctor was shattered. He stared hopelessly. Then he nodded slowly.



As the calls came, that chart slowly grew.

"It's true," he said. "They did get in touch with me—but—oh, can't you understand? They warned me that—if I brought the police or the F.B.I. into it, they'd—kill my little girl. Oh, God, can't you see it? I don't care about the money. They can have all my money. I only want peace—and my child. I don't want their blood. I don't want them arrested. I only want my little girl again—and my wife and my home. Don't publish this, Dow. Don't do me that wrong. Aren't you reporters even human? Are you always cold and callous and heartless? Haven't you ever loved anything?"

The agony in the man's voice penetrated through Dow's consciousness. He understood.

"All right," he said. "I'll hold it out—until you say. But this is bigger than any one man's happiness, Doctor. You owe it to society to run those crooks down. It isn't only you. It's every man who has a child and a little money. I know how you feel, but—" Then an idea took shape.

"Isn't there a way to locate them by radio? I'm not much on radio, but I had a hunch—"

Voude shook his head.

"I've thought of that," he said. "But it's hopeless. A directional-antenna or a radio-compass could get their general direction, but it would take time and—no, it's no use. None at all. I beg you, Dow, let me alone. Let me pay them

and get my child again. You can't ask a father to think of society when it's a question of his child's life. Don't print this story, Dow. I beg you, I implore you, Dow. Let me pay—the money doesn't matter. Nothing matters now—”

And he collapsed into his chair.

Barney Dow left the house. It was a dead-end situation; there was no solution. He couldn't blame the man. Only too many times had the bodies of stolen children been found, dismally and tragically, dead—when the press and the police clamored too loudly. No, he couldn't blame the man. . . . And yet—

He walked down Cyclorama Drive toward the trolley stop. There was the park. There was the gate where the Voude nurse had stopped with the little girl, leaving her unwatched for a few minutes while she chatted with a policeman on the beat. Vaguely the details of the case came back to him. The nurse had turned around, and the child was gone. There was no clue, not even the classical ransom note made out of clipped news-captions. Then later, this radio call. Clever, that. Damnably clever. Baffling. Even Voude knew it couldn't be traced. But it proved one thing: whoever did this knew the Doctor pretty well. Maybe it was vengeance, as the cops said. But who? Who would want to hurt Voude? Decent fellow, Voude!

The trolley seemed endlessly delayed. Night was coming rapidly and the breeze was cold. Barney huddled in the angle of the parkway gate. He lighted a cigarette. He wanted a drink. Stupid, being sober now. Man needs a drink now and then. . . . And who was this guy Browley? Didn't like his face. Too sleek. Protested too much. There was some yarn about young Dr. Browley. Something queer. Queer operation, maybe. Good plastic surgeon, they said—

There was a sound behind him. Something crashed down on his head. Then darkness. Blackness. Nothingness.

BARNEY'S half-hour was up—and more, and Little Billy was troubled. Forty-five—sixty minutes, now, and his hero had not returned. Something must have happened. *Must* have.

Little Billy sat in the stuffy cubicle on the top floor of his tenement building. He called it his “radio shack,” although it used to be a water-tank, and the owners didn't mind his playing in it. It was eight o'clock—eight o'clock and no Barney. Should he call the *Free Press*? He

had promised Barney not to tell anyone. Maybe Barney was drunk. But no, he wouldn't do that, not while he was on a story. Something was wrong. There was something queer about this.

IT was almost automatic with Little Billy to turn on his crude but effective receiver and listen over the invisible waves. It was almost automatic for him to tune in on the 160-meter band where the “hams” started operating about that time. The waves were friendly. He knew those voices. He had talked with them a hundred times. There was X3ACD from Thomasville, Georgia. There was X1RF from Pittsfield, Mass. There was that strong station from out in the Ninth District, in St. Louis. It give him a friendly, warm feeling, as though he were escaping, somehow, from locality, as though he could project an astral body into the airs and find spirits there, friendly spirits. Members of the Radio League, air-friends—good fellows, all those. Bankers and butchers' boys; actors and ditch-diggers. All friends. All brothers-in-the-air. That harsh note came from X2VDE only ten miles away—he ought to control his modulation better. . . . Where was Barney Dow?

Another half-hour, and Billy Boles was frantic. Something had to be done. Maybe those crooks would kill him. Maybe they'd be on the air again. Maybe he could locate them. No, you can't do that so easily. Radio-compass, maybe. Not even then. Or else if a lot of people got the direction and then criss-crossed they might possibly—

To pull the switch and send power into his transmitter was a relief. He was *doing* something. A boy had to do something. You can't just sit still and wait.

“Calling CQ, CQ, CQ . . . calling CQ . . . X2ABD calling CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ—” That was the general call, wanting to know if anybody would talk with him. The amateur's cry for air-friendship. The “ham” battle-cry. Somebody would answer; somebody always wants to talk with somebody. His meter showed a good output. That signal should be pumping way out in the ninth area. That new grid-bias—ought to give better distance. . . .

“Calling CQ, CQ, CQ . . . X2ABD calling CQ.”

And then somebody came in strong.

“QRA, QRA, QRA—” wanting to know who was calling, who was wanting to talk, who was wanting to be friendly



There was a sound behind him, and something crashed down on his head.

Billy didn't know this man, but he was a friend. They're all friends on the S.W. bands. Brothers in the great "ham fraternity." They don't have names, only letters. This was X3MKY from Baltimore, wanting to know if this signal was strong.

And that is the way it happened. . . .

Youth is irrepressible. Youthful secrets are hard to keep. It is difficult to blame Billy Boles if he could not keep this great secret. Difficult to be astonished that the story—the tragedy, perhaps—which was uppermost in his mind, should pour out of him to this friend so far away. After all, what harm could it do?

But X3MKY was a public-spirited soul. The Voude kidnaping? Yes, he had read about it in the papers. And what was that—on the short waves? These crooks were using the amateur band? They were getting tough over the air? They

were using the privileges of decent, licensed, authorized amateurs to do their dirty work? Something ought to be done about that. X3MKY was the kind of a public-spirited citizen who always feels that something ought to be done about things. "Wait a minute, we'll get the gang together. Wasn't this Dr. Voude a ham? We hams have to stick together. Sixty thousand of us in the country. . . . Sixty thousand of right-minded amateurs. Wait till we get the gang together. Maybe we hams can show them a couple of things. Didn't we all do a good job during the floods?"

"QXR, QXR, QXR. . . . Wait till I round up some of the boys. My trans-

mitter is stronger. . . . I've got 150 watts out here. You call anybody you can reach and I'll get some more. We'll figure something out—"

And the amateurs of America did figure something out.

Within an hour there were over a hundred stations on the air together, all discussing the Voude kidnaping case. Bright brains, these. Some of our future engineers and inventors are hiding their lights on the amateur short-wave bands. Fifteen-year-olds who know their calibration formulæ, who know their logarithms. Mere boys who can, in a trice, figure resistance charts and plot curves for plate characteristics of those miraculous vacuum tubes. Older men who have been successful in other fields—scientists, engineers, grocers, florists, ministers of God—minds of every caliber and description, all deep in their hobby: radio.

Turn these minds loose. Turn them loose on a problem—even a problem in criminology. Give them their radio. Let them work in concert. Forum of the air. And then when they do, let the Devil save his own, for their composite mind is a powerful machine.

BARNEY DOW came back to consciousness with gasoline strong in his nostrils. There was a soft purring under him and the centrifugal force of a moving vehicle insinuated itself into his being. Even cramped as he was, even in pain, even with the throbbing of his aching head, he knew he was in an automobile. It was pitch black. His hand touched only hard metal. There was a tire under him. He explored further, and came to the rather startling conclusion that he was locked in the rear trunk compartment of a fast-moving car.

The speed was terrific. Perhaps, he thought, he exaggerated it, riding thus, cramped and half dazed, but it was fast. Now who the devil could have done this? Who would sneak up on him and hit him with things—right there at the entrance to Cyclorama parkway? Practically in the city. . . . Well, there had been a kidnaping there—in broad daylight, too, with a cop just a step away.

The gasoline smell and the movement combined with his splitting head to make him ill. Dust poured up through the fissures under the body of the car, choking him, stifling him. He strained against the lift-door, but it was securely locked. He wouldn't have dared to jump at that speed, anyway. Who the devil? Why?

Then suddenly he was sick. Uncontrollably sick. Shock and pain and nausea. And then he fainted again. That head . . . the oozing blood—

AND then after while there was knowledge again, and feeling and sensibilities and perception. The air seemed better now. No feeling of metal around him. No feel of movement. No speed. Only inertia. There was wood under him, too. A floor, perhaps. But it was all dark. Queerly dark. Something was wrong with his eyes. Something covered his mouth. Something held his wrists and his ankles. It required every effort of concentration to think it out. Tape, that was it. Adhesive tape. Over his mouth and across his eyes and around his wrists and ankles. The dirty devils! Now who in hell would do a thing like that to Barney Dow?

But there were voices somewhere—muffled through something. Behind a partition, perhaps. Barney could heave his shoulders and shift his weight and roll. Not move, really, but roll. Roll toward the voices. And rolling, he encountered an obstacle—a wall. Something—and then the voices were more vibrant, louder-seeming. He could just make them out.

"Okay, okay, Doc," a tough voice was saying. "But you listen here, see? That was just dumb what you done, bringing that boid out here. Didn't I tell you not to come out here anyhow? D'you wanna get all the cops in the country out here? And then you gotta half croak a boid and haul him out here. . . . Jeess, but it's dumb."

The other voice was almost inaudible, a softer, lower voice, and Barney could not hear the words distinctly. But the tough voice replied again, ominously.

"Yeah? That's what you think, Doc. Now you listen to me. We aint going to take no chances, see? Everything was oke until you come out here, see? Bringing that reporter guy. That was a dumb trick, see? So whadda we gotta do? We gotta get out from under, see? How d'we know the kid don't know your voice, hey? How d'we know that boid was out all the time? We gotta give 'em the woiks, Doc. We gotta, that's all."

Then the lower voice, more clearly now, protesting:

"That's murder. I won't have that."

"That's what you think, Doc. Me, I aint gonna sit on no hot-squat. I aint gonna boin. They boin you for a snatch

nowadays. Hell, no, Doc, they get the woiks and we push 'em in the pond, see? You get the old guy on your radio, see? You lemme talk and I'll make a date. He can get the dough tomorrow, Doc. And he'll deliver. They always deliver. We can hand him the kid's shoit, see? But we don't hand him the kid. Hell, no, Doc, that's when I take a powder. You gotta play my way now; you gummed the woiks."

Then both voices were raised in tension, in anger.

"I say no! I won't be a party to murder."

"The hell you say. Whaddya think this is?"

"You hear me, Brennan!"

"Shut up, you damn'—"

Then there was a blow and the thump of a body and a groan and the tough voice was muttering profanely: "Now get up, you son of a louse, and get that radio woiking. It's damn' near nine o'clock. Snappy, now, before I bop you again."

Then the voices faded and there was only silence.

Well, it was pretty plain now. Too damned plain. Too cruelly plain. Barney was taped and blinded and helpless. He could picture a tough guy with a hard face standing over him with a gun, calmly leveled, calmly shooting. Not that it mattered. In a hundred years he wouldn't care. Just another newspaper man. Wished he had a drink first. A man ought to have a drink now and then. If you have to die and go to hell you might just as well have a drink. Ought to die with a grin. God, he wished he had a drink.

There was a little moaning sound in the room . . . a low, soft, querulous crying sound. Barney tried to call, but the tape held his lips and only strange noises came from him. A plaintive little moaning, muffled and weak. Probably little Mary Voude. Probably they'd taped her up, too. The dirty devils!

Then there was nothing. Nothing at all, but the sound of night birds in the trees outside and the whispering of the wind. Rubber minutes stretched into hours. Hours into an eternity. He tried to listen for the tick of his watch. He tried to count the ticks, making sense out of them. Time seemed an infinite thing. The agony in his head throbbled loudly. He wondered if they could hear it throbbing outside. God almighty, how long would they wait? Why—

THEN, after eternal lapses of time—perhaps a half hour . . . there was the scraping of an opening door and a careful footstep. There was the dull glare of a light, a moving light. He could see it yellowly through his tape. And a hand fumbled at his eyes, suddenly tearing the tape from them—cruelly, plucking out the hairs of his eyebrows. He groaned. He wanted to yell.

"Keep still, you fool. Do you want to be killed?"

That voice, that vibrant steel voice. Who? Who? He knew that voice.

The fingers ripped the ankle and wrist bonds. They plucked the tape from his lips, violently and painfully.

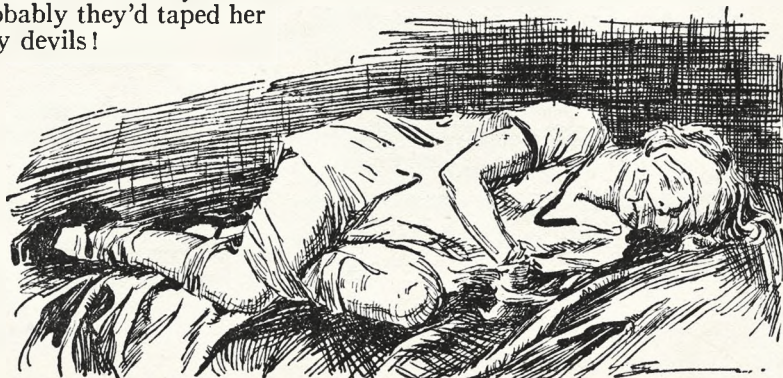
"Now get going," said the voice. "Take the girl—"

And it stopped there, frozen, while Barney strained himself to sit up. Frozen, the voice was, because of a sound. The sound was behind them. It was the sound of a door and of footsteps. There was a sudden glare of a powerful flashlight, then a growl of rage.

"Yuh would, yuh—"

Then the explosion. A roaring explosion of a shot, almost behind Barney's ear. A frightened muffled cry from deeper in the room. A choking call of: "*Oh—oh, God!*"

And a body crashed to the floor, bathed in the light of a hand-lamp.



In a corner was little Mary Voude, a bedraggled child already half-dead from shock and fear.

Barney saw the face. It was inconceivable, but there. There was blood pouring across it, but the features were there, twisted in pain, distorted in agony and fear, but still there—unobliterated. It was the face of Dr. Clyde Browley, assistant director of the Voude hospital.

Dr. Browley was dead.

"All right, mug, get on yer pins. You'll get yours, over by the pond. Get goin', now—get goin'!"

That was the tough voice behind the flash. Power, cruel power in the voice. "Get goin'—" it said, and Barney tried to move numbed legs.

Then hell broke loose entirely.

IT didn't take much time. It never does take much time to mobilize the invisible army. They do it by telephone. They do it by running in next door to call for Johnny. They do it over their own crude, or often not-so-crude, transmitters. They do it fast. They do it well. They do it efficiently. Because there is a love in it. There's passion in it. A man's job may be drudgery, but his hobby is a horse to ride. And history itself tells an almost unknown story of how the radio amateurs of America have, when the exigency has arisen, mobilized their forces, battled with flood and death, handled relief traffic, stood by their posts, starved and fought and staved off sleep, and kept their posts open. They're a great army, those hams. They work fast and they work well.

And on this night they worked. The "gang" was on the air.

"Calling CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ. . . calling CQ. . . listen in, all you hams!"

And then the conference, the discussion, the pooling of minds, the clear thinking of young brains, loving their problem, proud of their responsibilities, happy to be in action.

"Listen, gang, I got a map here. State City is in the second area, that means those crooks have got to be in the second, eighth or first area, because they wouldn't get too far away . . . they want to get money, see? So what do we do? We make a net around those areas. Make a circle of a hundred miles around the city. You fellows with the powerful stations, you all stand by. Now listen, here's the list. . . X2MVF, X2HGD, X3MY, X8JG—"

"QRV, QRV, QRV. . . Okay, we're ready. That makes about forty stations in the circle. All you hams without transmitters who are listening in, get on

your phones. Keep the air, see? If anybody picks up a signal from these crooks, call X3MKY in Baltimore or call X2ABD in State City. We do not have time to build a directional loop. But you all know the directional qualities of your aërials. Some of you have variable loops. What we want is a report on general direction. Never mind signal strength. We'll plot direction lines on a map and where they cross is where those crooks are located. We have to work together in this; no time to call the monitor stations in, no time for red tape. Got it clear? Okay, gang, get going—don't miss a minute. They might come on any time now."

That was at nine-thirty. It took half an hour to get the gang organized.

It was ten o'clock exactly when Little Billy caught that faint howling near 11 meters. It was hard to develop. It was hard to tune it in. Must be a portable station, he thought. A transciever—not steady, either. Not crystal-controlled. But it came in, finally.

"Okay, Doc, now listen, here's what you do. You gotta place up on Lake Mosher, aint you? A little summer place? Yeah, I thought so. Well, you go there, see? You go there at eleven o'clock in the morning. You bring the dough. And don't try to bring no cops, because it won't do you no good, see? And if you don't come alone, you never see the kid again. You drive out there alone, see!"

That was the beginning of it, and there was more. There were directions and plans. There was a mention of money. Fifty thousand dollars, it was. In small, old bills.

And then, frantically, Little Billy switched on his transmitter.

"Calling X3MKY, X3MKY. . . calling X3MKY!"

"QRZ, QRZ, QRZ. . ."

"I heard them. The best direction I can make is northwest of State City. My aërial is almost exactly broadside to N. W. And I get 'em strong."

"Okay, gang, start reporting."

And the calls began pouring in.

ON Little Billy's map—an old automobile map, it was—he had drawn a circle. As the calls came, he plotted straight lines from each lead-penciled indication of the stations. Slowly, gradually it grew, that chart. The lines began to criss-cross. As more calls came in, there began to appear a center of con-

vergency. And then suddenly it was clear. It was astonishingly clear. That little dot of blue on the map was at the head of a chain of small inland lakes, called the Noasha Chain, and Little Billy knew that Lake Mosher lay at the head of these waters . . . not more than twenty miles from State City.

"Calling X3MKY, calling X3MKY—hold everything, we've got it. I'm going off the air. I'm going to tell the cops. Keep on listening, you fellows. Report if anything happens. Call the State City police headquarters, 'cause I'm on my way. . . ."

And Billy Boles was on his way.

THE police? It's pretty hard to tell the police anything and when you're only a nineteen-year-old boy radio fan, the best you can get is a laugh.

"But listen," Billy was saying. "But listen, will you? There's a hundred of us hams who got those signals. We can't be wrong. Please, listen, mister. Please. . . . Barney Dow's out there . . . he must be out there. They must have got him somehow. This isn't a gag. I'm not working for the *Free Press* any more. I got fired today. Oh, please, please!"

They didn't like it, but they did it. Cops don't like advice. Especially advice from a young lad of nineteen, but it was the best they could do, and they did it.

Four cars, six cars, roared out the Noasha Highway, nosing through the black night, their lights flooding the almost primeval forest which skirted the road. In the first car, riding with Sergeant O'Donaghue and Lieutenant Sawn, was Little Billy Boles, proud and excited.

The road to the lakes was hard and rocky and there were great holes. The cars crept slowly, carefully. It was already eleven o'clock and after.

Lake Mosher is the first of the chain. Dr. Harson Voude's cabin stands almost alone there—there is only one more, that of Dr. Clyde Browley, some five hundred yards down the privately owned sliver of water. The first cabin, Dr. Voude's, was built in love. The second was built in hate . . . a bitter, jealous hate, which no one could understand. The way to the top was through Dr. Voude, and the Browleys took that way, hating it, hating Voude, hating themselves. Yet no one knew. If you want to be hated, do good to some one. If you want an enemy, be mild and kind and helpful.

And within a hundred yards of the Voude cottage the cars stopped while uniformed men armed with machine-guns plopped dismally through the mud, through the dark, through the silent whispering night.

Then that light and that shot.

The shot came from straight ahead. It was muffled, but unmistakable. It came from the dark mass which was Voude's empty summer cabin on the lake. A shot and a cry and the muttering voice. Then the men scattered and closed in.

Little Billy stayed in the car with the fat cop who was the chauffeur for Captain Brenner, and when he heard the shot there was fear in him.

"If aint goin' to be long now," said the fat one. "Keep yer shirt on, kid."

And then, after minutes, came that chattering of a Tommy-gun. Then a scream. Then excited voices. Then silent darkness again.

It had been Sergeant O'Donaghue who had fired that round from the machine-gun. Through the window, he had fired it. Through the window he had seen a man stretched on the floor and another man sitting and still another standing over him with a gun. Faces. Quick faces. Quick memories.

"Jees, it's that rat Murkis!" he said aloud.

Then he had fired, through the window. *Chatter-chatter-chatter*. Spray of lead. Onslaught of death. Followed by one hoarse scream of agony. Then they had poured into the cottage.

BLOOD everywhere. Blood of a rat named Murkis—blood of another man on the floor. Pool of light and blood. Hand-lights, pouring over everything. Man sitting on the floor, staring in bewilderment.

"Well, well, the cops! . . . Welcome home, cops. We of the Press salute you. I'll bet you did it with mirrors. Never heard of a cop who got any place in time. Remember me? Name's Dow—ol' Barney Dow of the *Free Press*. You wouldn't have a drink, hey? No, you wouldn't!"

Two men on the floor, dead. One a gangster with an altered face. One a promising young doctor from the Voude hospital. And that little bundle in the corner on a cot was little Mary Voude, a frightened, bedraggled little child with tape on her mouth, herself already half-dead from shock and fear. . . .

HAM BAND

Barney Dow was typing frantically.

"... The most fantastic story," he wrote, "ever to confront society . . . a story of smoldering hatred, hate for the hand that had nurtured him and fed him. This handsome, dapper young surgeon, elevated to the second highest position in Dr. Voude's hospital, was possessed of a warped mind. Potentially a criminal, bitten by a passion for power, stirred and whetted by a spendthrift wife, Dr. Clyde Browley had nurtured his unnatural hatred for years. And when Murkis, the gangster, came to him for plastic surgery, the idea was born in him. Murkis was to steal the child, while the Browleys watched the suffering of their benefactor. It seems impossible in this day and age that such warped souls can exist; yet the press daily reveals mountainous proof that humanity is still a victim of passion, hate and baser emotions."

That was one story. The other was simple, a bold report of a sad event.

MRS. BROWLEY A SUICIDE:
DOCTOR'S WIFE DIES AS
POLICE ENTER HER HOUSE

That was the headline. The rest of the story was the reprint of the sad, cruel, incongruous note she left behind her, a letter from a woman gone awry, a confession of two twisted, hate-maddened natures. Greed, passion, jealousy will do such things.

The story finished, Barney Dow wrote his last "30" at the end and walked to Niles Ballum's desk.

"There you are, Niles," he said. "Thanks for being decent about this afternoon. Now let's get this straight, Little Billy, here, is my assistant, right? From now on he goes on the staff, right?"

Ballum, no longer in a tantrum, grinned and nodded.

"And I'm glad of it, too," he said.

"Okay. Okay, boss. Billy!"

"Yes, Mr. Dow. . . ."

"You go to bed. A newspaper man has to get some sleep."

"Yes, Mr. Dow. Are you going to bed now?"

"Me? Hell, no, kid. I gotta get a drink—I never did finish my drink."

And many hours later when Barney Dow stood before the cracked mirror of Pat Mooney's bar, lifting his glass high and toasting his image which he saw only vaguely there, he said aloud to Pat and the empty bar:

"Heresh to the radio hamsh of 'Merica. Long may they os . . . osh . . . oshillate, an' may they never have shtatic!"

Warriors in Exile

I WALKED into the restaurant one evening to find my three friends, all veterans or *anciens* of the Foreign Legion, gathered about a bottle. The red-headed Casey was pugnacious; the thin, saturnine Kramer was very dignified; Ponson, the dark Alsatian, was animated.

They made room for me, ordered more wine, and blinked at the old brown sheet of paper I laid down.

"That," I said complacently, "is something you Legionnaires ought to look at twice, my friends! You think so much of the traditions and legends of the Legion—"

"It's Arabic," blurted out Casey. "I'm no Arab!"

Kramer held it up and inspected it. Arabic, yes; it was a letter from the hand of the great Emir who had fought the French in Algeria to the death.

"Abdel Kader," said Kramer stiffly. "Ha! I can read it. After his capture! He thanks Napoleon III for the gift of a portrait—bah! If you had one of his letters stirring up the great Kabyle rebellion of 1840, that'd be something!"

Ponson seized a pencil and began to jot down letters on the menu.

"I know something better," he cried quickly. "Miliana—the grandson of Pompey—the Fourth Battalion of the Legion—do you guys know about it?"

Casey lifted heavy eyes. "Miliana—that's the town below Algiers on the hillside. Sure, I been there. I had a girl there; her old man was in the quartermaster's department."

Ponson gave him a bitter look. "And that's all the name means to you! But to the second Legion it meant—"

"Second Legion?" exclaimed Casey. "You mean 2nd Regiment Étranger—"

"I mean the second Legion! The first corps was loaned to Spain and destroyed; then the Legion was organized afresh—"

The scrap was on—a furious discussion about the history of the famous corps. True, the Legion had been mustered out

"THE GRANDSON OF POMPEY"
tells a story of beleaguered
men in desperation—of the For-
eign Legion at its gallant best.

By

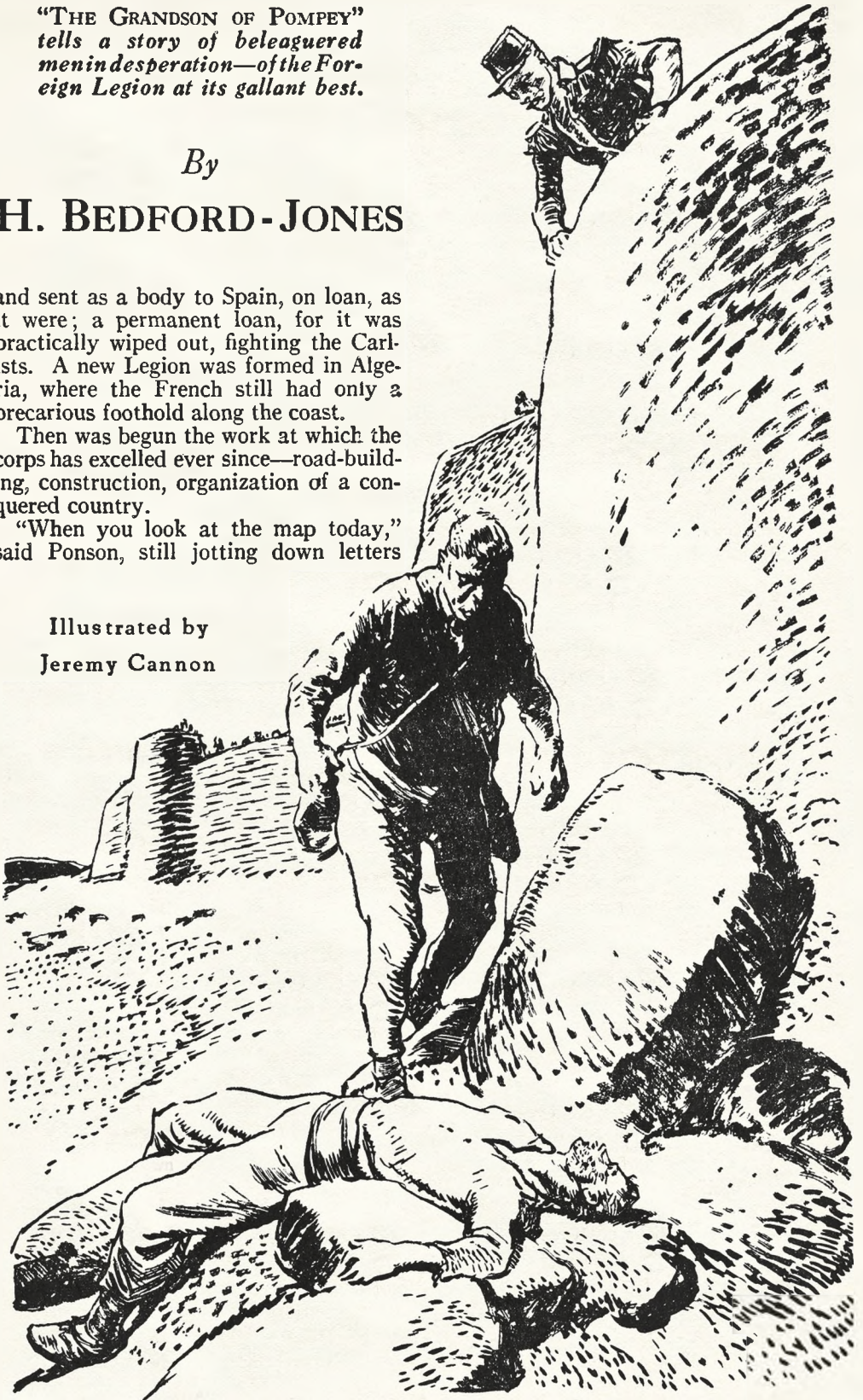
H. BEDFORD-JONES

and sent as a body to Spain, on loan, as it were; a permanent loan, for it was practically wiped out, fighting the Carlists. A new Legion was formed in Algeria, where the French still had only a precarious foothold along the coast.

Then was begun the work at which the corps has excelled ever since—road-building, construction, organization of a conquered country.

"When you look at the map today," said Ponson, still jotting down letters

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon



"There's your stone, Grandfather!" he said, gasping. "Blood on it now. . . . A good fight, sir!"



"An arrant rogue, by his looks; a dissolute scoundrel, obviously. Eh, fellow? Isit not so?"

and trying to reconstruct something, "it's funny to think that Miliana could have been a frontier town—it's so close to Algiers. But it was. And back in 1840 the Fourth Battalion of the Legion, which had only one regiment then, occupied it and garrisoned it. . . . Ah! Now I've got the thing."

He laid his pencil aside, and grinned.

"I suppose you birds would say there's no such thing as an honorary Legionnaire, eh? I don't mean honorary members of the association of veterans, like our artist in New York; but honorary members of the Legion itself—"

Then there was a real howl. These men who had fought and slaved away the best years of their life, had an intense

pride in the corps. They denied furiously that such a thing was possible. But I knew better, and nodded at Ponson.

"You mean that chap Lord Teignmouth or something?"

"I don't know his name; Milord Pompey, he was called. That's the name he went by. He was pottering around Algeria. He was one of those terrible Englishmen who speak Greek and Latin like natives. He was always poring over some old inscription. When he got to Miliana, he was in his element—a lot of old Roman cities were around there; and even now you stumble over the ruins if you walk a mile."

"Any Americans in the Legion then?" demanded Casey.

"I don't know. There were some English, anyhow. There was one in the Fourth—a big, lazy blond with yellow mustache. He was Private Smeeth; there was no *Compagnie d'élite* then, or he would have been in it. The best soldier, the worst drunkard, the most unvarnished scoundrel, in the whole regiment. He spent half his time in a cell or at punishment—"

"Never mind about him," growled Casey. "I tell you, there's no such thing as being an honorary member of the Legion. *Arrgh!* It's enough to make anybody sick."

Ponson chuckled blithely and went on:

"You know, when the Kabyle war broke out, it came in a hurry, all along the line. Back in those days, Miliana was a great place of pilgrimage for the Algerines. They came from all parts to kiss the shrine of some saint or other."

"They still do," I broke in. "Sidi Yusuf is the name—one of those local saints who sprang up all over the place."

"So," resumed Ponson, with a nod, "the first place that the rebel tribes wanted to get back, was Miliana. Not that it was much of a place—just a village, then, with red tile roofs to mark it out. It had an old wall around, which Arabs had built from Roman ruins; you could find anything in that wall—pillars or capitals or tombstones. Perched on the hillside, half a mile above the glorious plain which the natives called El Chudary or the Green, it had a swell view.

"And one fine day, that whole plain was filled with Kabyles, horsemen by the thousand. The war was on. Miliana was invested tight as a drum—and no artillery. Milord Pompey was there, and no getting out for him. Lieutenant-colonel Illens turned all the natives out



of the place, repulsed a couple of assaults, and settled down to stand a siege with the twelve hundred of the Fourth. He held a dress parade—and you should have seen it! That's where the English milord got in bad with the Legion."

Ponson started to laugh. Sober or not, he had us all interested; and his descrip-



"I've no more use for you than you have for me. To hell with you and your title!"

tion of that dress parade was a classic. It occurred in the abandoned marketplace of the village. Except for the outposts, in the gardens and vineyards around the town, and up the creek that watered Miliana abundantly, the whole battalion was lined up on parade.

Illens and his staff took along Milord Pompey to inspect the ranks. He was an old fellow with gray hair and spectacles. Twenty-five years previously, he had fought the French at Waterloo; and being a real live lord and a great man, he was treated with extreme respect. He was harsh-spoken, abrupt, and about as amiable as a bear with a sore head.

THE June sun was hot, and Milord Pompey showed up with a green umbrella, which drew titters from the ranks. And what ranks they were! The *élite* companies had red epaulets, granted in memory of the assault on Constantine three years before, which were pinned on their vests—no coats under that sun. Some wore red pantaloons; some had white cotton ones. Most fearful and wonderful of all was the headgear.

You could see red shakos, leather tarbucket hats, sun-hats with long vizors, some with neck-flaps, some without. As Milord Pompey stalked along beside Colonel Illens, he uttered caustic comment in his perfect French.

"There is a remarkable uniformity about one thing, I observe," said he. "That is, the entire battalion has buttons that are alike."

Some truth in that; the buttons with a star, the only mark of the Foreign Legion at that time, were alike. Some one spoke out from the ranks.

"And its muskets are all bright, you old fool!"

"Who spoke?" snapped the Colonel. "Advance three paces."

Private Smeeth advanced, saluted, stood at attention.

"An insult to a guest demands an apology, which I make," the Colonel said. "Insubordination demands ten days of heavy labor on the fortifications, which is your privilege."

Milord Pompey peered at the man and went up to him.

"It seems to me," he said stiffly, "that this rascal must be a poor soldier."

"On the contrary, milord," said Colonel Illens, "he is a good soldier; but he is a rascal."

"That is obvious in his features." Milord Pompey stared at Private Smeeth, who looked him in the eyes, with a thin suspicion of a smile. "Yes, an arrant rogue by his looks; a dissolute scoundrel, obviously. Eh, fellow? Is it not so?"

Private Smeeth saluted. "Monsieur, it runs in the family," he said. "My grandfather was a scoundrel; so am I. But I'm not a hypocrite, as he was—and is."

The listening officers saw Milord Pompey turn white with fury, but could not account for it; Smeeth's words had been polite. They had not yet guessed the relationship between these Englishmen.

The review went on. Milord passed sarcastic comments that made the Fourth furious. The battalion, however, did not hear what he said to the officers when the ranks had been dismissed.

"Messieurs, if we had to fight these Arabs for a month,"—and he waved his green umbrella toward the sweeping plain below, where the white robes fluttered,— "we could not have better men. Their uniforms are rags; but I cannot imagine more superb soldiers."

The heart of Colonel Illens, who loved his men and his battalion, warmed to the harsh old Englishman from that moment. Milord Pompey—so he was known everywhere. He had a theory that the family of Pompey the Great had been buried in one of the Roman cities hereabouts, and this was why he was in Algeria, or so he said. He collected all the old inscriptions he could find, and if he had any other business here, he did not mention it. . . .

During the first two or three weeks of the siege, Milord Pompey continued pok-

ing among the ruins and making a nuisance of himself generally, regardless of bullets. Tribesmen by thousands were around the village. After the first few assaults were repulsed by the fusils—1822 model—of the Legion, the siege settled down to a continual fusillade and sniping. All roads were closed; the revolt was general in Algeria, and Colonel Illens could only hang on to his position like grim death.

Luckily, provisions did not lack, and the water-supply was assured; but the hot sun and the effluvia of the Arab village suddenly began to fight for the Kabyles. Dysentery broke out, and a terrific scourge of fever swept the living and killed off the wounded quickly. The advance posts had to be held at all costs; with daily assaults on these, a daily hail of musketry pouring into the town itself, the Fourth began to shrink—and was in its agony before anyone realized it.

IN the midst of all this, Milord Pompey and his green umbrella came one blazing afternoon to the most exposed section of the town wall. A minor attack there had just been repulsed. Half a dozen dead and wounded Legionnaires were being hauled off; others along the wall were engaged in sniping. One of them was Private Smeeth, unshaven and powder-grimed, who regarded the old Milord with a grim smile and flung him a bitter word. Bullets buzzed like hornets, but Milord Pompey refused to stoop.

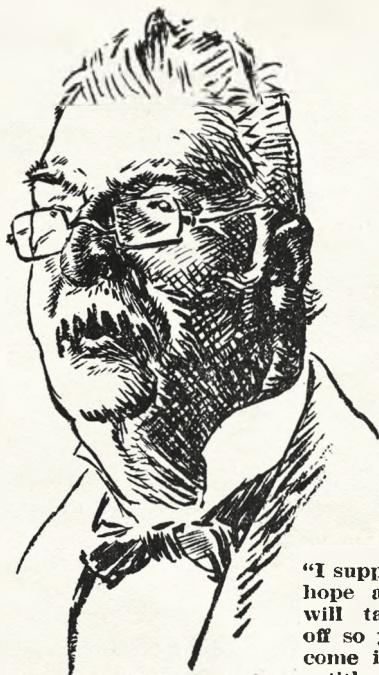
"Hello, old hawk-face! I suppose you think you're showing off, with your stiff neck and your umbrella; but you're not. You're safe as safe. The natives won't fire on you; green is their sacred color."

"Hm! The event proves you wrong." And the Milord showed a bullet-hole through his umbrella. "Why didn't you answer my letters, you graceless rogue? Why did you refuse to let me buy your discharge?"

"I'm satisfied," said Smeeth coolly. "I've no more use for you than you have for me. You're a cold-hearted scoundrel who could watch his only son die rather than lift a finger to help him or his wife. To hell with you!"

"Perhaps I've paid for my own actions," the old man said harshly. "I cannot ask forgiveness from the dead, but I can atone to the living. That's why I'm here, Reginald. I want to ask only your pardon, your—"

"My name is Private Smeeth, Fourth Battalion of the Legion, to you," said



"I suppose you hope a bullet will take me off so you can come into the title, eh?"

the younger man. "Kindly remember it, and save your crocodile tears for those that want 'em. That's all I care to say to you."

"Indeed?" Milord shook with anger. "I suppose you hope an Arab bullet will take me off so you can come into the title, eh?"

"To hell with you and your title!" said Smeeth, and chuckled. "Look at that stone down yonder, at the base of the wall below me! It ought to interest you, Milord Pompey. It seems to have your nickname on it, unless I've forgotten my Latinity."

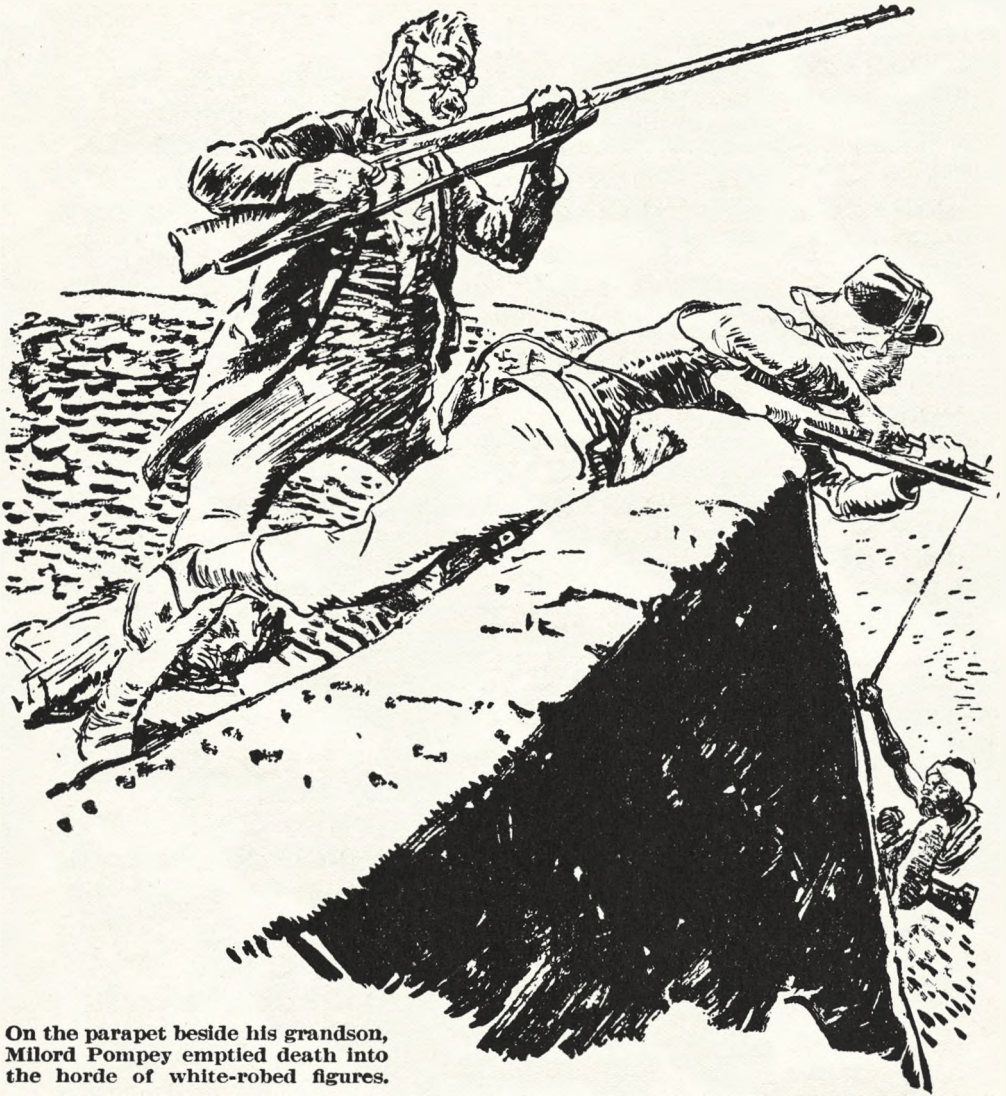
He turned his back, put his reloaded fusil over the parapet, and banged away.

"Got him!" he cried exultantly to the next man. "Not bad, comrade, eh? We may never see Algiers again, but at least we're depopulating this section of Kabilia at a good rate!"

Milord Pompey was below the parapet, on his knees, examining a great block of stone built into the wall there. It was laid in sideways, but the inscription on the stone, only partially defaced, could be made out. With pencil and paper, the old Milord was feverishly copying it. The men above jested and laughed at him, but he was quite oblivious to their sneers.

At dinner that evening—for he messed with the officers—the beak-nosed old Englishman peered excitedly about.

"Gentlemen, I've made a discovery, a real discovery!" he declaimed with un-



On the parapet beside his grandson, Milord Pompey emptied death into the horde of white-robed figures.

wanted enthusiasm, and passed a paper around the table. "This inscription is from a tombstone, a *cippus* as it is technically known, built into the wall of the southern angle. It goes to prove beyond a doubt that the grandson of Pompey the Great was buried here, and possibly the great-grandson as well. My theory, messieurs, has been proven! What a force, what a beauty, is lent the touching epigram of Martial upon the misfortunes to this family, of the man who had the entire Roman world at his feet!"

There was a polite smile, a faint lifting of brows. Colonel Illens and his officers, their circle rapidly thinning, had but faint interest in this Englishman's theory, and none whatever in Pompey the Great.

"We happen to have the entire Arab world at our feet just now," said some one dryly, "and it's devilish unpleasant."

"Oh! That reminds me!" Milord Pompey turned to the Colonel. "I beg that you'll have the goodness to assign me some post of duty. It will afford me great honor to serve under your command, *mon colonel*."

This sudden courtesy and desire to be of use astonished them, but the offer was accepted; Milord Pompey was assigned work with the ambulance section.

He flung himself into it with a devotion, a stern self-denial, which amazed everyone. He handled the wounded, the sick, with a tenderness no one would have suspected in him. As the days dragged on to July, and the agony of the Fourth Battalion slowly developed into a death-rattle, the value of his services became ever more pronounced.

The walls were held; the outposts were held; but at fearful cost. Up the long

sharp slopes, in among the vineyards and gardens, on the rocky hill above, the Arabs were everywhere. Day and night their bullets hailed into the devoted town. Only the odd chance that Miliana, almost alone in the whole country, had tile roofs on its houses, saved the place from fire and from that riddling storm of lead.

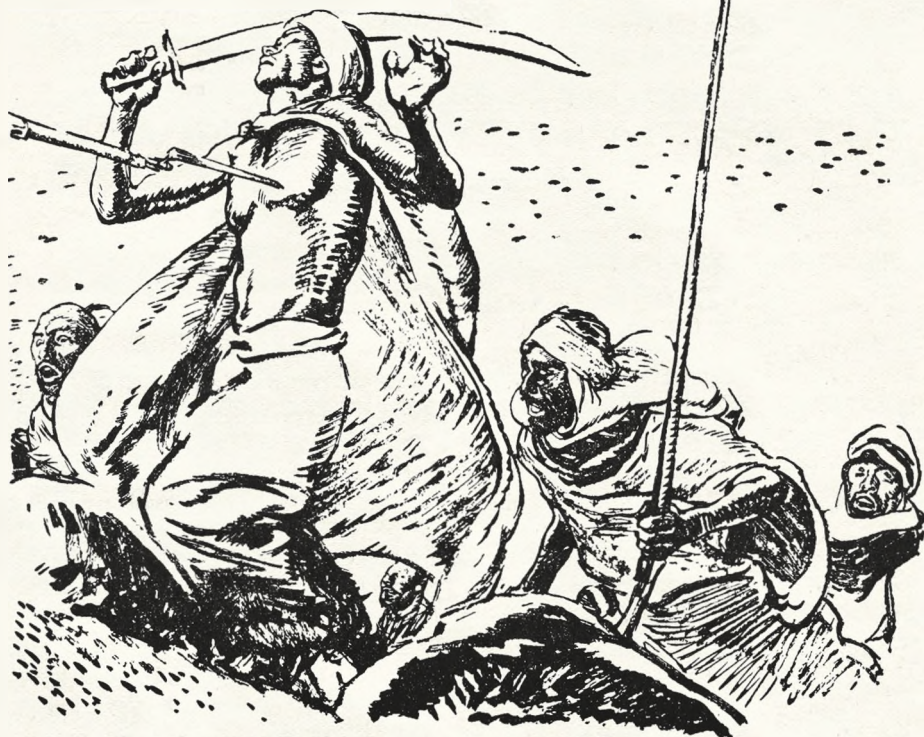
The circle of officers lessened. The battalion shrank. The whole place was one vast hospital, for fever and dysentery never slackened. The heat was horrible. Milord Pompey rigged all the available

strength never seemed to diminish; and sickness, like the hot lead, passed him by.

On the morning when he brought his dying lieutenant to the hospital, he ran into Milord Pompey, and grinned at him.

"I hear you're making yourself useful, Milord. It must be rather a strange experience for you, eh?"

The shaggy brows drew down at him. "Strange that you can jest, with death



canvas and carpets into sun-shades; bullet-riddled as they were, these afforded the sick men some relief.

Each day the outposts had to be re-victualled and relieved. These outposts, which held off the Kabyle waves, simply had to be held, regardless; and they were held. But the necessity of a tiny column going out to each one, every day, became more and more terrible. The twelve hundred had shrunk to half that number—and of those, not three hundred men could bear arms.

Private Smeeth, in all this, bore a charmed life. When an assault came, his was the rallying voice; when an officer fell, it was Smeeth who took over. The day came, indeed, when he was acting captain of his company—not much of a company, however. His herculean

all around you, sir. None of us are going to get out of here alive. Will you not listen, at such a time, to my words?"

"Yes, as you listened to my father's words," said Private Smeeth. "Not the twelve plagues of Egypt would soften your hard heart; and I've all the respect for my dead father that I lack for you. And nothing could give me any respect for you."

He turned his back and went back to his post, at the south angle. That had become his accustomed station. It was the most exposed point of the walls, but Smeeth was a remarkable marksman, and he had developed a technique of killing off the Arab leaders in every attack which more than once saved the place. This was the one point at which the enemy could come, for the outposts protected

the rest of the walls from direct assault; therefore the outposts, at this angle, were subject to daily attack.

Still the battalion shrank. Colonel Illens and a handful of officers survived. Men lacked for bare defense. When it came to visiting the outposts with food and water and reliefs, the prospect became more terrible each day. The few civilians were under arms. The surgeons, the ambulance section, the officers, took fusils and acted as guards when the little columns went to the outposts. Musket in hand, the Colonel himself became a soldier.

Milord Pompey was bandaging a wounded man under the parapet of the exposed angle, when Colonel Illens came up and stood wearily, drawn and haggard, to inspect the point. No officers remained. The sergeant of the guard approached and saluted.

"*Mon colonel*, Private Schultz has mounted his last guard. There is no one to take his place. I need a man."

The Colonel made a helpless gesture. The harsh-faced old Milord straightened up and saluted stiffly.

"My colonel, I claim the honor," rasped his voice. "I am well. Let some of the slightly wounded look after their comrades. Give me a fusil."

The Colonel embraced him—to his frowning annoyance.

Thus, with a fusil and one of the old casquettes of the Legion to shield his head from the blazing sun, Milord Pompey mounted to the parapet. The alarm sounded; gaunt tottering figures flooded up. The Kabyles were launching an attack at this exposed salient.

The fusils ripped out volley after volley. White robes littered the slopes down below the wall. The attack was repulsed. As Milord Pompey reloaded, he found himself face to face with Private Smeeth, and smiled grimly.

DAYS passed. The death-rattle of the Fourth was passing into the final convulsion. The twelve hundred had become as the dust. Over eight hundred lay in shallow graves below the wall. A scant hundred and fifty men were able to stagger to duty; yet so fierce remained their fire that the Arabs delayed a final assault. Not yet had the outposts been taken—and until these fell, the walls could only be reached at the exposed southern angle.

Untouched by bullet or sickness, Milord Pompey mounted guard with the

rest, used his fusil with the best of them; his bony old frame under its Legion casquette seemed impervious to sun or fatigue alike.

He, like those who remained, like Private Smeeth and the officers, was no more than a living shadow. With lack of sleep or rest, with continual *alerts*, with incessant fighting, the men had lost human semblance or volition; they could fight mechanically, no more. Frequently, they had to be taken by the arm and led to their post and made to sit there, gun ready, vacant eyes fastened on the ground outside. If an attack came, they fired like automatons.

They had to fight, watch, tend the sick and wounded, relieve the outposts—everything. A bare hundred and fifty of them. Half the surgeons were dead, but that was balanced neatly by most of the battalion being dead also.

COLONEL ILENS, three officers and Milord Pompey messed together one noon. The haggard, hollow-eyed Colonel regarded the old Englishman with amazement.

"*Mon Dieu!* What a man you must have been at half your age!" he exclaimed. "If you can do better than any of us today—"

A thin smile cracked the gaunt old face.

"I am merely making up for some of the things I've missed, *mon colonel*. At half my age, I might have been what Private Smeeth is today: the best soldier in the whole battalion."

"You Englishmen are magnificent!" murmured the Colonel. Milord Pompey inclined his head.

"It takes a Frenchman to recognize the fact, Colonel."

All very polite and very Gallic—but the alarm sounded. A new attack was on the way, at the south angle. Milord and officers alike seized muskets and hurried out to the threatened point. The outposts were being attacked also; it was general—a desperate effort to overwhelm the defense.

On the parapet beside his grandson, Milord Pompey loaded and fired as coolly as any veteran there. Wiping his spectacles now and again as sweat smeared them, he exchanged jests with Private Smeeth, emptied death into the horde of white-robed figures, watched the flood come almost to the very walls ere it broke and eddied back again.

The attack was broken, but bullets still came, buzzing like wasps, or hitting the

stones and sailing away in screeching ricochet. A few more dead, a few more wounded for the fever to finish off. The tension relaxed. Weary men slumped down in repose. Messengers came on the run; all was well at the outposts.

MILORD POMPEY glanced at the Colonel, who was receiving the reports, then turned as a hand clamped on his shoulder. He looked into the eyes of Private Smeeth, who was extending a hand.

"Shake!"

"Eh?" The old Milord scowled as he took the extended hand. "You mean it?"

"I never expected to see the day when I'd salute you, but I do it now," and Smeeth suited action to words. "We've been good comrades these last few days; when I said I'd never respect you, sir, I lied. I offer my apologies."

The harsh old features broke suddenly into radiance.

"My boy, my boy!" He caught the other in his arms, stared into the unshaven face. "Humph! This won't do. We're acting like these Latins—can't have such a thing." And he drew back. His face was still radiant. "Then it's—er—all right?"

"Quite all right, sir. Or should I say—Grandfather?"

"Thank heaven!" muttered Milord Pompey. Then, hearing his name, he swung around to find the Colonel speaking. He saluted smartly.

"Private—*Mon Dieu*, but that English name is terrible!—Private Pompey," exclaimed the Colonel, "I am proud of you. You, monsieur, are an honor to the Legion, and the Legion is proud of you! I shall recommend that you be placed on the records as a member of honor of this battalion—that is to say, if you'll write out your name for me."

A thud—a sharply choked cry, a slithering rush and fall. Men came running. Milord Pompey flung himself from the parapet, and with the Colonel hurrying to help him, leaned over the figure that had fallen.

Private Smeeth put out a hand to the stones beside him. His fingers slipped on something wet. He laughed suddenly at the two faces above him.

"There—there's your stone, Grandfather!" he said, gasping a little. "Not a bad touch of irony, eh? Blood on it now. The grandson of Pompey, isn't it? A good fight, sir, a good fight. Pompey

was lord and master of all the world—same as you, in a way. And his grandson died in a ditch—same as me—"

He laughed again—and died. He had three bullets, all through him at once.

Colonel Illens looked at Milord Pompey, who stood very erect, his harsh beaked features set hard; and suddenly the Colonel lifted his hand in a salute. The other men around imitated his action. No word was spoken. The gesture was a tribute to that indomitable old man who stood with stricken features.

And yet, strangely enough, there was something of a radiance still lingering in the man's face, as though not death itself could take from him the happiness that had come to him a moment before those bullets struck.

THIS was the story that Ponson told us; and when he had finished it, he handed over the menu on which he had scribbled.

"I believe they've broken down the old wall at Miliana now, in building a modern town, and they've changed the name of it, or rather its spelling," he said. "But I copied that inscription years ago. I remember every line, every letter of it, perfectly. I can point you to the records of it; the thing is real."

"But what about the siege?" I questioned. "How did it come out?"

The others smiled at my ignorance. They knew the traditions of their corps, the stories of its exploits.

"Oh, it came out as the Legion usually comes out,"—and Ponson shrugged. "A day or two afterward Changarnier's column relieved the place. Practically everyone left alive went into the Blidah hospital—but there was no surrender."

The menu was passed around and came to me. I stared at it, plucking up my scanty Latin. Yes, it was the tombstone of Pompey's grandson, no doubt of that—almost all the inscription was there to read, abbreviated in the Roman fashion:

Q. POMPEIO CN. F. QUIRIT. CLEMENTI
PA DIIVR EX TESTAMENTO. Q.
POMPEIO F. QVIR. ROGATI FRATRIS SVI
POMPEIA Q. P. MABRA POSVIT

But I thought of the grandsire, not of the grandson, as I lifted my glass to clink with the others at the toast of red-headed Casey:

"To the honorary member of the Legion—*salut!*"

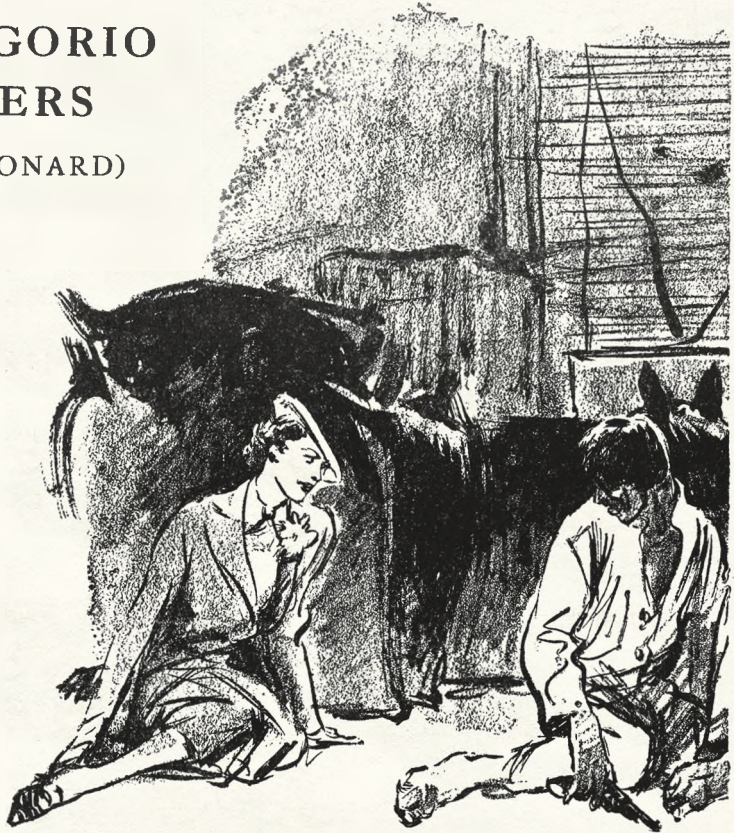
"Leather-bellies," the next story in this colorful series, takes you and the Legion to the Crimea.

The Valley

By GREGORIO
SOMERS

(JACK LEONARD)

A novel of friendship and fighting and tremendous adventure in a remote mountain fastness. "Our weapons are the only friends we have," said the old Spaniard. And the American crouched behind the machine-gun answered: "I thought I had no friends at all until I came here."



THERE'S something sad about the end of a voyage. The land approaches, shows itself above the horizon, draws near, looms up and overwhelms completely the cheerful small world of the ship. At sea, with nothing but water in sight, all things are very simple indeed. All life is paid for in advance. All life is lived with its fingers crossed. All problems are pushed ahead into the future or back into the past. But as soon as the land comes near, the river of life starts flowing once more, and it roars bank-full with a foaming flood of problems dammed up and forgotten for the space of the voyage.

Roger Phillips had felt this thing before. He'd made many voyages. But he never felt it so strongly as he did this morning when the fruiter *Tiberon* came out of the tropical night to lie in wait for the dawn before the harbor of Boca del Rio. He wasn't merely returning to an old life this time. He was approach-

ing a new life. He'd lost a country, and the chances were he'd never gain a new one. A man's second country is never quite as good as his first. It never quite fills completely that deep-rooted scar in his heart. . . .

When he heard the engine slow down at five o'clock, Roger put on his clothes and came on deck to get his first look at Boca del Rio. There wasn't much to see as yet. The dawn was coming in the East, but the land still looked like a strip of purple velvet below a sheet of dark blue velvet sky. A few bright sparks flashed faintly far away in a close cluster. Those were the street-lights of the town, burning on short steel poles among the waving fronds of the coconut palms.

The ship was hardly moving at all. Her Diesel engine throbbed idly, making a sleepy sound. Roger sat down in a canvas chair. He looked at the other chairs—a short, empty row. Soon they'd

Stronghold

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"Fire away, General!" Roger called.
"We like the music."

be filled with people, citizens of a country he could never see again. They were dull people mostly, snatching short vacations from a life of gray routine. They'd return to New York and scatter to their various homes—little warm homes with children underfoot, and salesmen ringing the doorbells. They'd play bridge, read the evening paper, fight for their favorite programs on the radio. Roger had always despised that kind of life. It was too safe, too unexciting; its future was much too easy to predict. But now he wondered with a kind of terror what the future held for him. He shuddered a little, for he did not know at all.

Slowly the day spread over the sky in a pinkish glow. The sea turned blue. The land turned green. Behind the shore a row of tall, jagged mountains caught

the light. The engine throbbed more loudly, and the hull of the ship began to vibrate. The bow turned in toward the cluster of fading street-lights, like a bird-dog pointing a covey of hidden quail.

"The Captain's going in," thought Roger gloomily. "He can see his way now. I wish I could see mine."

It took a long time for the *Tiberon* to follow the unmarked channel into the harbor. She moved slowly and timidly with much clanging of engine-room bells. Gradually most of the passengers gathered at the rail in front of Roger's chair. There were about fifteen of them.

Roger knew them all, and he knew a great deal about their private affairs. A cruise is an open forum of autobiography. Ever since the ship had left New York, he'd been hearing "life-stories" of various

types—most of them very dull indeed. That large comfortable person in the white cotton dress was a grandmother six times over. She expected another descendant to appear on the scene in Hartford, Conn., in about six weeks. That tall man in pongee was a lawyer from Harrisburg. He didn't like the Governor of Pennsylvania. That dumpy couple were on their honeymoon and rather communicative about it. There were two unattached young men and two unattached girls. They had just completed a pair of mergers; Roger was mildly interested.

During the voyage he'd talked politely to these people, listened to their small troubles, applauded their small triumphs. He hadn't found much to attract him to them. But now, as the waterfront of Boca del Rio crept stealthily toward the ship, he felt a sudden wave of love for them—these ordinary people—and all they represented. They were the United States. They were his countrymen. He spoke their language; he knew what they expected from life and what they were likely to receive. He felt a strong desire to mix with them for the last time.

He didn't do it. Clear and vivid and strong as life, a memory-vision rose out of his mind and planted itself in front of his eyes, like a colored motion-picture on a wall of mist. He saw a table covered with a white cloth. On the cloth were plates of food, glasses of wine, an ash-tray full of cigarette butts. Some of these were stained with lip-stick. He remembered that detail. He also remembered another detail. The blonde curly head of a girl was resting face-down on the table. Blood was soaking into the cloth and spreading in a circular stain. In Roger's hand—his own hand—was the neck of a broken bottle. He was looking at it in horror. There was no one else in the room, but some one was knocking loudly on the door of the apartment. A key clicked in the lock—

ROGER put his hand across his eyes and tightened all his muscles. When he looked again, the vivid scene was gone, but the passengers at the rail seemed miles away. He was not one of them. He was not an American. He could never see his country again. Boca del Rio was the only place in the world where he could find secure refuge.

He got slowly to his feet. The ship was on an even keel, drifting toward the pier, but Roger stood unsteadily on the deck, as if his sense of balance had de-

serted him too, along with hope and courage. The town of Boca del Rio was not unattractive—green and tropical, blazing with color; but Roger saw it hardly at all. He felt as if he were looking over the edge of a cliff a dozen miles high, a cliff so high he couldn't see the land beyond the brink.

AS he was standing there, half-dazed by the impact of memory and the utter emptiness of the future, a pleasant voice struck into his consciousness—a girl's voice. With an effort he got control of himself. She was standing before him, holding out her hand. She was smiling a little.

"Good-by, Mr. Phillips," she said.

Roger stammered awkwardly. He'd been dreading this moment and trying to put it out of his mind. He didn't know the girl well. He'd danced with her a couple of times and played shuffleboard once. He didn't even know her name. But more than anyone else on the ship, she typified all the pleasant things he was leaving behind. Her little straw hat and brown linen suit were in perfect taste. Her dark eyes were clear and intelligent. Her smile was friendly, with a touch of reserve which made the friendliness mean something. The sight of her called up to Roger's mind all those things which he'd loved most deeply and lost forever. She stood for his country, his boyhood sweethearts, his mother who'd died years ago. She stood for the girls he'd known in college, for gay parties at pleasant summer resorts, for his sister's friends, who were his friends too. He couldn't bring himself to speak.

She must have been a little surprised at this confusion, but she didn't show it. She continued to smile and hold out her hand. Roger pulled himself together.

"Good-by," he said in a low voice, as if he were saying something very important which he didn't want overheard. "Good-by. I wish I didn't have to get off here."

The girl's face lit up quickly.

"I thought you were going farther," she said with surprise. "I'm getting off here too. I live here."

Roger was speechless. She was so sensitive, so well-dressed, so utterly civilized. She *couldn't* live in Boca del Rio, that little port on the edge of a semi-savage country of anarchy and sudden death! It wasn't reasonable!

"Yes," said the girl with a gay little laugh, "I live here. This is my country.

You thought I was American, didn't you?"

"Yes," stammered Roger, "of course—"

Desperately he tried to say more. He took her hand nervously; then dropped it again.

"Good-by. Not exactly good-by. I mean—"

Roger was hoping she'd say something else, but she didn't. Then he tried to say it himself. He wanted intensely to see her again on shore. It was the most important thing in the world just then. But when he tried to say it, his lips refused to move. He remembered what he was—a criminal, a fugitive from justice. He remained silent, and the occasion passed by.

The girl turned abruptly away and left the deck. Only after she was gone did Roger notice—or remember—the faint hint of disappointment in her eyes. He remembered that her hand had trembled a little when he touched it.

"Maybe she's frightened too—like me." The thought came suddenly. "I bet she hasn't been back to this hole in years. Poor kid! What's she doing here? What's her family like?"

The ship bumped softly against the pier. A confused tangle of shouting arose—English and Spanish. The engine stopped, leaving a loud, dull silence in the air. Roger squared his shoulders. His emotional crisis had passed. With calm interest he looked over the rail at Boca del Rio, shimmering hot and brightly-colored in the strong sun.

"Well," he said, smiling to himself, "I know one person in this country, anyway. Perhaps I'll never see her again, but I can try to find out who she is. It will give me something to do."

The thought was very comforting. That dead feeling of leaping into utter vacancy was gone. He had an interest, a connection with his future home. With firm, confident steps he went below to get his baggage.

WHEN he returned on deck, the cruise passengers had left the ship in an eager, personally conducted bevy to see the sights of the town. Three uniformed officials were sitting behind a card-table in the smoking-room, waiting to interview the regular passengers. Their faces were dark and rather cruel. Their manner was a curious combination of polished politeness and theatrical ferocity—very common among Latin-American officials. They were drinking highballs provided

by the ship. There was no one else in the room.

Roger knew exactly what to do. He did not produce a passport or offer to open his baggage. He took from his jacket pocket a large sheet of paper, unfolded it deliberately, and laid it on the table. The three officials read it, raised their eyebrows, looked up, and smiled.

"The General expects you," said one of the three; "and there's an American here who expects you too."

"An American?" asked Roger sharply. "What's his name?"

"I do not know. He is a friend of the General."

Roger put the paper back into his pocket and left the room, frowning perplexedly. As soon as he was out of hearing, the three officials chuckled.

"That's the man," said one. "It is very amusing. He is running away from the American police; but here—right here—he will find another gringo who is also running away because of the same crime."

"Which one is guilty?"

"Who knows? Perhaps both. Perhaps neither. But the General knows something about it. He thinks that one gringo will try to kill the other."

OUTSIDE the smoking-room, Roger had started for his cabin but turned to look at the clock in the main lounge. And through a glass partition he saw the girl to whom he'd said good-by. She had entered the smoking-room from the deck and was standing just inside the threshold. Her face was pale; she was obviously frightened. Roger stepped through the door again. As soon as she saw him, she ran over, as if to throw herself upon his protection.

"I expected to be met by some one," she said faintly, "but there's no one here. I haven't any papers."

"I'll do the talking," said Roger.

"No, no," she warned. "You mustn't get mixed up in this. Something's gone wrong." She touched his arm and spoke with a note of fear in her voice. "The ship was a day ahead of schedule. We didn't stop at Las Salinas. Remember? I radioed my family, but they aren't here to meet me."

Roger ignored her warning. He took the folded paper from his pocket and held it conspicuously in his right hand. He stepped over to the table.

"*Señores oficiales,*" he said in fluent Spanish, "the Señorita is my very good friend. She is going ashore with me."



The big man turned on him fiercely. "I did not address you, gringo," he snapped. "I shall take the Señorita under my protection until her kinsfolk arrive."

The officials looked doubtful, as if their dignity forbade too quick and willing agreement. Roger waved the magic paper. All resistance disappeared.

"Why not?" said the leading official with a smile. The others nodded. Roger went back to the girl and led her out on deck.

"Send for your baggage," he said triumphantly. "It's all right."

She looked up into his face with very earnest eyes. Her lips were trembling.

"Please," she said earnestly. "You mustn't do such things. It's dangerous. You don't understand. You don't know what might happen."

Roger smiled reassuringly.

"No," he agreed. "I don't know yet, but I've got to learn the customs of your country sooner or later. I'd better start now." He looked along the empty deck. "Steward!" he called to a white-clad

figure in the distance. "Get the lady's baggage. She's going ashore."

They walked down the gangplank together. Roger felt greatly stimulated.

"That was damn' foolish," he thought. "I shouldn't get mixed up in the local messes. This is the time for me to lie low." But he was glad he'd done it. He didn't care what happened now. The worst had happened already—in that smart New York apartment two weeks ago. He wanted to forget. He needed trouble, excitement—something to fill his mind to the brim, to smother his memory. He looked gratefully at the girl's slim figure ahead of him. "I don't wish her any hard luck," he thought. "But for my own sake, I hope she's in a real jam."

THERE are many little ports like Boca del Rio, lying prostrate on a strip of swampy lowland between the cool green mountains and the warm sea. They have a little sun-flooded plaza, a few dozen streets of stucco houses, an old Spanish fortress built against the pirates and the English, a few stores and liquor-shops. The people do as little work as possible. They play the guitar with marvelous skill, talk politics in careful, tense whispers, and create as much excitement as they can when opportunity presents itself. Bright purple bougainvilleas climb on every wall. Poinsettias blaze in the dooryards. The stiff leaves of the coco-

nut palms rattle all day overhead with a sound like the patter of falling rain.

There isn't much business or industry in such a town. A man can live in the tropics on very little food, and a town can live on very little business. There's work of a sort to do, but it comes in bursts between long periods of leisure. Piles of bagged coffee accumulate on the pier, and *cacao* beans, bundles of green hides, mahogany timbers, slabs of copper. When the piles are high enough, a ship creeps in from the empty sea to take them away, and the port awakes for a brief burst of novel activity.

ROGER, with the girl at his side, stepped off the gangplank onto a pier which was densely packed with colorful, excited humanity. Gay, strapping negroes flashed their white teeth and offered to carry the bags. In little shy groups, aloof but curious, stood Indians from the back country—small wiry men in high-peaked hats and white pajamas. Several policeman fingered their revolvers officiously. Three small touring-cars stood with their doors suggestively open on the side toward the ship. In the background, trying not to look too interested, were the notables of the town, business-men and officials.

Roger ordered two of the negroes to carry the baggage.

"Where'd we better go now?" he asked the girl.

"I don't know exactly. There's a café on the plaza. We can wait for my relatives there." She still sounded frightened, but there was a note of growing confidence in her voice.

"Shall we hire a car?" asked Roger.

"I think we'd better. It's only a step, but no one walks here if he can help it. They don't consider it dignified."

She was smiling now. She looked as if she were beginning to enjoy this nervous home-coming. Roger entered into the spirit of the thing. He loaded the bags into one car and helped the girl into the back seat of another.

"To the café on the plaza," he ordered. "And quickly."

The driver smiled. The engine roared. The little car darted like a frightened rabbit across the waterfront street. It swerved around a corner and came to a skidding stop in front of a sidewalk café on the edge of a palm-shaded plaza. Roger hopped out and held the door open.

"Here we are," he said as the girl alighted. "Now what do we do?"

She laughed. She actually laughed! The color was back in her cheeks, and she looked vivacious and attractive.

"I guess we just sit down and wait," she said. "The whole town knows we're here. My people won't have any trouble finding me." She took a seat at one of the iron tables. "I hope they come soon."

"I thought you lived here?" asked Roger.

"I live *there*." She pointed to the tall green mountains which overhung the town. "My people don't come to Boca del Rio unless they have to."

Roger saw a bit of the frightened look come back in her eyes. Quickly he tried to create a diversion and interrupt her train of thought. He motioned to the single waiter who was hovering in the background.

"What will you have to drink?" he asked.

"Beer, I guess."

"*Dos cervezas*," ordered Roger. He also told the waiter to take their baggage from the sidewalk and put it inside the restaurant behind the sidewalk café.

"Where did you learn your Spanish?" asked the girl. "It's very good, for an American."

"In the Philippines. I lived three years in Manila."

He looked into her eyes, inviting a personal question which would allow him to ask a few questions in return, but the girl remained silent, showing not the slightest trace of curiosity. Presently the waiter brought two bottles of beer and two glasses. The girl started to fill her glass. Then she set the bottle down again. She hesitated, looked apologetic.

"I'm not being merely curious," she began, "but I think I ought to know what you told the officials on the ship. I didn't hear you say anything to them except that I was your friend."

"That's all I did say."

"Then why did they let me ashore without even asking my name?"

HE hesitated. There wasn't any really good reason why he shouldn't tell. The news would get around soon enough, no matter what he said or didn't say. His brain told him that, and it was the truth; but his heart kept him silent. Desperately, tenaciously he clung to silence, as a man will cling as long as he can to a bit of wreckage in the middle of the wide, cold North Atlantic. These last few moments of respectability were precious, like the last moments of life.

"Do I have to tell you?" he asked.

"Of course not," said the girl quickly. She seemed very surprised and regretful over causing his obvious distress.

"I have a letter," said Roger slowly. "It's from a man in New York who knows a very important person in your country. It asks him to take care of me."

"Thank you," said the girl very promptly, as if to clear him of all obligation to say more.

Roger gave her a grateful smile.

"May I ask a question now?" he suggested.

"Yes," said the girl doubtfully, "but perhaps I can't answer it."

"You seem pretty worried. I'd like to help you if I can. I haven't much else to do around here."

"Perhaps it won't be necessary," answered the girl evasively. "I hope it won't."

"But you think it may be."

"Anything can happen in this country. Lots of things do happen. I've lived in the United States for five years, but I don't think my country has changed very much since I left it."

"What are you afraid of?" asked Roger bluntly.

A strange, unyielding expression came into the girl's soft eyes—an expression of which Roger was going to see a great deal in the future. She remained attractive, charming, infinitely civilized; but she didn't seem a bit American any more. She was definitely foreign, though dressed in smart American clothes and speaking American English. Her foreignness was not merely a foreignness of place, but of time as well. A moment ago she had been a modern, normal young lady; but now she seemed to belong to the remote past—to an age when men wore swords, fought duels, defended their honor with their lives, thought strange thoughts, did strange things which no modern American could ever completely understand. That expression perturbed Roger a little. He forced a smile.

"ANYWAY," he suggested, "you can tell me your name. My name's Roger Phillips. You must call me Roger."

The girl laughed lightly. The expression which worried Roger, disappeared.

"I've got lots of names," she said. "My full name is Lucia Blanca Matilda Fernanda Torreón y Cordero. I call myself Lucia Torreón most of the time. You'd better call me Lucha. That's short for Lucia."

Roger looked at her sharply. The name "Torreón" sounded vaguely familiar. He tried to reach back into his memory to recall where he'd heard it before. He didn't succeed. He had nothing but a faint impression, gained perhaps from a chance remark by one of the ship's officers or a casual conversation among the Puerto Rican stewards.

"Torreón," he said slowly, still trying to remember. "I've heard the name somewhere. Your family is pretty well-known around here, isn't it?"

She turned away as if to avoid answering. She was sitting with her back to the plaza and hadn't looked at the street before. Now Roger saw her flinch as if she'd seen something alarming. The street and plaza were almost empty. A group of loungers sat on a concrete bench. A few Indians in their characteristic costume were standing a little way up the street, huddled close together. Several men in blue shirts were gathered at the nearest corner. There wasn't much to be afraid of, Roger thought.

BUT then he noticed something else. There were no women or children in sight; and every single man had his eyes glued on the café. The waiter had disappeared. The restaurant was empty. Roger realized all at once that he and the girl were alone in the center of an eager circle of converging, ominous interest. A warning thrill of approaching peril ran up his spine. He'd felt that thrill before.

"Lucha!" he whispered loudly.

The girl's head turned back. He didn't like the fear he saw in her eyes.

"Lucha," he demanded abruptly, "what are you afraid of? You've got to tell me. What's going to happen?"

"Oh, Roger!" she cried suddenly. "I'm afraid. They're going to take me away. I shouldn't have left the ship. My people aren't due here until tomorrow. Of course my radio didn't reach them. How could it? I was foolish. I was crazy. I've been away too long."

"Who's going to take you away?"

"Our enemies. The enemies of my family. The Torreóns are at war. We've been fighting the same war for a hundred years. We've always won. But now—if they take me away—"

"Tell me more. While the telling's good."

Lucha didn't answer. She looked up the street and gave a little frightened cry. Roger twisted around in his chair. Walking toward them in the middle of

the rutted, dusty street were three men. The man in the center was tall and powerful, dressed in a greenish khaki uniform, with an automatic pistol slung on a cartridge-belt around his middle. The other two were smaller and dressed in white civilian clothes. Their complexions were all rather dark, though not at all negroid, and their faces were hard, large-featured, and cruel. They reminded Roger of certain people he'd known a little too well in New York—men who lived on the fringes of the criminal world—men too intelligent to be ordinary criminals, and too violent and fond of easy money to follow honest callings.

He shuddered. Those hard faces were very familiar in type. They recalled a certain evening two weeks, and a girl's blonde head on a damask tablecloth. But he pushed the unpleasant recollection out of his mind, lest it cloud his capacity for action.

"Do they speak English?" he asked very quickly of Lucha.

"I don't think so."

"Remember that!"

He had no time to say more. The three men walked up to the table, eying Roger suspiciously. The man in the center bowed low with heavy formality.

"Have I the honor of speaking with the Señorita Torreón y Cordero?" he asked.

"That's her name," said Roger in Spanish.

The big man turned on him fiercely.

"I did not address you, gringo," he snapped. "Say nothing more until I give you permission. I shall take the Señorita under my protection until her kinsfolk arrive. She shall wait for them with me."

"How do you feel about it, Lucha?" asked Roger in English.

WHILE he spoke, he watched the faces of the three men to see if they understood the English words. No spark of comprehension crossed their faces. He glanced at Lucha. Her face was still white, but the last hint of fear was gone from her eyes. In its place was burning that strange, icy expression of antique pride, of rigid determination.

"I shall wait *here* for my kinsfolk," she said in Spanish. "I shall wait here until they come. *And they are coming.*" Her voice was calm, but the very tone was a threat, and a strong one.

The big man laughed raucously. It was easy to see, however, that the threat had made a deep impression.

"Señorita," he said, "your kinsfolk are far away. I control Boca del Rio. It was very fortunate that I happened to be in the port when your ship arrived ahead of schedule. So do not try to resist. You must come with me."

His voice was rough. All pretense of politeness had disappeared. He glared at Lucha, then at Roger.

"Gringo," he growled, "perhaps you wish to live a little longer? No? Then do not interfere with a matter which you do not understand."

ROGER examined the big man with a calm appraising eye—saw that his right hand was tense and ready to draw his gun. He seemed strong and ruthless, Roger decided, but not very alert.

"The Señorita," he said slowly, "will stay with me until her relatives arrive."

With a quick, flashing motion like the stroke of a poisonous snake the tall man's hand flashed down to his belt, and a blued steel automatic pointed at Roger's middle.

"Stand back, gringo," he shouted.

Roger got up and stood beside his chair. Lucha was sitting rigid across the table, her face white, but her eyes more defiant than frightened. Roger caught her attention with a glance.

"Lucha," he said in ordinary, low-pitched, conversational English, "I want you to scream as loud as you can. I want you to scream. Do it now."

"Silence, gringo," commanded the man with the gun.

He said nothing more. Lucha opened her mouth and uttered a piercing scream. All three men turned to look in her direction. Roger was watching the muzzle of the gun. It wavered away. He was no longer covered.

At that instant, with quick, sure motions, he did a number of things. He leaped to one side. He grabbed a beer-bottle from the table, swung it up in a high circle, then down with terrific force on the head of the man with the gun. The bottle splintered to bits, spraying a fountain of creamy foam. Roger reached forward, tore the gun from the man before he fell, overturned the iron table against the two civilians. Then he took Lucha by the arm and dragged her headlong into the door of the restaurant.

It was all over in a couple of seconds. The tall man lay unconscious on the pavement, and before the two civilians could recover their wits, Roger and Lucha had dashed up a flight of stairs and



"Who is he?" demanded Roger. "He's one of my people." Lucha smiled down at the little Indian with affection.

"You were wonderful."

Roger brushed the praise aside.

"I wish I wasn't quite so wonderful that way," he said. "Now tell me: When do you think your people will get here?"

"It depends on that radio message, on the time it reached them, if it reached them at all. Maybe they're almost here."

"Will they come with enough men to get us out of this fix?"

"Yes," said Lucha confidently. "They always come to Boca del Rio with a lot of men."

"We'll try to hold out," said Roger.

He glanced quickly around their improvised fortress to gauge its strength. They were on the second floor of a small two-story building. The staircase and hall occupied about a third of the area. The rest was taken up by two large, messy rooms stacked with heavy boxes, bags and barrels. It was evidently a warehouse or storeroom connected with the restaurant below.

Roger thumped the partitions with the flat of his hand. They were flimsy affairs of thin wood, although the floor was unusually solid. The doors were solid too. There was one unglazed window in each room, and another in the hall at the head of the stairs.

Dropping cautiously to his hands and knees, Roger crept to the end of the hall, keeping his head well below the level of the windowsill. He took off his hat and pushed it up into view. . . . Nothing happened. He put the hat down on the floor and raised his head. The street was empty as far as he could see. The plaza was empty too.

"Everybody's ducked," thought Roger. "Looks like the town's expecting trouble."

He put his head carefully out of the window to see the rest of the street. Fifty yards away, close to the building-line, stood half a dozen soldiers, rifles in their hands. A large open car was parked against the curb, surrounded by a group of civilians apparently engaged in animated discussion. On the back seat was a man in uniform, with a blood-stained white bandage around his head. He looked up suddenly and barked a quick command. The soldiers raised their rifles. Roger jerked his head back to safety as a crackling volley splintered the frame of the window.

"Be careful," pleaded Lucha.

Roger looked around. She seemed excited, but not at all panic-stricken.

"What a girl!" he thought admiringly.

"Not a dull moment in *her* life. She

were standing breathless on the second floor of the building.

"They'll think twice before they follow up these stairs," said Roger. "I've got a gun now."

Lucha's eyes were wide with excitement and admiration.

"Roger!" she cried. "How did you do it?"

"Practice," said Roger shortly. An unpleasant train of thought was passing through his mind, and his face showed it. "I've had a lot of practice with bottles, in various ways. That's why I'm here in Boca del Rio. Too much practice."

comes home from college to see her folks. She gets off the boat and jumps right into a war. Just like that!"

"What did you see?" asked Lucha.

"Nothing much. The man I hit with the bottle's sitting in a car up the street. He's got six soldiers with him, and they've got the building covered, but it looks as if they were afraid to come closer. I don't see why. They could sneak along the wall and occupy the restaurant. I couldn't touch them without exposing myself."

"Listen," whispered Lucha suddenly. "I think somebody's downstairs now."

Roger stiffened. He leaned over the banisters, covering with his gun the open door at the foot of the stairs. He listened carefully. From below came a murmur of strangely soft voices and a curious shuffling sound. Chairs scraped, and a plate or a glass fell to the concrete floor, splintering loudly.

"You're right," whispered Roger. "Who is it?"

"Careful," cautioned Lucha, "don't shoot too soon."

She leaned over the banisters beside him. She spoke several words in a clear, loud voice. Roger strained his ears to listen, but he was amazed to find that he couldn't understand the language she was speaking. It wasn't Spanish, but an odd, singing, liquid tongue, very flowing and musical. Her lips, while she spoke, seemed to move with unusual rapidity.

The whispering and shuffling stopped. From the restaurant below came an answer in the same strange language.

"It's all right," said Lucha in English. "Don't shoot."

TOO amazed to move a muscle, Roger watched a face appear in the door. It was a small, dark-skinned, large-eyed face with straight black hair cut in a bang across the forehead. White teeth flashed recognition; and up the stairs came a short, stocky Indian dressed in a blouse and short trousers of white cotton. In one hand he carried a high-peaked straw hat, in the other an enormous old-fashioned six-shooter. A heavy machete hung on a leather belt around his waist. He stopped on the top step, smiling politely.

"Who is he?" demanded Roger.

"He's one of my people." Lucha's voice was proud. She smiled at the little Indian with almost motherly affection.

"What!" cried Roger. "You're no Indian!"

"Of course not. I'm Spanish. So is my family. But these Indians are our people just the same. They'll fight for us. They'll die for us. And we're all ready to die for them."

"It's over *my* head," said Roger helplessly. "I don't understand; but ask him what happened."

LUCHA talked with the Indian for a minute or so in his own language. Roger watched with interest. The man was not taller than five feet two, but his brown forearms were exceedingly muscular, and his brown calves below his trouser-legs looked as if they might belong to a marathon runner. His torso was thick and strong, as if he were used to carrying heavy burdens on his back. His feet were shod with curious sandals of braided fiber and rawhide thongs. Around his waist was slung a little leather pouch gayly decorated with colored embroidery. His clothes were very clean, and his hat was finely woven. He spoke softly but very fast, not trying to conceal his excitement.

Finally the talk came to an end.

"What happened?" demanded Roger.

"He says he came down from the mountains last night with coffee. He saw me get off the boat and recognized me. He knew my family hadn't arrived to meet me, so he gathered all of his people that happened to be in town. They followed us to the plaza and watched from up the street. When we ran into the restaurant, they all followed. There are ten of them there, all armed. That's why the soldiers didn't come after us."

"Great stuff!" cried Roger in admiration.

He stepped forward and held out his hand. For a moment the Indian didn't seem to know what was expected, but finally he put out his own hand. Roger shook it warmly.

"And what about your family?" he asked Lucha. "Does he know when they're coming?"

"No, he doesn't. But he's heard that a messenger started for the mountains late last night. He thinks he may have my radio. If he has, they'll get here some time this morning."

"We'll try to hold out," said Roger. "Now I'm going downstairs and see what's what. You'd better come along to translate."

"Most of the Indians speak Spanish," said Lucha.

"Then stand halfway down the stairs. That's the safest place."

Roger went down to the ground floor, followed by the Indian leader. He found the restaurant almost dark. Heavy wooden shutters had been swung from the inside across the glassless windows on the street. The door was ajar, but three Indians with drawn revolvers were standing guard beside it. Six more were gathered in a silent group in the rear of the room.

"That's fine," said Roger in Spanish to the leader. "You were right to close those shutters."

"We thought it best," said the Indian with a shy smile which contrasted oddly with the warlike appearance of his revolver and machete. "We were afraid it might be dangerous to close them later." He spoke fair Spanish, but hesitantly, as if it were a foreign language.

"Is there a door in the rear?"

"Yes. We have closed that too."

Roger went to the back of the restaurant, where he found a small door leading to the kitchen in the yard outside. It was closed and bolted with a heavy iron bolt.

"What do you think is going to happen?" he asked the Indian leader.

"I do not think they will attack now. They have only six soldiers in Boca del Rio. But soon they will have many more."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

The smile left the Indian's face. He became stolid, dull as a log. He remained silent for a moment, eying Roger suspiciously.

"The Señorita will tell you if she wants to," he said at last. "She is a Torreón. I can say nothing."

"Lots of mystery about this business," thought Roger. "I've been in scraps before, but I always knew what I was fighting about." He shrugged his shoulders. "It can't be helped, though. I'm in it now, up to my ears."

HE wondered whether he had not better ask Lucha a few more questions; but before he could decide, one of the guards by the door began speaking rapidly in his own language.

"There's a man at the door," translated the Indian leader. "He has a white flag. He wants to speak with the Señorita Torreón."

"Tell him to come in," said Roger. "And tell him to hold his hands above his head."

The Indian repeated the order in a loud voice, and presently a small, dark-skinned man appeared in the doorway. He was thin and shifty-eyed. He looked rather like a shyster lawyer. Both his hands were held very high, and both were trembling violently. Roger motioned him to step inside, felt his hips for weapons and found none.

"WELL," he demanded, "what do you want?"

The little man stammered. "Señor," he pleaded, "do not think I am a soldier or a partisan. I do not fight. Never!" "All right. I won't hurt you. What is it?"

"Forgive me, señor. But I was told to speak with the Señorita Torreón, not with you."

"Come on, then," said Roger, shrugging his shoulders. He led the way to the staircase. Lucha was sitting on a step halfway down. "Here's an ambassador from the enemy," he said in English. "You'll have to do the talking. You haven't even told me what the fuss is all about."

Lucha's sensitive ear caught the faint hint of reproach in his voice. "Forgive me," she said regretfully. "I can't tell you much. Only my father can explain to a stranger the affairs of the Torreóns. That is our custom. It has been that way for a hundred years."

"All right," said Roger. "I'll go away while you talk to this rat."

"No. You must stay and listen. I want you to."

Roger turned to the little man.

"Go ahead," he ordered. "Give her the message."

Very humbly the little man stole forward to the foot of the stairs. He bowed politely.

"Señorita," he began, "they forced me to do this. They forced me at the pistol's point. Not for any other reason would I risk offending your father."

"Give me the message," said Lucha coldly. She made no motion to rise or otherwise to acknowledge the bow. Her whole attitude expressed the highest degree of aristocratic contempt. She sat on the step, looking down disdainfully. "I shall tell my father that you were forced to do this."

"Thank you," said the small man eagerly. "Thank you a thousand times. Forgive me, señorita, but they say you must surrender at once. They promise to spare your life and to respect your hon-

or. The Indians may go back to their mountains. But the gringo will be shot."

Roger's fingers tightened around the grip of his gun.

"Is that all?" Lucha asked calmly.

"Yes, señorita."

"You know my answer, don't you?"

"I think so, señorita," said the little man nervously, "but please be good enough to express it in words."

"The answer is no. You may go now."

The little man turned and went quickly to the door. As soon as he reached the sidewalk, he broke into a run and disappeared. Roger looked up at Lucha again. Her proud, icy stiffness had disappeared. There were tears in her eyes.

"I'm *so* sorry, Roger," she said very low with a sob in her voice. "I shouldn't have spoken to you at all on the boat. I shouldn't have taken your help. They'll shoot you, Roger. And it's all because of me."

"Nonsense," said Roger. "Don't you worry. I've got a trick up my sleeve. See this!"

FROM his pocket he took the folded paper which he'd shown to the Customs officials. "They won't shoot me when they've seen this."

Lucha looked doubtful.

"What is it?" she asked.

Roger was silent for a moment.

"I didn't want to tell you about it," he said at last, "but now I've got to. There's a man down here that calls himself a general. He's just a big-time bandit, but he offers protection to American criminals who've got money to pay his price. He won't let them be extradited. That's what I am, Lucha—a criminal. I can't go anywhere else. The American police would have me back in no time. So I came down here. I know this general's agent in New York. I paid my money, and he gave me a letter of recommendation. It's worked like a charm so far, and now I'm going to try it on this gorilla that wants to shoot me."

"What's the name of your General?" asked Lucha in a strangely flat voice.

"General Marso."

"Oh, Roger!" sobbed Lucha. "I'm *so* sorry. I don't care what you've done. I don't care why you had to come down here. I'm so sorry. And you haven't anywhere else to go."

"What's the matter? Don't you think it will work?"

"General Marso's outside. He's the man you hit with the bottle."

ROGER had a moment of agonizing dismay. It passed quickly, and he laughed aloud.

"So that's General Marso!" he cried. "That's my protector! What do you know about that? I pay him five thousand dollars to keep me away from the cops, and then I crack him over the head with a bottle of beer. Nice work! Just like old times. I've been doing things like that all my life. I guess I'm the world's champion nit-wit."

"It's all my fault," sobbed Lucha.

Her eyes were still wet with self-accurring tears. Roger reached out and patted her tenderly on the shoulder.

"Don't cry, Lucha," he begged. "You couldn't help it. You warned me plenty. And if that's General Marso, I haven't lost much. I couldn't get along with a mug like that. We'll have to fight, I guess. Maybe your folks'll show up before the General gets hold of the rest of his gang. I'll go upstairs, anyway, and take a look-around."

Lucha said nothing. Roger went past her up the stairs and looked cautiously out of the hall window. The street was still empty, but across the plaza he saw a rather disconcerting sight. A hundred and fifty yards away, well out of pistol-range, stood a modern air-cooled machine-gun. It squatted low on a tripod. Many wooden boxes of ammunition were piled near by, and three soldiers sat on the ground beside it.

"Good Lord!" cried Roger in dismay. "That's a Lewis 19! It'll rip this joint to ribbons!"

He charged down the stairs, crowding past Lucha without stopping. As soon as he reached the ground, he began barking orders to the Indians. But then he saw the little lawyer standing timidly just inside the door.

"Back again?" Roger cried angrily. "What do you want now?"

"I have another message," said the little man.

"Spit it out!"

"To the Señorita Torreón, please. Those are my orders."

"All right."

He led the little man to the staircase.

"Here he is again!"

"YOU may speak," said Lucha. The lawyer bowed.

"They will start firing at once," he stammered, "if you do not accept their terms. They have a machine-gun and plenty of ammunition."

"Are the terms still the same?" asked Lucha.

"No, señorita. They are more liberal. The gringo will be given a fair trial."

"For what?" demanded Lucha. "What crime has he committed?"

"Rebellion, señorita. That is what they make me say."

Lucha laughed shortly.

"A fair trial for rebellion? A fair trial before General Marso? A fair trial in Boca del Rio? That is very humorous."

"Yes, señorita," said the little man. "It is humorous."

"You may go now," said Lucha.

But Roger seized him by the elbow.

"Let's hold him awhile," he said in English. "We need time; we've got to pile something up against the windows. That chopper'll take this place apart."

He flipped a handkerchief out of his pocket and tied it around the little man's eyes. He put him in a corner with his face to the wall.

"Don't look around," he warned.

THEN he gave a series of rapid orders in Spanish. Lucha stepped out of the way, and six of the Indians ran up the stairs to the second floor. In a moment a stream of boxes, bags, and barrels came tumbling down from the storerooms above. As soon as they reached the ground floor, they were rolled or dragged to the shuttered windows and stacked up in a waist-high barricade. Roger supervised the job with the air of a master, watching for chinks and thin places. He didn't shut the door, but continued the barricade across the open doorway.

"We want to be able to see out," he explained to the Indian leader, "in case they try to rush us."

The Indian agreed with an appreciative nod.

"Come here," called Roger to Lucha, pointing to a place on the floor behind some bags of raw sugar. "Sit down there. That's the safest place now. They may start shooting any time."

"No, they won't," said Lucha, sitting down on the floor behind the bags. "They'll want to hear what their messenger has to report. I know my countrymen."

Roger looked at the girl with admiration. When she got off the ship, she'd been obviously frightened. A moment ago she'd been crying as if her heart would break. But now, leaning against an improvised barricade, under the very

shadow of death, she seemed as calm as at a tea party. A light smile flickered on her red lips, and there wasn't the slightest trace of fear in her steady dark eyes.

"Say!" he cried. "We're in a pretty hot spot, but it doesn't seem to bother you a bit."

"I've come back home, that's all," said Lucha calmly. "It took me a little time to get acclimated. I spent five years in the States, and I became quite American. But now I'm back home. I'm used to this sort of thing. When I was twelve years old, I watched my favorite uncle die from a bullet-wound in his lung."

BY this time the barricade was solid enough to offer a certain amount of shelter. Roger stationed the ten Indians behind it. They drew their pistols and laid their bare machetes down on the floor beside them. Then he went to the corner where the little lawyer was waiting. He led him to the front door.

"Now listen," he said firmly. "Tell General Marso that we're not a bit afraid of his machine-gun. We've got a good barricade. We've got eleven well-armed men. I used to be a soldier in the American army, and I know what I'm doing. We can hold out until the Torreóns arrive. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said the little man, eager to get away.

Roger took the blindfold from his eyes. Without another word he scrambled like a squirrel over the barricade and ran out the door.

"Get down," cried Roger to the Indians. "They're going to shoot."

Each man chose a place behind the barricade. Roger crouched near Lucha. His heart was beating loudly, and he was far from feeling the confidence he'd just expressed. He waited nervously. He had not long to wait.

First came a crackling, splintering sound. Then a fraction of a second later the popping, irregular roar of the gun. Glancing bullets whined overhead, knocking great clouds of plaster-dust from the walls and ceiling. The bags and barrels of the barricade began to stir and tremble as if alive. Roger looked at the Indians. They were crouching tense, flexing their brown, hard muscles, eager for action. He looked at Lucha. Her face was white, but there wasn't a trace of fear in her eyes. She smiled and put out a slim hand to pat his sleeve.

The room began to fill with an odd, burnt, dusty smell. The bullets snapped

and crackled. Some were finding their way through the barricade. A thin trickle of kerosene advanced across the floor from a riddled crate. One of the Indians gave a low cry of pain. Then he smiled apologetically, holding up a slightly wounded forearm.

All at once the firing stopped. There was a heavy moment of silence. Then a loud voice called out from across the plaza.

"Surrender, gringo," it called. "You can't escape."

Roger recognized the voice of General Marso. He crept to the doorway and peeked cautiously over the barricade. Flanked by palms of the plaza, many of their trunks shredded by bullets, he could see the tall figure of the General, standing with his feet wide apart beside the machine-gun.

"Fire away, General," he cried defiantly. "Fire some more. We like the music."

The General turned his head to give an order. Roger ducked down. Another stream of bullets beat against the barricade, raising the dust and making a great deal of noise, but doing no more damage than before.

"A great military discovery," called Roger gayly to Lucha across the room. "Coffee and sugar are as good as sand-bags."

The firing stopped again. Roger waited a moment. Then he looked cautiously into the street. He sprang to his feet with a loud shout of triumph. The machine-gun stood deserted on its tripod. General Marso and his soldiers were running diagonally across a corner of the plaza. From somewhere out of sight came a scattering burst of rifle-fire. One of the soldiers fell on his face and lay still.

Roger vaulted the barricade and emptied his automatic at the General as he climbed into his parked car. He did no damage. The range was too great. The car backed into the street, turned around and roared off around a corner in a cloud of dust.

"We're O. K., Lucha," cried Roger through the door. "I guess your folks are here."

LUCHA appeared in the doorway. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were bright with excitement. She didn't seem a bit unnerved by the experience of being under fire. Rather she looked like a tennis champion who has just won an

"No one is really alive, who hasn't some one to live for."



important match of mixed doubles. She climbed nimbly over the barricade.

"We've won, Roger," she cried. "We've won. Here they are. Look!"

Roger looked. He saw nothing for the moment, but his ears told the story. From the distance came the rapid beat of galloping hoofs. Then a chorus of high-pitched, piercing yells rang out in the stillness. And across the plaza charged a band of wild-looking Indian horsemen. They were bare-headed, their black hair streaming behind them in the wind. Each man was waving a rifle high above his head in triumph, and their yells were savage enough to chill the reddest blood. Roger drew back in amazement. The Indians charged directly toward him without slackening speed. They reined up suddenly and came to a rearing stop in a dense pall of choking dust which nearly blotted them out of sight.

The yells stopped. Slowly the dust cleared away. The Indians dismounted and crowded toward the door of the restaurant to greet their comrades climbing out over the barricade. They didn't seem savage any more. Their brown faces were smiling pleasantly. They looked like merry grown-up children, gentle and rather shy.

But Roger wasn't watching the Indians, remarkable though they might be. Two much more remarkable figures were advancing toward him and Lucha. He stared, incredulous as if he were looking

at Goya drawings come to life. They were tall, spare men with aquiline noses and eyes which sparkled like polished jet. They wore black felt hats with wide straight brims. Their clothes were soft brown leather—tight trousers and jackets with polished silver buttons.

One of the men was about forty years old. The other was considerably older, with iron-gray hair and a gray mustache. They ran toward Lucha, whipped off their hats, and both tried to embrace her at the same time.

"Ah, Luchita," cried the older man. "You are so beautiful, and so American." His Spanish had an elusive, old-fashioned flavor.

"But a real Torreón," said the other. "Just like her father still."

Lucha smiled joyously. She seemed like a little girl now, delighted to see her family again.

"Oh, my uncles," she cried happily. "I'm so glad to get home. I've been away so long. Is everything the same?"

"The same," said the older man with a smile and a shrug, "or worse. Our friend the General gave you a real, old-fashioned welcome."

Lucha turned to Roger and led him forward with considerable formality.

"These are my uncles, Rodrigo and Carlos Cordero."

Roger bowed.

"This is Mr. Phillips. Have you heard? He saved me from General Marso."

The uncles bowed gravely to Roger and shook his hand. They spoke a few polite words. Then suddenly their smiles broke through, like the sun through clouds, ripping the veil of formal manners to shreds. They took him in their arms, patted his back in a warm Latin *abrazo*. Dignity was laid aside, formality forgotten.

"Señor!" they cried. "*Amigo!* Yes, we have heard. We got a message when we entered the town. You have saved our little Luchita. We thank you with our lives; all our possessions now belong to you, and our hearts also."

ROGER tried hard to conceal his embarrassment. He stammered and struggled to speak, but every word of Spanish had flown from his mind. Lucha saw his predicament. She interrupted.

"My uncles," she said, "Señor Phillips will not be safe in Boca del Rio. General Marso has threatened to shoot him. He cannot stay here."

"Of course not," agreed the uncles. "He shall come with us to the mountains. He shall have the best we can give."

At last Roger found his voice.

"I am grateful, señores," he said with the best he could do in the way of a formal bow. "I think we had better start. General Marso has sent for reinforcements."

"You are right," said the elder uncle. "We cannot hold the town for long against the General. We have only thirty men with us, and he has more than two hundred, an hour away by car."

He waved his hand. An Indian led forward a light chestnut mare with a side-saddle for Lucha, and for Roger a tall black horse belonging to one of his comrades. Lucha swung lightly into the saddle, hooking a slender leg around the horn. Uncle Rodrigo gave an order. The Indians leaped like cats to the backs of their horses, and the little cavalcade started off across the plaza, the unmounted Indians trotting along behind.

WHEN they reached the street on the other side, Roger remembered the machine-gun.

He looked around; it was still there, standing on its tripod among the boxes of ammunition.

"Wait a minute," he cried. "Let's take that along. We may need it."

"Do you know how to use it?" asked Uncle Rodrigo. "None of us know how."

"I know very well," said Roger.

"Magnificent!"

He gave an order. Six of the Indians trotted up the street, and returned with the gun and all its ammunition-boxes balanced across their saddle-bows.

"Now I feel better," said Roger. "That's a weapon I really understand."

They started off again, but they hadn't covered more than a quarter of a mile before one of the Indians cried out in his own language. Uncle Rodrigo ordered the whole troop to rein up and listen. For a moment they heard nothing. But now from far away in the distance came the faint sound of an auto horn. Then another.

"To the bridge!" shouted Uncle Rodrigo. "It's the General's men!"

With a thunder of hoofs the troops swept on through the last outskirts of Boca del Rio and out on a dusty road beyond, which led in wandering curves through open fields of ragged grass. Ahead was a wall of solid green, the

forested bank of the river, a little more than half a mile away.

Roger was galloping close to the elder uncle.

"Don Rodrigo," he cried, "what will happen to the Indians on foot? They are far behind."

The gray-haired rider shook his head. He seemed worried and regretful.

"The fortunes of war, my friend," he shouted above the roar of hoofs. "We cannot protect them or take them with us. If they do not reach the bridge in time, they will all be shot. We had an agreement with General Marso which allowed our people to bring their coffee to Boca del Rio in peace. But now it is war."

The troop galloped on, leaving the unmounted Indians far in the rear. The road made a wide curve across the plain. Then it ran straight for the trees by the river and plunged into a sort of green tunnel beneath the tangled branches. Beyond lay forty yards of still brown water crossed by a pontoon bridge with a plank surface. Roger was thinking hard as the troop thundered across to the other side. He was still thinking hard when Uncle Rodrigo shouted an order to halt. He couldn't forget those ten shy, gentle Indians who'd risked their lives so bravely for him and Lucha in the restaurant.

UNCLE RODRIGO dismounted and began to give out rapid orders in the Indian language. Roger got off his horse and spoke to him.

"I think we can hold the General off," he said slowly, "until the rest of your people reach the bridge. We have a machine-gun now."

Uncle Rodrigo turned quickly, a grateful smile on his thin face.

"You will do it, then?" he cried eagerly. "You alone can work the gun. A few men with rifles are not enough."

"Yes," said Roger. "I'll do it."

Uncle Rodrigo shook his hand warmly.

"I hoped you'd offer this," he said, "but I didn't want to ask. It will be dangerous."

"I want two men."

"Carlos and one of the Indians will go with you. I must stay here with the Señorita Lucha. Those are her father's orders."

Roger put the gun on his shoulder and started for the bridge, followed by Carlos and an Indian, each with an ammunition box. Just before he reached the first planks, he turned to look for Lucha. She

was sitting on her horse a little way up the road.

"Good-by, Roger," she called. "Proud of you, Roger."

THEY crossed the bridge, passed through the tunnel of green and out in the hot sun on the other side. In the distance lay the red roofs and coconut palms of Boca del Rio. The road led across in aimless curves. Far away were eleven white dots, the unmounted Indians running strung out along the dusty track. General Marso's automobiles were not yet in sight. They had evidently stopped for some reason in the town.

"Perhaps we won't have to fight at all," said Roger to Carlos. "But we'd better go on, anyway. The nearer we are to the town, the better chance we'll have to stop the General before he overtakes the Indians."

Carlos agreed with a nod. He was a smaller and slighter man than Don Rodrigo, but he gave the same impression of quick intelligence and utter fearlessness.

"We must choose a place for the gun," he said. "We want to fire at the road without hitting the Indians."

Roger led the way, trotting as fast as he could with the heavy gun. He knew there was no time to lose. Any moment now, the General's cars might appear at the edge of the town; and when they did appear, they'd cover the rest of the distance very quickly. At last he reached a favorable spot, a hundred yards from the trees, where the road curved properly. He set up the gun behind a clump of tall grass. He took a drum of ammunition from one of the boxes and fed the first shell into the mechanism.

Then Carlos touched his elbow.

"Look," he said.

Roger looked quickly toward the town. At first he saw nothing but a smudge of yellow dust. Then below it he saw a row of black specks near the last of the houses. They were the General's cars, bouncing and swerving over the rough track toward the river. At the rate they were going, they would overtake the Indians a little way from the gun. Roger adjusted the rear sight for a quarter-mile range. Then he sat down to wait. He patted the ugly breech-mechanism fondly. The gun was in excellent condition.

"I hope we don't kill the man who had charge of this gun," he said to Carlos. "He's done a fine job."

"Yes," said Carlos. "It's good to keep one's weapons clean."

He pulled out his own revolver and showed it proudly. It was old and clumsy, but there wasn't a speck of rust on the velvet surface of the steel.

"These are the only friends we have," said Carlos, "—our weapons. We Torreóns have not another friend—not in all the world."

"I thought I had no friends at all," said Roger impulsively, "until I came here."

Carlos merely smiled, but his smile meant much. Roger was very happy at that moment, and a curious placid contentment warmed his heart. It wasn't a normal time for placidity or contentment, he reflected. An odd trio they were, crouching behind a machine-gun on the edge of a tropical savanna: an Indian in sandals; a feudal Spaniard, relic of the incredible past; and himself, a modern American who'd borne on his shoulders a few hours ago all the tangled worries, regrets, uncertainties of the modern world. But he felt much closer to these two fellow-fighters than he'd felt to any other man for many years. They were wholly simple, wholly loyal and brave. . . .

With something of an effort Roger came back to earth and looked over the sights of the gun. The General's cars were much nearer. He could count them now. Some were passenger-cars. Some were trucks packed with men. He trained the gun on the leading car, and followed it with the front sight. His heart began to pound fast. His muscles tingled. Carlos and the Indian crouched low beside him—silent and tense, breathing hard.

"It won't be long now," said Roger in a hoarse whisper. He didn't realize he was speaking English. Neither did the others. They knew what the words meant.

The cars came on rapidly, each with a comet-trail of dust behind it, rising high and dense in the still air. He could hear the sound of the engines. He put his hand to the trigger. He compressed his lips tightly and pulled the trigger.

THE gun roared. It leaped and struggled on its tripod like a wild beast in chains. The grass whipped about and lay down flat in the blast from the muzzle. Roger fired in short bursts, correcting the aim each time. The leading car slowed down. Then it swerved off the road and turned over and over, rolling like log on the hard ground.

"Must have hit the driver," said Roger, forgetting again to speak Spanish.

He turned the gun to the second car—a large truck packed with soldiers. It stopped. The men tumbled out and flung themselves down in the tall grass. The third car stopped also, as Roger sprayed it with a stream of lead. All along the line the cars were stopping. Some were trying to turn around in the narrow road, backing into the ditch and floundering helpless. Between the bursts of fire, he could hear faint cries and shouts, the roar of racing engines.

HE stopped firing. The road was a scene of helpless confusion.

"Come on," cried Roger. "Let's not waste any more shots. To the bridge!" he ordered. "Bring along the rest of the shells."

He lifted the gun to his shoulder and started for the river. Rifles began to crack behind him. A few bullets hissed overhead. The first of the eleven Indians caught up. They were panting hard, but did not seem exhausted. The rest were strung out for a hundred yards along the road.

"Keep scattered out," warned Roger. "We'll make too good a target."

He ran heavily with the gun, Carlos and the Indians stringing out behind. More rifles cracked. The bullets were coming closer. Just as they reached the shelter of the trees, another machine-gun opened fire. The bullets whipped through the leaves with a snapping sound, but did no damage.

The bridge lay ahead. The wooden roadway was covered for half its length with heaps of dry wood and grass. Uncle Rodrigo stood on the near bank, smiling excitedly.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "I saw it all from the edge of the trees. You did not lose a man."

Roger was too out of breath to answer.

"Go across to the other side, my friend," said Uncle Rodrigo. "I shall attend to the rest."

Roger struggled wearily across the bridge, crowding past the piles of wood. He set the gun down and looked back. As soon as Carlos and the Indians had left the far bank, Uncle Rodrigo walked slowly across the bridge, a blazing torch of dry reeds in his hand. As he passed each pile of wood, he touched it with the torch. Little orange flames licked up. By the time he reached the near shore, the bridge was a mass of flame.

"It would have been simpler and less destructive," said Uncle Rodrigo apologetically, "to cut that rope." He pointed to a heavy steel cable which bound the row of pontoons to the trunks of the trees on shore. "But we haven't any tool which will cut steel."

"We'll let the General worry about the bridge," said Roger. "Where's the Señorita Lucha?"

"She's waiting up the road. She will be glad to see you—naturally."

Roger looked at him sharply. He thought he detected a subtle meaning in the other's tone, as if the speaker were sorry he couldn't say more.

"Your niece is very charming," he said.

Uncle Rodrigo appeared not to hear. He turned away and distributed the machine-gun and its ammunition among the Indians. Roger shrugged, and walked up the road to find Lucha.

She was waiting beside her horse. She ran forward eagerly to meet him.

"Roger," she cried in English, "I heard what you did. It was wonderful. You saved all the Indians." Her eyes were sparkling with admiration and gratitude. She looked as if she were going to throw her arms around his neck. But suddenly she seemed to retire behind a wall of reserve; the tone of her voice changed. She began speaking Spanish. "The second time today," she said, "you have earned the eternal gratitude of the Torreóns. My father will receive you like a son."

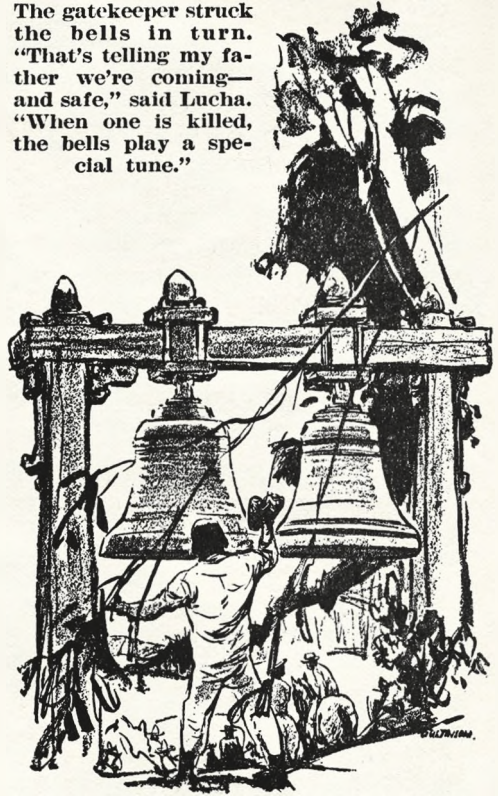
Roger noticed the change in tone and manner, and it worried him for a moment. Then he put it down to the conflict of personality which he had already noticed in Lucha. Sometimes she seemed to me an American girl, frank and open. Then she'd change suddenly into an old-fashioned Spanish lady—a vibrant, emotional, proud being, but wrapped in layer upon layer of stiff, insulating reserve. He thought he understood.

"I feel as if I'd come home," he said, smiling at her tenderly. "All my life I've never thought of anybody but myself. Now I've got you to fight for, Lucha, and brave men to fight beside."

She looked at him very seriously as he remounted.

"I know how you feel, Roger," she said. "No one is really alive who hasn't something to fight for and live for. It isn't good to be without responsibility to others. We Torreóns have a great deal of that. Too much, perhaps. My father will explain everything tonight.

The gatekeeper struck the bells in turn. "That's telling my father we're coming—and safe," said Lucha. "When one is killed, the bells play a special tune."



You will like him, Roger. But there are things about our valley which you will not like—unless you try hard. We live pretty comfortably; but we've got some old-fashioned ideas which modern Americans don't understand."

"What do you mean?"

"We live in another age—entirely different. You'll have to step back to the Eighteenth Century, Roger—or perhaps farther than that. It won't be easy."

"I know I'll like it. I like your uncles very much. You're Eighteenth Century yourself sometimes, Lucha, and I like you best that way."

She laughed—then checked herself.

"Here they come," she said. "We mustn't talk like this before my uncles."

Rodrigo and Carlos walked up the road together. They were smiling gayly.

"Señor Americano," cried Carlos, "what shall we call you? You're one of us now, and we don't use last names in our valley. There are no strangers among us."

"Call me Roger."

"Rochair—Rochair. That is very difficult to say. We know no English."

"Try it again, Roger."

The uncles tried again. They were making progress. One of the Indians tried it too, very shyly at first. The

rest took up the game, and Roger heard various versions of his name shouted out merrily all the way down the road toward the bridge. Most of them called him "Don Roger."

"If this is Eighteenth Century formality," he thought with a smile, "I can stand it."

"Come on," said Uncle Rodrigo after a minute of this. "Let's be off. We've got a long ride ahead."

ROGER never forgot that ride, or lost the remembered thrill. It was so peaceful on the safe side of the river, so increasingly beautiful and so increasingly strange. He rode close to Lucha when the trail was wide enough, happy to be near her, happy to watch her smile, to watch the little dark curls on her temples fluttering faintly in the breeze of her motion.

The road led up the river for a couple of miles through flat, open savannas covered with tall grass. Then gradually the country changed. First a few palms appeared, their trunks laced tight in corsets of strangling vines. Presently the palms began to cluster in groups, and small gray-barked trees sprouted up in their protection. Then bushes appeared, and tall spiny plants with large star-shaped leaves. The dense mass of jungle along the river began to edge out into the open country, sweeping in a curve to meet the forest ahead.

The road was a mere bridle-path now. There were no wheel-tracks of any kind. It avoided the jungle as long as it could, getting farther and farther from the river. Then it seemed to take a deep breath, ready to plunge through a black hole into the darkness beneath the trees.

Don Rodrigo stopped and turned toward Roger.

"Look at the mountains now, Don Roger," he said. "This is the last time we'll see them until we reach the pass. Soon you will learn to love them as we do."

Roger had been watching those great green peaks for some time, watching with a mixture of amazement and awe. First came a belt of forest, gradually tilting upward, sweeping up in a great smooth curve and slowly changing to a lighter green. Then came the spurs—like gully ridges on an eroded hillside, magnified a thousand times. These were green too, on tops and sides, and soft-appearing.

Then, like the front of a breaking wave, up-rushed the mountain wall—

stern, incredibly steep. It was still green—a curious gray-green—broken by many patches of vertical black cliff. A few bright shreds of cloud were drifting halfway down, casting deep shadows on the green. Up soared the slope to end in jagged peaks against the blue sky.

"Our mountains are beautiful," said Don Rodrigo simply. "You like them?"

"They are the most beautiful mountains I have ever seen," said Roger with perfect sincerity. "And I've seen a lot of mountains."

"Look," said Don Rodrigo. "There's the road to our valley."

He pointed ahead to a pass between two peaks. The lowest visible point on the skyline was at least eight thousand feet high, and protected in front by almost vertical slopes.

"What?" cried Roger. "There?"

"Yes, my friend. You shall see. The river is the friend of the Torreóns. It has cut a road to our valley. Come on."

He spurred his horse and plunged abruptly into the forest. Roger followed, still incredulous. Lucha rode behind, then came Carlos and the mounted Indians, the unmounted Indians bringing up the rear.

IT was cool in the forest, and very dark. Roger felt as if he had passed through the door of a dim, refrigerated movie theater. Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. He was in an enormous room, the ceiling supported a hundred feet up by the trunks of great gray-barked trees. Overhead was an almost solid mass of branches, vines and parasitic plants. No sunlight struggled through. In the crotches of the trees, in the loops of the vines, hung clusters of orchids, their flowers glowing pale as if they were covered with luminous paint. The forest smelled damp. The trail was soft underfoot with powdered rotten wood. Nothing moved or rustled. There was no breeze, no sound.

The trail began to climb upward. The trees became smaller as the altitude increased, and a few flecks of sun struck down from overhead. Raucous bird-cries broke the silence. And off to the left, a deep continuous roar grew stronger and stronger until the whole forest vibrated dully with the sound.

"What's that roaring, Lucha?" asked Roger.

"That's our river, the one we crossed. Up here it can't be crossed at all. Everything is stronger in the mountains."

She smiled happily. Roger felt it too. The air was clear and bracing. The smell of damp decay had disappeared, and with it the oppressive silence of the lowland forest. The horses' hoofs were clacking loudly over patches of gravel on the trail. Parrots screamed. Yellow butterflies danced in the patches of hot sun. Everything seemed much more cheerful, more alive.

UP, up climbed the trail. At last it reared over a steep ridge and burst suddenly from among the trees into the open sunlight. Carlos and Rodrigo reined up their horses and wheeled about, gesturing proudly.

They stood on a sharp spur above a narrow, steep-walled valley. Five hundred feet below roared the river, swift as a millrace. Up above stood the mountains, tier upon tier of green peaks ending in jagged points against the sky.

Roger was silent. He looked at Lucha. She was silent too, drinking in the sight with delighted eyes.

"Oh, Roger!" she cried suddenly. "You don't know how I feel. Now I'm *really* coming home."

"Come on," cried Don Rodrigo. "There is more to see, my friend. This is only the beginning."

Roger looked ahead. He was rather puzzled by what he saw. The valley seemed to end abruptly, running straight against a high mountain wall.

"Do we have to climb over that mountain?" he asked Lucha.

"I'm not going to tell you. Wait and see."

The trail descended steeply and plunged into a dense tangle of vegetation. The river came closer, roaring only a few hundred yards away behind the screen of green. Roger could feel the damp, cool breath of the spray. The mountains were high overhead by now, shutting off the sun. Finally the trail was edging along the foot of an enormous cliff, glistening with moisture, festooned with clinging vines.

Then quickly it turned a sharp corner. Roger gave a short cry. He couldn't help it. There was the river, foaming deep, close at hand, roaring loud with a shattering volume of sound. And up beyond, both river and trail vanished together into a black hole between two rocky walls which seemed to meet overhead. The trail became a narrow shelf. It was wet with spray, and only just wide enough for a single horse and rider.

"What a place to defend!" he thought. "One machine-gun could hold it against the whole world."

He rode on through the semi-darkness. After about a quarter of a mile the cañon turned another sharp corner and became a little wider. Across the trail was a wall of great stone blocks, pierced by a door with an iron-barred gate. An Indian was standing behind it. He smiled a welcome and opened the gate. The troop passed through in single file.

"They don't even need a machine-gun," thought Roger. "A couple of rifles would do it."

The river was much quieter here, flowing less swiftly and foaming hardly at all. Behind the gate stood a wooden frame supporting two ancient bronze bells of different sizes. Don Rodrigo gave an order to the Indian gatekeeper, who took a hammer and struck the bells in turn, playing a sort of slow, rhythmic tune. The sound echoed from the cliffs, and gradually died away.

"Listen," said Don Rodrigo.

Roger listened. After about a minute he heard the same tune repeated by another pair of bells up the trail.

"That's our telegraph system," said Lucha. "It's primitive, but it works."

"What's it saying?"

"It's telling my father we're coming—and safe. When one has been killed, the bells sing a special tune."

Roger wanted to ask more, but Don Rodrigo gave the signal to ride on. A few hundred yards beyond the gate the cañon widened out suddenly into a little round valley with a rocky floor.

"This is what we call the vestibule," said Lucha.

Roger had given up trying to ask questions. He followed across the "vestibule" to another high ridge. The river led once more through a narrow cañon, not as long as the first. It passed another guarded gate and another set of bells.

Then all at once the trail came out in the open. Roger stopped. Carlos and Rodrigo wheeled their horses around.

"Welcome, Don Roger," they cried in unison, "to the Valley of the Torreóns!"

FOR a full minute Roger couldn't say a word. He was too astonished and overcome. A wide, flat cultivated valley lay ahead; it was about five miles across, nearly round, and surrounded on all sides by vertical cliffs of black rock. It was sprinkled with little villages, dotted with groves of trees. The river meandered in

silvery bends through the fields, branching and twisting. Everything was marvelously green and fertile. Herds of cattle cropped the rich grass. Some of the fields were white with ripe cotton, others bright green with young corn, others yellow with ripening wheat. It was a scene of inexpressible order and well-being, all the more astonishing after the sloth of Boca del Rio and the wildness of the mountains in between.

"So this is where you live!" he said to Lucha, at last.

"Yes," she answered. "That's our house over there." She pointed to a cluster of gray stone buildings half a mile away. "My father owns a lot of houses. He'll ask you to live in one of them. You can stay as long as you like—the rest of your life, if you want to."

"Will your father let me help—let me work?"

"You've helped enough already; but there's plenty of work to do."

"And you, Lucha? You're going to stay here?"

"Always, I think."

Roger took a deep breath, filling his lungs with the clear mountain air, the fragrance of growing things.

"It's too perfect," he said. "It's a paradise. I can't believe it."

He looked at Lucha with a boyish smile of gratitude and affection. She didn't smile back. She seemed a little sad and serious.

"I'm afraid you won't like all our customs," she said slowly. "My father's rather old-fashioned."

"I don't care if he is. So much the better. I had to run away from the modern world. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned myself."

DON CARLOS was sitting his horse a few yards ahead. He waved his hand and shouted loudly. His shout was answered from below. A single horseman was riding toward them.

"Who's that?" asked Roger.

"That's my father's adopted son," said Lucha. "He brought him back from Spain twenty-five years ago. His name is Ignacio Lopez. I haven't seen him in six years. He's been studying in California. I hope you're going to like him."

"Of course I will," said Roger confidently.

But something in the tone of Lucha's voice made him turn and look at her sharply. Her cheeks were dead white. Her eyes were hard with determination,

as if she were trying to conceal her thoughts from all the world.

"What's the matter, Lucha?" he demanded. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Ignacio and I are engaged, Roger," she said slowly. "We are engaged to be married. And engagements are never broken here."

ENGAGED! Engaged to be married! And engagements are never broken here!"

The words echoed back and forth in Roger's brain. His eyes were still full of the beauty of the valley, but it didn't seem real any more. Now it was only a painted picture, a dream, a vaguely promised land beyond his reach.

They say that a man's whole life comes back at the moment of death, a vivid parade of good deeds and evil ones, of joys and sorrows. This happened to Roger, in a sense. He had just been born again—that morning when he started fighting Lucha's battles. He had just crossed the threshold of a new life, a bright, glorious life that centered closely around Lucha. Now that life had died.

Flooding into its place came a wave of depressing memories: He remembered the wasted years, the heedless, violent years of his early manhood. He remembered the cynical faces of his New York associates. He remembered most vividly of all the curly blonde head of the murdered girl in his New York apartment. No use pretending he didn't do it, even if he didn't remember striking the actual blow. He was drunk, crazy, desperate. He remembered what he was—a criminal waiting for capture, waiting for trial, waiting for death. . . .

Then he felt a light touch on his arm.

"Roger," said Lucha, "look at me."

He turned. There were tears in her eyes. She had followed all his thoughts. "You're sad, Roger," she said softly. "You're discouraged. You're thinking about the trouble that made you leave the United States."

"Yes. You made me forget it for a whole day."

"Keep on forgetting—please! You're not a criminal, Roger. Maybe you made a mistake, but that's all over now. You're brave and loyal and good. I don't believe what you did was really wrong."

"It was very wrong. I'll tell you about it."

"No. Not now. Not ever! Don't ever tell me. I don't want to know."

"Oh, Lucha," blurted Roger, "are you really engaged to this man?"

"Yes."

That was all she said with her lips, but her eyes said a great deal more. He had known her only a day. It seemed like a year, or a dozen years, and now she was stepping out of his life, leaving a glance behind which showed she didn't want to go.

"I don't deserve to know you," cried Roger. "I don't deserve to know you at all."

"Yes, you do. We're going to have a lot of good times together. But my marriage to Ignacio is something else. It's a duty to my father, and to the people that depend for their lives upon him. You *must* understand, Roger. This valley is a feudal kingdom. I'm a sort of princess. I've got to marry the man my father has chosen."

Roger said no more. But he rather wondered at himself—wondered why he didn't reject with violence the very idea of Lucha's marriage to another. He wanted her. He wanted her more than he'd ever wanted anything before. Why didn't he fight—or plan at least to fight?

Slowly he saw the reason why. He had loved women before, the girl of the blonde curls, for instance. But that had been love born of masculine vanity and pride in a choice, much desired possession. Lucha was different. She aroused emotions he never knew he possessed. She was beautiful and desirable, yes; but that was not all, or even very much. She was also loyal, steadfast, devoted to her own high ideals. In a flash he saw the whole truth. He loved her for the very qualities which kept her from being his.

ROGER straightened his shoulders and looked down the trail at Ignacio Lopez, a small approaching figure now not more than a hundred yards away.

"I hope he's worthy of you," he said slowly.

Lucha didn't answer. Carlos and Rodrigo spurred their horses forward.

"Come on, Roger," said Lucha. "Be nice to him—please."

"Of course I will."

She gave him a grateful smile. They trotted ahead to join the three men. Ignacio Lopez was a handsome young man of medium complexion and average height, dressed in a white riding-habit

of foreign manufacture, and wearing an expensive Panama hat. In contrast to Lucha's two uncles, there was nothing quaint or unusual about his clothing or manner. He might have stepped directly out of an American fashion magazine.

"Hello, Lucha," he called. "How does it feel to come home?"

HE spoke perfect English. A little too perfect, in fact. It had a colloquial, collegiate flavor which didn't fit the background.

"It feels very nice," said Lucha. They didn't kiss or even shake hands. "Did you learn a great deal in California?"

"I learned the name of every damned rock in the world. I'm a qualified mining engineer. Now your father expects me to sit around here the rest of my life, and forget all I know."

"Let's speak Spanish, Ignacio," said Lucha.

Her voice expressed a mild rebuke. Ignacio shrugged, and the conversation turned to Spanish. Roger was introduced by Rodrigo, who began a glowing account of the events in Boca del Rio, Carlos contributing a few details, and Lucha telling what happened after she left the ship. Roger was the hero of the whole affair, and so he sat silent on his horse, listening to the tale and watching the face of Ignacio Lopez.

He was rather puzzled by what he saw there. He couldn't detect a single spark of gratitude, of jealousy, of incredulity, or any other normal human emotion. The young man's face remained a practical blank. He made small polite remarks from time to time to show he was listening, but they didn't ring true. He seemed preoccupied, to be thinking about something else.

"Say!" thought Roger. "That fellow's got something on his mind."

He watched with greater attention. Ignacio was certainly thinking very hard behind his mask of indifference. He seemed to be taking each bit of information as it arrived, feeding it into his calculations, and drawing definite, unspoken conclusions. Once or twice he glanced quickly at Roger, saw his eyes were watching, and glanced away.

"I don't trust him," decided Roger with impulsive conviction. "He's up to some damn' thing."

They rode on toward the house of the Torreóns.

Black Horses



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

HEAT—dry, glaring and windless. The scorched waste of Mendoza Flat stretched to a level horizon, above which came another horizon of low, jagged, dark-blue mountains.

The herd streamed slowly on in a great cloud of dust, approaching the weathered corrals of the X Bar Y. There was the din of bawling cows, calves, steers, each to its own note; and sometimes came the high trumpeting of a bull. Now and then rose the shrill, wearied yelp of a cowboy.

A dust-gray horse swung out from the cloud, on its back a withered, dust-powdered old man who loped ahead of the point, tiredly slapping his quirt against his tattered chaps. He shouted hoarsely from a dry throat:

“Ho-o-old up! Ho-o-old up!”

The point stopped. Like the current of a slow river, the swing came on and pressed against it. Last came the drag—mostly shaggy, big-paunched calves that stumped doggedly on short legs, heads hanging and mouths open. Cows turned, bawling brokenly for calves lost in the press; the herd was stopped, and began milling slowly.

Men, eyes red-rimmed from the biting dust, shouted to each other above the din. The old man called to a passing rider:

“Sam, would you mind holdin’ the cut awhile?”

This, then, was an old-fashioned outfit; there were no orders to cowboys, merely requests—perhaps a relic of the day when the hoarse voice of Judge Colt made all men equal here in Arizona.



A most unusual and deeply moving story of the old West—and the new.

By JAY LUCAS

There began the usual business of working a herd. A long-legged calf went flying; behind him a racing pony, a whirling loop. The calf was dragged back to the herd—he went in stiff hops, stiff legs thrust far out, strangling; this was his first lesson in bunch-breaking.

Now the old man was wearily mopping his lined face with a red, white-dotted handkerchief. Hard day—never seen a bunch more ornery to drive. But you could hardly blame 'em—shore hot, hotter'n the hinges of hell!

Another man, thick-set, perhaps forty, came loping up on a sweat-streaked sorrel. He spoke gently:

"Dad, we can handle 'em all right now; you better go up to the house an' rest."

"Believe I will, son—believe I will. I'm tired—tired. Reckon I'm gettin' a mite old to stand this work."

Old Ernie Tompkins turned his horse quickly; that pain in his chest had

caught him again, and he did not want Clay to see his face. Of course, all that ailed him was that dust and heat. . . .

He did not unsaddle at the corrals; he did not want to walk to the house—he was tired, very tired. Some of the young squirts could unsaddle for him when they got through working the herd. They wouldn't mind, being as how he was getting sort of old. They were good kids—not like the cowboys of the old days, of course, but good kids, anyway.

STIFFLY he swung from his shabby saddle, dropped the reins, and slowly climbed the three steps to the wide old-fashioned porch. He kicked off his tattered chaps—bat-wings—and hung them on a nail against the wall.

He left his spurs on—ancient spurs, silver-mounted, with straight shanks. His dusty boots were tiny and trim; he hadn't walked a mile since he was a boy

back in Texas. Big Bend Country of Texas; shore used to be wild. Bad men a-plenty! They said it wasn't so dog-gone' tame back there yet! Likely not, likely not—they kind of men didn't *get* tame; they could only get shot.

He eased himself slowly into a raw-hide-bottom rocker. He reached to his shirt pocket and drew out a long piece of thin corn-shuck, trimmed with scissors. He tapped a little stream of tobacco along it and rolled a cigarette. Funny how he'd got back to corn-shuck cigarettes this last year or so; nobody else smoked them any more. Used to smoke them back there in the Big Bend Country when he was a kid—him and Steve.

He inhaled deeply. Dang it! There went that pain in his chest again. That dust was enough to give anybody pains in the chest.

He stiffly crossed his thin knees, and sat staring down at his boots. He wore them, of course, with the tops outside his trousers; it was them movies made in California that had most of the young fellers wearing their boots inside their pants now—and them crazy wide cuffs on their pants. And the big feet most of 'em had now—you could see plain how much *they'd* walked. Only a few, like Clay, reared on cow outfits, had small feet and wore their boots outside.

Old Ernie surveyed a foot. He wore fives. Steve had used to wear fives too. They'd sometimes swap boots, and sometimes they'd try which could sneak out of bed first in the morning to grab the best pair. . . . Steve—Steve.

He slowly raised his head, and looked out across the corrals to where the boys were working his herd. At that distance, his eyes were still almost as keen as they had been fifty, sixty years ago. Course, he didn't see things close as well as he used to, but outside of that—

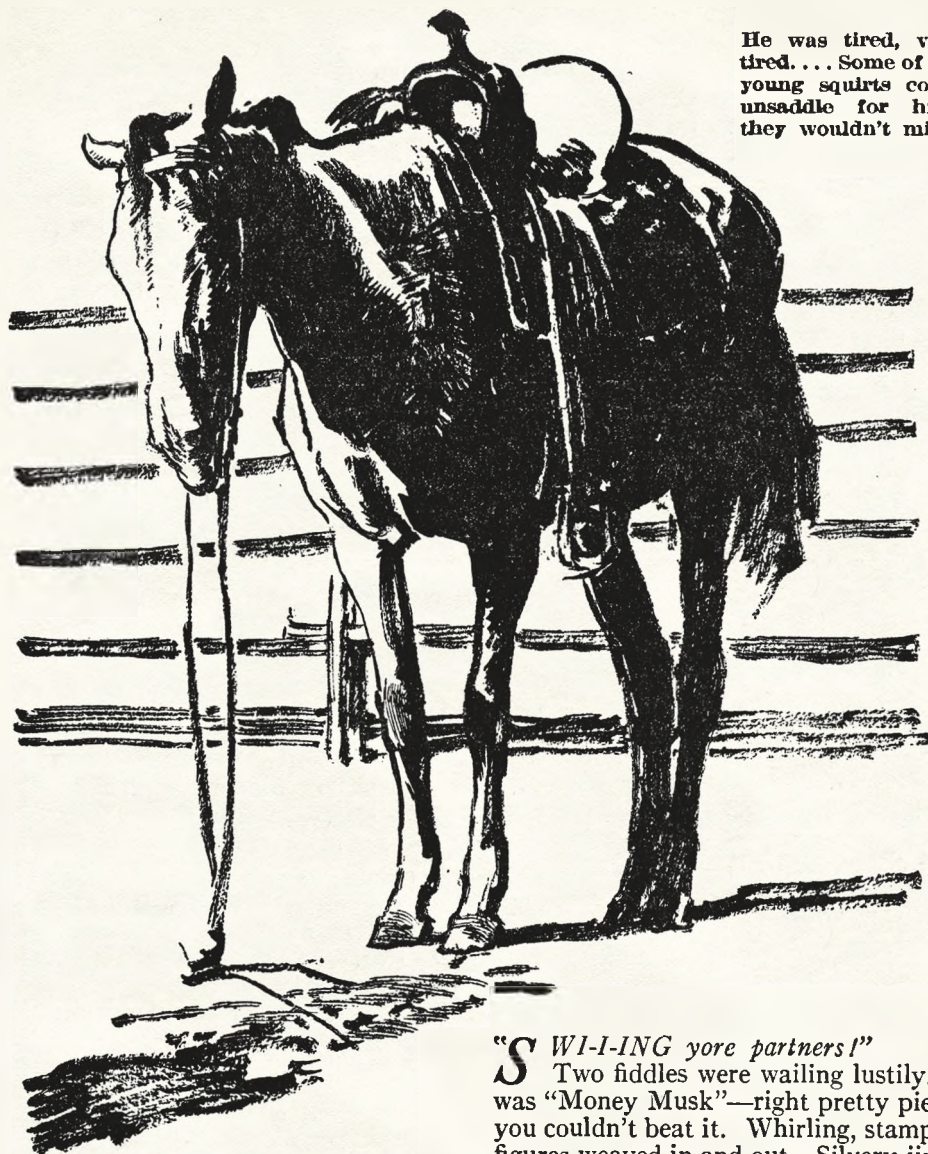
Seventy-two—seventy-two last Friday—and still able to make a hand. Not many men could say that! Course he couldn't top a bronc' any more, and it was none of his business to flank calves—that was for the young squirts; but he could still make a hand. He was proud of it; he knew people talked about it—"Seventy-two, and look at him head that calf!" Yes sir, and still ran his little outfit without a foreman.

Little outfit? Well, one had to admit that it wasn't so little, at that—not big exactly, but comfortable, comfortable. And danged good white-faces. Funny, sorter, to look back on the long-legged,



long-horned devils he'd started out with—wild as jackrabbits, and you might as well try to get beef on a race-horse. No money in critters of that kind, but he'd had the range when white-faces began to come into the country—English cattle, they used to call them at first.

See Clay, heading that cow back into the herd! Good rider, and a good boy; he had a good head for cattle. Clay was well-educated too; clear up to the eighth grade, and could read pretty near any-



He was tired, very tired. . . . Some of the young squirts could unsaddle for him; they wouldn't mind.

thing, and write fine letters to buyers. Jim, the young one, was even smarter, even if he hadn't gone to school quite as much as Clay; he was range-boss for the big Tyson Cattle Company and drew down a fine check every month. Uh-huh—both his boys was smart; he was lucky.

Uh-huh—good boys; didn't care about anything only working with cattle; they'd got it from him. So many young fellers nowadays was so rattle-headed; looked like all they wanted was to listen to that danged thing they called a saxophone. Squealed like a stuck hog, it did—call *that* music? Now, a good fiddler, and another feller with good lungs to call the figgers—

Old Ernie's head had jerked up once; it was drooping again, slowly. His eyes were closing.

S WI-I-ING yore partners!"

Two fiddles were wailing lustily. It was "Money Musk"—right pretty piece; you couldn't beat it. Whirling, stamping figures weaved in and out. Silvery jingle of spur rowels, swish of long skirts. Nell was shore pretty tonight—right pretty!

"Hi-yuh, Nell!"

Swish and swing of voluminous skirts, tight bodices heaving, cheeks pink from the fast dance. Gosh, but Nelly Greaves was *pretty*—and good sense too, which all girls that pretty didn't have. And how she could dance!

"Nell, yo're shore dancin' tonight!"

"Now, Ernie!"

Was she really mad at him, or only acting? Her face had turned pinker, and she had looked away. She looked back once, quickly, and then away again. Dance! Nothing could dance like Nell's eyes, or shine like 'em. Huh? He was thinking things like a poetry feller!

"Nell, let's show that Badger Creek bunch real *dancin'!*"

Real dancing was faster dancing. Wild whirl. Small feet twinkling beneath her long skirt. Her laugh of pure joy.

Excitement, high spirits. Now and then the shrill, high-pitched yelp of a cowboy ringing against the rafters of the little schoolhouse. Pure joy of life, of course; the most rowdy of them would not think of going to a dance when he'd had a drink or two—not among decent girls. Why, if he did, a girl wouldn't touch him even to slap his face; the other boys would attend to him, plenty!

A soft voice:

"Ernie, yo're no slouch at dancin' yore-self."

Shyly, with a single flash of those clear blue eyes. And what pretty yellow hair she had!

The music was over, and he had taken Nell back to her place. A hand tapped him quietly on the shoulder from behind.

"Ernie, come outside. I want to talk to you."

That was Steve—never was a partner like Steve Mullins. Raised together in the Big Bend; ran away together to join a herd going "up the trail." Panhandle—Dodge City—Montana. Out to the wild Arizona Territory, side by side, singing and laughing as they rode, and sometimes getting into tomfoolery as young fellers will—did many things they shouldn't. Working on one outfit after another; summers passing, and winters. Steve six feet tall—handsome cuss—and wore the same size boots as his shorter partner. And could Steve fork a bronc!

"Want to talk to you."

Walking across the floor, side by side, him and Steve. Nell staring after them with wide, scared eyes, her face white and one hand up to her heaving bodice. Out through the door, out into the clear cold moonlight where buckboards stood, and horses with saddles high on their humped backs. Steve! Steve!

HUH? Dang' near fell out of his chair! Must have been sort of asleep. And—dreaming about Steve. Funny, he had dreamt about Steve so much this last year or so; seemed like Steve was near him. But the dream always stopped before—

That wouldn't do; had to think about something else.

Wonder if that young college feller was coming back to stay with him again this summer? He had an invite, and shore was welcome. Nice sort of young feller; too bad if he had T. B., like the

doctors thought he might be getting. Liked to sit there on the porch and read to an old cattleman that was just a mite shy on book-learning. Could even read things in Latin and Greek—read it slow, because he had to say it in English.

There was Castor and Pollux—he remembered them well because the book had a colored picture of them. On two fine white horses with sort of silvery manes and tails. Right pretty horses, looked like Arabs. No other horse could ever be as pretty as an Arab, even if they were kind of small—teeny little muzzles, and slim legs; pretty as spotted pups. Two fellers riding side by side on white horses—side by side, like him and Steve. . . . Huh! Mustn't think of Steve.

That young feller said the old Romans used to believe in 'em. Well, it was poor business to make fun of any man's religion—who knew the truth about that sort of thing? Some people stuck up their noses at the Mormons, or used to a few years ago; but what if they *had* found them tablets of gold like they said? Anyway, they'd turned out to be mighty fine people; you couldn't beat 'em.

Elysium Fields? Wasn't that what the young college feller had called it? Fields—any cattle in 'em? Or cowboys? Or old stove-up cowboys? Golden harps—that didn't seem like much fun, somehow; a place with horses would be better. Back in the old days, when Steve—

"**W**ELL, Ernie?"

A big man with a big cigar in one corner of his mouth was speaking to him across a battered desk.

"Well, I—I reckon I *might* take that sheriff job, but I got to get a hundred a month. I—uh—I'm savin' a little stake to get an outfit o' my own."

"Batchin' outfit, Ernie?"—gravely.

"Aw, shet up, Judge—you gimme a pain!"

"Haw—haw! Well, ol' man Greaves' gal is right pretty."

"Aw, you gimme a pain! Do I get the hundred?"

"You danged Jew! Oh, well—pin this on yore chest."

Now, that sheriff job—

"Well, what you goin' to do about it, Ernie?" Coolly, sarcastically.

The gaunt, tow-headed young man with the dissipated face was standing opposite him on the board sidewalk, grinning down at him tolerantly because he was so short. Whitey Remsen was *bad*; he'd killed Sheriff Cox, whom nobody had

wanted to replace until Judge Laviter had talked to Ernie; and they said Whitey'd shot Walter Nunn just to see him kick.

"I'm a-goin' to see that you git out o' town in five minutes, Whitey. That rough stuff don't go here no more."

"Oh! Think yo're tough since you got that tin badge?"

"I don't think nothin'—only that yo're a-gittin' out, an' quick."

"What if I don't go, Ernie?"

"We-ell, *one* of us is goin', Whitey—feet first, if we have to."

A flash of hands. . . . Whitey's gun was clattering on the boards of the sidewalk, and Whitey was holding his right elbow with his left hand; he'd never make another fast draw. Blood was streaming through Whitey's fingers and dripping down the front of his trousers. . . .

And there went Whitey, riding down through the thick dust of the street, a dirty bandanna tied around his arm. Yeah—that was right; go after the toughest one first, and then the others wouldn't give him no bother. . . .

"Spike, don't you think the climate o' Californy might be what you need awhile?"

"Reckon it might be, at that, Ernie—yo're the doctor."

Slim, good-looking Spike was grinning at him recklessly, carelessly, with a brown cigarette dangling from his mouth. Spike Driscoll was a good kid, only that he'd got in with the wrong bunch.

"Have a drink with me, Spike, before you go—jest to show there's no hard feelin's?"

"Hell, yes. Yo're all right, Ernie. If I was half as slick with a gun as you are—"

And there went Spike Driscoll, riding off, whistling. Heck, he'd straighten out yet—he'd meant what he promised back there in the saloon.

OUCH!
That pain in his chest had woke him up—sort of shooting around there inside him, not in one spot. Course it was only the dust—that dust all day, and the heat, and working so hard, would give anybody pains in the chest. Well, he hadn't been dreaming about Steve that time; that was a good thing. Some day he'd finish that dream about Steve; and when he did— No, he must never finish that dream about Steve—never! Because if he did— Well, he *must* not finish it. Have to stop thinking about him, even—about Steve and that night.

What was it he'd been figgering about? Oh, yes—religion, and that sort of thing.

TAKE them Hopi Indians with their snake-dance: he'd never seen anybody look more plumb religious than the snake priests. They'd go dancing along nearly naked, with big live rattlesnakes in their mouths—*hop-hop* one foot, *hop-hop* the other. Dang' near naked, with gray-fox skins hanging down behind; the gray fox was sacred with them, like the grizzly bear. All painted up with colored mud. Sounded crazy, but shore powerful solemn and religious, even to a white man that didn't understand a word of the chants. And two solemn-faced gray-haired old priests helping the old, old medicine-man, who was so old that he was all dried-up and blind, and stooped away over.

That snake-dance was to bring rain to their little patches of fields miles apart on the desert—a Hopi would run twenty miles and back in a day to look after a little field no bigger than the floor of a small bedroom. Little fields with a flat rock stuck up to shelter each young melon vine from the desert sun; why anything grew there, or how the Hopis knew where to plant, no white men ever could figure out—no more than they could figure out why a snake priest never died of snake-bite; that had the doctors puzzled, but they never could find out.

Uh-huh—them snake priests were so religious, and believed it so much, that one of them wouldn't open his eyes or miss a step even when a big rattler bit him clear through the cheek into the tongue. Could anything be wrong, when anybody believed it so strong as them priests? And if they *were* wrong, believing it that way, then everybody must be wrong and there was nothing— But that didn't sound right: must be *something*. . . .

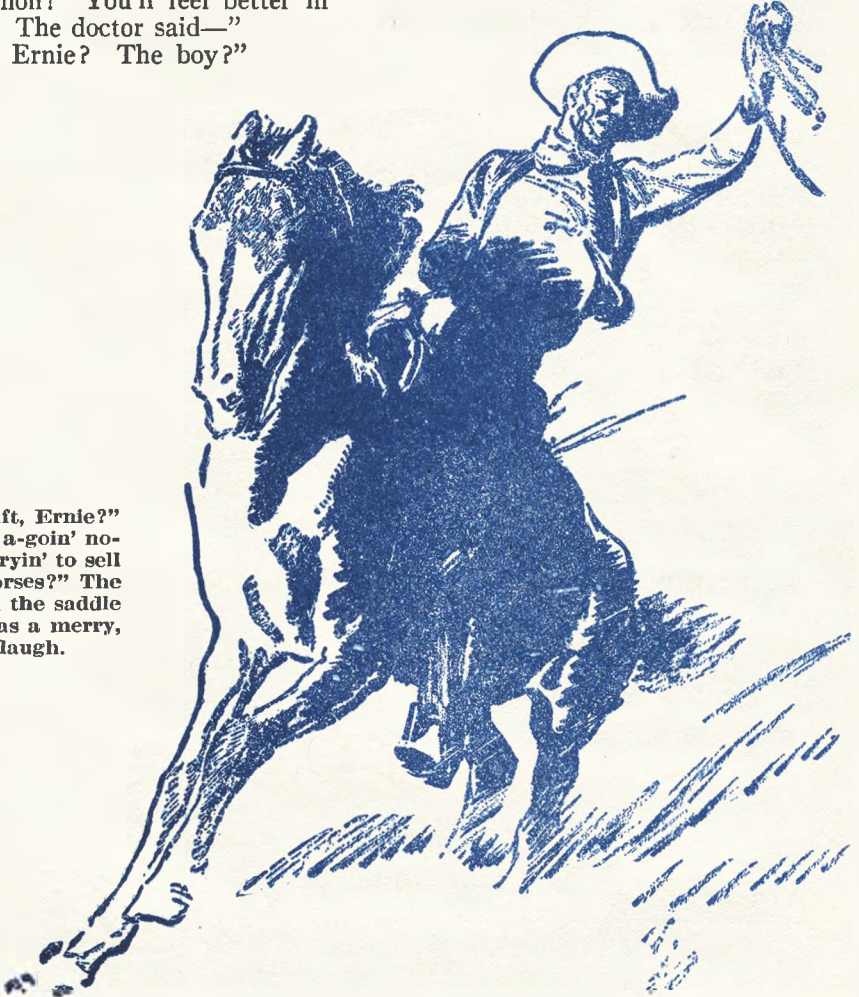
Seventy-two. Maybe live ten, fifteen years more—mighty healthy for his age; hardly ever ailing. His grandfather had lived to eighty-six, and his father might have, if a horse hadn't fell on him and killed him. Fifteen years, and after that? Shore, there had to be something!

Was that two teeny little dark clouds coming up over the mountains way off there, side by side? Side by side—that's how him and Steve used to ride. Funny—*danged* funny—that he couldn't get Steve off his mind today. Him and Steve back there—him and Steve and Nell. Nell Greaves, she was then. . . .

Two little dark clouds, way off across Mendoza Flat. . . . Had to rain soon and break this heat. . . . Two little dark clouds coming toward him.

ERNIE—Ernie! I'm goin'! Ernie!"
 "Nell, hon! You'll feel better in the mornin'. The doctor said—"
 "The boy, Ernie? The boy?"

"Ready to drift, Ernie?"
 "Huh? I aint a-goin' nowhere, son. Tryin' to sell one o' them horses?" The young man in the saddle laughed; it was a merry, reckless laugh.



"Kickin' like a yearlin', Nell—husky young-un."

"You—you'll call him Jim, after my dad?"

"Shore, Nell—we will."

"No! *No!* Ernie—I can't—can't see you. *Ernie!*"

"Hon, I'm right here. You go right to sleep, an' you'll wake up all right."

Tears streaming down his face, an awful lump in his throat. But he had to keep his voice steady; wouldn't do to scare poor Nell—used to be Nell Greaves. He was squeezing a white, thin hand that felt clammy and cold.

"I won't—wa-wake. . . . *Ernie! He's comin'!*"

She was sitting up, white as the white

sheets. And she was falling back, lifeless as the sheets themselves.

"Oh, my God! My God!"

Mrs. Saunders was leading him from the room; he crashed into the door-jamb and stood facing it blindly an instant

before he knew how to go around it. *Nell!*

And whom had she seen coming? He'd never figured it out.

HUH! Why, he'd dang' near fell out of his chair. But it wasn't pain in his chest that woke him up; it hadn't come that time. Funny that he should be dreaming so much about things that had happened so long ago—now Jim was range-boss for the big Tyson Cattle Company, and drew down a fine check every month. Jim was a smart boy, and so was Clay.

His cowboys were unsaddling down by the corrals now; some throwing their saddles over the top log, some laying

them neatly on their sides on the ground with the sweat-drenched blankets spread on top to dry. Shore wet blankets today; this heat was hard on horses, like it was on men. Old Brownie had fell dead under Slim Sullivan—queer that a horse should fall dead that way! But it was shore hot, and kind of choky. . . .

That college feller—there was a picture in one of his books, of a feller called



Pluto; he drove great black horses, and took dead people down into a great, endless cave somewheres back in the old countries. That's what the Romans used to believe, but it sounded like foolishness. But what if the Romans, and the Mormons, and the Hopi snake priests, were all of them right? Might be different things—sounded reasonable; we don't all like the same things. Now, if he had his choice, and could go with good horses—

No, them wasn't clouds—couple fellers coming riding across the Flat. Like-

ly a couple boys from the Diamond T outfit coming to pick up their strays. He'd better make 'em stay all night; the cattle had had driving enough for one day, it so hot—one cow had "melted" on them and dropped dead; fine fat cow too. But it was beginning to cool off a mite now, seeing as it was about sunset.

"WANT to see you outside, Ernie." Crisp, cool night of an Arizona October, with clear, brilliant moonlight as nowhere else.

Empty buckboards; saddled horses with humped backs and trailing reins. Two men stopped facing each other—two slim, trim young cowboys, one a good deal taller than the other.

"Ernie, Nell Greaves is my gal—sabe?" Quietly.

"See here, Steve—Nell's free, white an' eighteen. She can go with anybody she wants to."

"I was goin' with her first!"—in a voice that was dry, harsh.

"How often?" A scoffing tone, still held in restraint. "Not what you could rightly call *goin'* with a gal, Steve."

"I don't give a damn! You lay off!" Crisp, bitter.

"Steve, us two—"

"Aw, lay off, you fellers; let's go back into the dance."

"Ed, we're a-goin' to settle it right now. Listen here, Ernie—"

"Steve, I aint a-listenin' to nothin'. I'm a-goin' with Nell Greaves all she'll go with me, an' if you don't like it—"

The sentence meaningly unfinished. A pause. . . .

"*Stop 'em, for God's sake!*"

A tang of biting black powder in the still air—a little whitish cloud drifting off in the brilliant moonlight. Steve on the ground on his back; he moved only once—sort of rolled over and drew up one knee a little bit. Something dark spreading down the side of the white shirt he'd worn for the dance. A man with a badge on his chest coming running from the schoolhouse, where now the music had stopped suddenly.

"What? For God's sake—"

"Steve started it; we all saw it. He called Ernie out—"

"No use—plumb through the heart."

The man with the badge pointing a stern finger:

"You git home—the judge'll want to see you in the mornin' anyway."

"Wait, Ernie! You don't have to quit the country; go on home for the night. We'll all sw'ar he started it, an' it was an even break."

"Break be damned! I've killed—Steve!". . . .

"Self-defense. Prisoner discharged. You, Ernie Tompkins: I'm a-warnin' you. . . . Too danged quick on the trigger. Jest as much to blame as him."

"Thanks, Jedge. I—mebbe I was a mite hasty. Steve—"

"You young cowpunchers! I should send you up for it; but then, when two of you— Well, git out! Next case; that gal from the red-light—"

And they'd buried Steve under the big juniper up on the hill, where he could have seen for miles and miles, if he could have seen at all. He'd have liked that. Steve—Steve—his pardner.

THIS time he woke up slowly, stupidly, with cold beads of sweat on his forehead, with that pain clutching and gnawing at his chest as it never had before.

So he'd finished the dream at last—the thing he'd dreaded all down those long years. Many a night he'd woke up in a cold sweat just as they were walking out of the little schoolhouse, Nell staring after them, her eyes big and scared—he'd always woke up then, shivering, with sweat on his forehead.

Them was wild days—many a young cowboy got shot for less. If Steve hadn't been his pardner—

From out toward Mendoza Flat came a quick spatter of sound.

"*Yip-ee! Yip-yip-yip!*"

Why, it was just like Steve's coyote-yell! A rider was dashing by the corrals and toward him, leading a spare saddled horse. How he rode! Some young fool that hadn't better sense than to ride a good horse to death a hot evening like this. That coyote yapping—

Dusk was settling; the sleepy, eerie hoot of a great owl came from a ledge.

ARAB horses! No others could have such slender legs and such dainty muzzles—muzzles hardly large enough for the flaring, quivering nostrils. Black manes whipping—black Arabs—he didn't know there were any black Arabs! Coal black, jet black—the blackest, shiniest things you ever saw.

And how they came! They'd easy take any race in Prescott or—

Huh! Them was too big for Arabs; nearly twice too big, but they shore had the lines. Great black tails streaming in the wind of their own speed.

Here they were, sliding to a stop in a cloud of dust, the lead horse rearing and pawing once—pretty! The rider was leaning back with the grace of an old-time cowboy who had lived his life in the saddle; he was smoking a brown cigarette.

"Ready to drift, Ernie?"

"Huh? I aint a-goin' nowhere, son."

The young man in the saddle threw back his head—a well-shaped head—and laughed. It was a merry, reckless laugh. Ernie thought he recognized it vaguely; was it that new bronc'-twister from the Bar Heart come over after strays? His face looked sort of blurry, like things did at close range these late years; a man of seventy-two couldn't see close things so very well.

"Hurry up, Ernie!"

It came to him suddenly. The young fellow wanted to sell him one of the horses; wanted him to try it out. Everybody knew he was a fool about good horses, and the fool price he'd pay if one suited him. Well, he'd buy one of 'em, if it took the price of the herd he'd gathered that day; it would last him the rest of his life, if he took care of it. But he was foxy; he wouldn't let on to be too anxious—he'd have to pay a-plenty at the best.

"Aint tryin' to sell one o' them horses to me, are you, son? Showin' 'em off that way."

Again that merry, wholly reckless laugh—seemed to be a nice sort of kid; wonder if he could hire him?

"Climb on an' try one, Ernie."

As well as he could see so close, the kid seemed to be grinning at him—seemed to know some great joke. Uh-huh; seemed to be a right nice kid.

"Well, I got too many horses now, kid; I can't afford— Oh, might as well see what gaits he has!"

It seemed difficult to lift himself out of his chair with both hands; he barely did make it. He had to lean one shoulder against the wall as he slowly pulled on his old chaps. Across the porch now, and down the three steps—it seemed miles. His old chaps flapped dismally, and his rusty spurs clinked. . . . Now he had the rein—he could hardly see it—and the saddle-horn. Now, if he could get his foot up into the stirrup. . . .

Huh! The horse reared suddenly, pawed the air; the great black mane whipped across old Ernie's face, blinding him. And something happened: A terrible pain in his chest, that didn't last no time; a blinding flash of white-hot light that swept around him; a mighty crack in his ears.

And here he was, seated firmly in the saddle; he could just remember swinging up instantly like a young feller—or better. He flushed with pride. Who'd say he couldn't make a hand—and he seventy-two!

"Let's go!"

His breath caught; he gasped. Why, that sounded just like Steve's voice, just as it used to, 'way back in them days— And he could have sworn he saw somebody falling down flat beside the horse just as he went up—some little withered feller in torn batwing chaps. He'd have looked down, but he didn't have time. . . . They were going, going! Over the fence like two swallows.

"Yip-ip! Yip-ip-ip! Let's drift, Ernie!"

FEAR was clutching at him—if that wasn't Steve— And under them the swift rattle of hoofs, like the very fast roll of soft little drums. Streaks of yellow passed under them, and dark lines, and then a wide streak of silver, so fast that things were all blurry; he could not tell where they were going. And—and they had started west, but the sun was rising ahead of them! Why, it was nearly clear over them now!

A terrible fear seized Ernie, a fear such as he had never known. If that *was* Steve—

Swift rattle of hoofs—what mighty horses these blacks were! The silver

streak had fallen behind; dark land fled under them, as they went on, side by side.

He began to tremble. What had happened? Why, he was all limber and active, like a young-un fresh out of bed of a cool morning. He—but he felt sort of queer; he didn't feel right!

His eyes came suddenly to his hand holding the reins. What! Why, his hand looked white and soft, like the hand of a young cowboy who had always worn gloves, like the old-timers did! Why, it wasn't *natural*! And he could see his hand so plain; it should look blurry. Something was wrong. . . . Fear clutched at him, horror. His head swung slowly, stiffly, and his eyes fell full on the face of the other rider.

"Steve! But—I shot you!"

Steve's calming, quiet voice—yes, it was Steve, just as he used to be:

"Heck, what of it, pardner? It had to be one of us; I aint got no hard feelin's."

"But, Steve, yo're *dead*!"

A little friendly, twisted grin. How well he remembered that little twist down to the left corner of Steve's mouth.

"So are you, pardner. They picked me to go for you, so's you wouldn't get too scared—us bein' pardners always. An' she said to tell you—"

DARKNESS ahead; a gaping hole: they shot into it. Cold, damp, clutching darkness, but the black horses never paused. And then a soft glow of light before them, growing larger with astonishing swiftness. The blacks were slowing down now of their own accord.

Ahead, Ernie could see a horse that seemed to be molded of burnished silver—what a wonderful long mane and tail he had! And—that was a young girl riding him, waving her hat and coming at a lope, as though she'd been waiting.

A whisper from Steve:

"That's her. I'll swing off."

He was gone, somewhere. Ernie leaped from his saddle before the silver had stopped. His arms were extended.

"Nell! Hon!" In his strong young arms, her body was warm, soft; her face was flushed with happiness.

"Ernie!"

The black horse and the silver nuzzled each other in greeting. Across the rich, short grass there came a puff of scent-laden air; petals fluttered gently to the ground.

Ernie's eyes closed; a little groan of happiness came from his lips. So *this* was death!

SHIPS and MEN

IX—The Things That Are Caesar's

REAR ADMIRAL LUCAS, commanding the Pacific Coast squadron at San Diego, leaned over the luncheon table and roared with laughter.

"That's a new one!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, that's a new one!"

"I beg your pardon, admiral." Little old Professor Boggs drew down his bushy brows and scowled. "It is not a joke. When I say that one of the oldest and most formidable of naval weapons, which actually wrote a great chapter in history, was a sickle, I am not joking."

The Admiral wiped away his tears of laughter.

"No offense, my dear chap," he said tolerantly. "But you must admit—"

"Admissions mean weakness. I admit nothing," shot back the Professor. "The sickle might even be called the basis of naval strategy."

The rest of us kept silent. What had begun as a mere discussion, had now settled into a duel between our famous guests. The Club has some queer fish at its weekly luncheons, and raises some singular discussions; but as the Admiral said, here was something new.

"A sickle!" repeated the Admiral, and chuckled. "A sickle as a naval weapon!"

"Precisely," snapped Professor Boggs. "I presume you never heard of Captain Jean Jacquet and his singularly beautiful wife?"

"I do not recall the names," confessed the Admiral. "It is quite possible that I have met the captain in question while I was in France—"

"Captain Jacquet lived two thousand years ago," the Professor said. At this, the Admiral waved his cigarette.

"Oh! In that case, I fear we never met. But you interest me, sir. What has this gentleman to do with sickles as naval weapons? Unless you mean that they were used by boarding parties, in place of swords and daggers, in some chance engagement."

"I do not. They were used, sir, in the first naval battle to be fought in the English Channel. Thanks to them, an entire nation was destroyed and the invasion and conquest of Britain by Julius

Cæsar was made possible. Do I interest you still?"

"You do," said the Admiral frankly.

Indeed, Professor Boggs interested all of us with his apparently incredible thesis. We knew him to be a noted historian and scholar, and whatever he said was sure to be accurate. The newspaper men present scented a news story and pulled their chairs closer.

Boggs drew on the tablecloth a thumb-nail sketch of the Breton coast.

"Here is the present Quiberon," he said. "I shall stick to present-day names in the story, to avoid confusion. This entire coast was held by the fierce and warlike Breton people, whom the Romans called the Veneti. Cæsar and his legions were camped on the Loire, building ships. It was hopeless to attack the Bretons, who could take to the sea in their huge ships, without naval craft to cut them off in retreat. This was the situation when Captain Jean Jacquet came home from the town of Painbœuf and found a Roman officer sitting in the parlor talking with his wife. You will see, gentlemen, that the story has some very modern angles." And Professor Boggs shot a glance at the grinning news hawks.

MODERN angles indeed! The story was all modern angles as he presented it, and but for one thing might have happened today. That one thing was the character of Julius Cæsar, the most brilliant soldier and most arrant rascal Rome ever produced. . . .

What with the war and the Roman occupation, money was rolling in and shipping was brisk, and Captain Jean Jacquet, thrifty Frenchman that he was, congratulated himself. He had just come down from Nantes with a barge-load of hides, seasoned timber and other supplies for the new Roman shipyards, and would get cash in hand on delivery. It was after dark when he got the barge tied up, and started home.

He was amazed by the progress made in the yards; these master shipwrights, imported from Marseilles, knew their business. Three weeks ago, when he had



From an etching by Yngve E. Soderberg

By **H. BEDFORD-JONES** *and*
CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

sailed upriver, hardly a keel was laid; now galleys were afloat and others crowded the ways. The same thing was happening at Brest, Rochelle and Rochefort, and Cæsar would soon have enough bottoms built to launch his attack against the Bretons. These Roman shipmen could assemble a fighting galley in twenty-four hours after the parts were laid out. They had everything—foundries, rope walks, carpenteries—and the immense yard was in a fury of industry even now, by night.

But Captain Jacquet laughed in his beard as he strode along. These Romans were due to get a surprise when they did attack. He knew the Breton seamen.

THE early spring evening was overcast, with a sharp wind-driven drizzle pelting down. Despite this, the town was filled to overflowing. The narrow streets, flanked by squat and ugly stone buildings, were alive with swaggering, boisterous soldiery; the Seventh Legion was in town, pay in hand, and as usual was out to raise hell.

Drab balconies protruding over the muddy street displayed signs scrawled in Latin, protected lanterns lit dim doorways; flutes and Breton pipes resounded from the taverns. Here and there roaring fires were blazing away, surrounded by throngs of soldiers in leathern caps and surcoats, entertained by jugglers or street merchants, while ladies of the oldest profession plied their trade with gusto—a trade highly honorable in Roman eyes. Pay night was a big night for everyone, rain or not.

Captain Jacquet put all this behind him, came to his house on the outskirts of town, and walked in to find that his wife had company. A Roman officer, Captain Caius by name, and evidently a man of note.

"Jean! I'm so glad you came in time to meet Captain Caius!" cried Virginis Jacquet, after her first eager greeting. "I was downtown buying a roast, and some of those soldiers got fresh. Captain Caius came along and put them in their place, and escorted me home. He's very anxious to talk with you, too."

Captain Jean Jacquet clasped hands cordially with the Roman and insisted that he stay to dinner, and Caius accepted gladly. The two men talked while Virginis bustled about, laying the table. Singular and somewhat remarkable, these three persons on whom the destiny of nations were to depend.

Jacquet was bluff, bearded, wide-eyed, a huge-muscled giant known far and wide as the best captain on the coast and the finest pilot—and the strongest man. Beside him, the smooth-shaven Caius looked strangely slender. Yet Caius was tall, somewhat scanty of hair, with imperious dark gray eyes and high thin nostrils, and a most infectious smile. A charming fellow, this Roman.

About Virginis, the most beautiful woman in France, there was something cold and glorious, like moonlight. The glitter of her ash-blond hair was marvelous; her blue eyes held a flame; she herself was like a cold flame of fire that stirred the hearts and souls of men. Jacquet worshiped her beyond words.

"D'you know this commander of yours?" asked Jacquet, as they sat down to dinner.

Caius laughed.

"Who, Cæsar? Yes; I'm on his staff. The worst scoundrel in Rome, between you and me. They say no woman's safe from him."

"I've heard as much," said Jacquet, with a frown. "But a fine soldier."

"Aye." Caius sobered. "The shadow of Cæsar is over everything, my friend; a man of parts, who knows everything, does everything, shrinks from nothing. He'll crush these Bretons like an egg held in his hand."

"Not he," said Jacquet confidently. "I know 'em, know their ships, their seamen. You boys will lick the tar out of them on land, and they'll take to their ships—and your puny little galleys won't be in it. Why, their ships are built of foot-square beams! And you haven't any pilots who know these waters, and the islands."

CORRECT." Caius stretched out his long legs. "Cæsar has given me the job of getting a master pilot who knows every inch of the coast. I've tried half a dozen; they were all worthless braggarts, and they've been crucified to teach people that Cæsar means business."

"Life and death doesn't mean much to you Romans, does it?" said Jacquet.

"It means nothing," said Caius coolly. "We all die sooner or later. Cæsar himself shrugs at it. He's been something of an adventurer, you know; can use a sword with the best of us, but has learned to use his head instead. You should do the same."

"Me?" Jacquet looked up in surprise. "How do you mean?"

"You're too big a man to be in the petty business of making money." And the Roman's thin lip curled in scorn. "See here! I can offer you the job of master pilot with the fleet, at a salary of five times your monthly earnings—merely as a starter. Would it interest you?"

Jacquet stared at him for a moment, then met the eager, breathless gaze of his wife. He laid down his knife, wiped his mouth, and shook his head.

"Nope. You Romans look down your noses at anybody working for you. Take orders? Not me. I'm a free man, and stay one. I'm not a Breton; your money looks good to me, yes. But not your job, cap'n. I don't like all this war business. One more voyage, and I'm going up to Boulogne, where I've got an interest in a big Gaulish freighter. Virginis and I are going to Britain and settle down in peace and quiet—eh, my dear?"

Caius glanced at Virginis, and smiled. "I suppose so," she said quietly.

"Roman peace is better than British peace," said Caius. "Besides, Cæsar is going to Britain himself—with his legions."

Captain Jacquet roared with laughter. "Yes, he is! I tell you, even if he drives the Bretons off the mainland, they'll retire to the islands and keep the Channel controlled."



The upshot was a beautiful riot, in which Captain Jacquet laid out half a dozen of the Seventh before a centurion brought up the military police.

"No," said Caius. "Cæsar means to destroy them so they can't do this."

"Cæsar! Cæsar!" And the seaman grunted. "You talk as if he were some god. I tell you, he's a fool—a woman-chaser who's played in luck. I've heard the soldiers talk about him. I know his story. A sharp fellow, yes, but he's a fool to go up against the Bretons. They'll smash him and his ships."

"He may find a way to smash them," said Caius calmly.

"A way? Yes." Jacquet frowned and tugged at his beard. "I know a way; but you high and mighty Romans laugh at simple men. No offense, cap'n. You're different from most of them. If more of 'em were like you, Rome would be better liked in these parts."

"No offense meant, none taken,"—and Caius laughed. "Look here, would you like to take a look over the camp, up-river? If the weather clears tomorrow, I might take you up, both of you. Would it interest you, Mrs. Jacquet?"

"I'd love to go!" exclaimed Virginis. "I've heard so much about your camp—"

"Well, you go if you like," Captain Jacquet put in. "I must deliver cargo and check invoices most of the day."

So it was arranged, and Captain Caius departed. A splendid fellow, said Jean Jacquet. A thorough gentleman, agreed Virginis, and with most elegant manners.

Virginis went over the camp, on the morrow, with Captain Caius; he came for her in a military chariot and showed her a wonderful time. Cæsar was daily expected to arrive, and she was eager for a sight of that famous soldier.

Captain Jean Jacquet, during the ensuing days, went about his business and had small joy of it. Scarcely was his huge barge unloaded, than one of the newly launched galleys fouled her moorings and smashed her against the quay, crushing her whole port side. Furious at losing time when the lucrative river freighting was at its height, Jacquet filed claim against the military authorities.

He pressed the claim hotly. And once in the law business, he was soon in up to his neck and floundering, and wishing he could get out of it.

AS Captain Caius had said, the name of Cæsar, the shadow of Cæsar, was everywhere. Stories of his incredible energy, his exploits, his personality, were on all lips; and plenty of these tales were not of the supper-table variety by a good deal. The legions were moving up, the

Roman fleet promised to be ready soon; when Cæsar came, there would be a swift and smashing attack on the whole Breton country.

Not that there was any serenity in Painbœuf. The Bretons had treated the Roman envoys with contumely, the whole country was in a flame against the invaders, the coasts and rivers and towns swarmed with spies and pirates. Sabotage was in the very shipyards. Isolated Romans were murdered, foraging parties were attacked. When any of the Breton raiders were captured, crosses decorated the river front, but this had no effect. No Roman ships got through by sea, or could venture forth alone.

"If Cæsar were here," said the soldiers, "he'd finish off these rascals like he did the Miletan pirates. Where the devil is Cæsar, anyhow?"

Nobody knew. In the camp, said some, secluded and making his plans. Roistering with wine and women in Rochelle, said others. Traveling from town to town and personally seeing that the work went forward, according to some.

CAPTAIN JEAN JACQUET had his troubles in court, since he was dealing with Roman citizens, and a Roman citizen got all the breaks. He had trouble at home, because Virginis was continually after him to take the job Captain Caius had offered; there was really no reason against it, except that the bluff, simple skipper was obstinate. However, he was too thoroughly in love with his wife to refuse her anything, and he began to see that he must give in sooner or later.

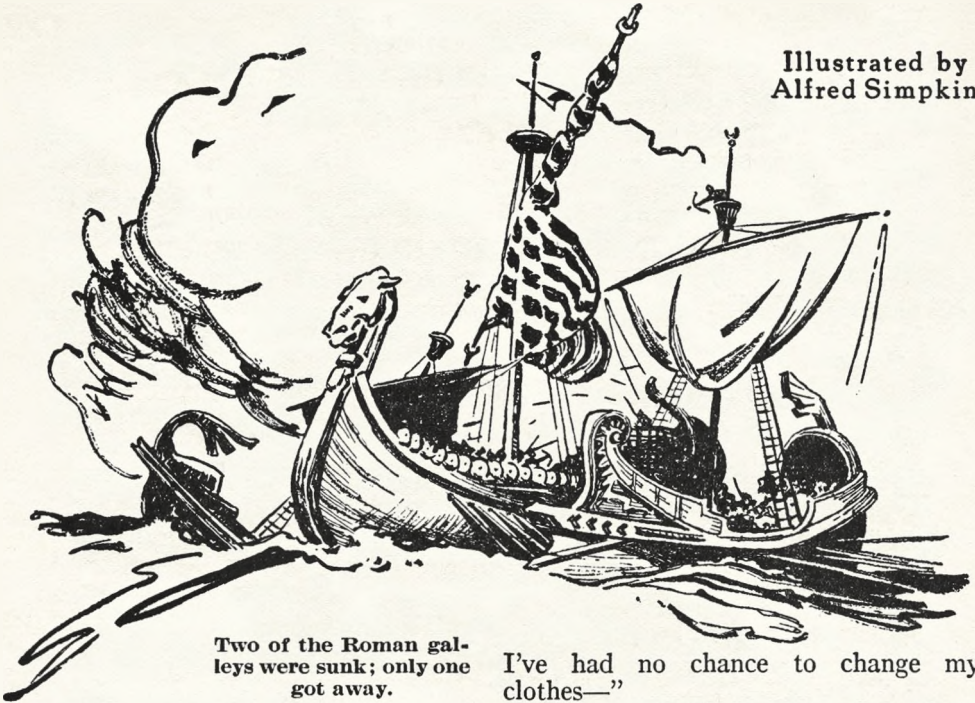
About this time one of the huge, massive Breton ships turreted like a castle, met three of the new Roman galleys coming up from Brest. The Romans attacked; two of their galleys were sunk trying to ram the Breton, and only one got away.

Captain Jacquet heard of this happening while he was sweating in court, and his frank remarks on Roman seamanship did his cause no good whatever. His temper was short.

When court was finally adjourned, he started for home in no pleasant mood. Captain Caius was throwing a party this evening in camp, and was sending a chariot for Jacquet and Virginis; it promised to be a gay affair. Caius had been away on official business for some days.

Captain Jacquet, heading for home to bathe and dress, ran into a crowd of legionaries who had drunk unwisely and

Illustrated by
Alfred Simpkin



Two of the Roman gal-
leys were sunk; only one
got away.

well. They began to make fun of his beard, and Jean Jacquet buffeted one of them half across the street. Two others fell upon him, and while he was handling these, some Loire barges came running from a tavern and mixed in the row, knives out and fists flying.

The upshot was a beautiful riot, in which Jacquet laid out half a dozen of the Seventh, before a centurion brought up the military police. Several of the bargees were cut down and Jacquet, knocked senseless with a spear butt, woke up in jail with a lengthy list of charges against him. As his cheerful jailers assured him, it meant slavery or crucifixion at the least.

An hour later, he was summarily ordered out with word that he was free. Captain Caius was waiting in the office, and waved a hand at him.

"My chariot's outside; pile in, and I'll be right there."

Jacquet lost no time in obeying. Caius followed at once and climbed in beside him, telling the charioteer to drive hell-bent for camp.

"Your wife heard of this mixup, and told me," said Caius. "I've managed to get you out, and can arrange things with the procurator in the morning. Nothing like a little pull, cap'n! How's your head?"

"Still there, but with a bump on it," said Jean Jacquet ruefully. "See here,

I've had no chance to change my clothes—"

"Nonsense! There are a couple of the staff, no more; we've got some Greek dancers and some grand wine," Caius exclaimed. "Who knows? Accidents often bring good luck, skipper. A philosopher named Crates happened to break his leg while he was in Rome, and got the whole city off in the pursuit of culture, until now we have more highbrows than Athens itself. You never can tell! By the way, I heard today that you're in some court squabble about your barge. What judge is handling it?"

"A fat lunkhead named Crassus, at military headquarters," said Jacquet.

Caius clapped him on the back. "As good as settled this minute! Crassus will do anything for me, anything; so forget the whole business and enjoy the evening. We've got a jar of the finest Falernian wine that ever came out of Italy, and you'll see some dancing that'll knock your eye out."

When they reached camp, dinner was awaiting them in the tent of Caius. Virginis was radiant over the release of her husband; never had Jean Jacquet seen her look lovelier. The two young officers who made up the party were of old Roman families, and Jean Jacquet found them thorough good fellows.

"Just to prove to you," said Caius behind his palm, "that there are other Romans of the right stripe, cap'n!"

Naturally, Jean Jacquet was grateful to this staff officer; the more he saw of

Caius, the more he liked the man. During dinner, a number of officers on duty dropped in for orders or decisions; the high authority of Caius was plainly evident. So was his friendliness, and the peculiar charm of his character. He promised Jacquet that the claim regarding the barge would be settled in cash, on the morrow.

Captain Jacquet was not the man to pass up rare Falernian. By the time the Greek dancers finished their performance, he was feeling mellow. Virginis, who had been chatting with Caius, suddenly turned to him in quick excitement.

"Jean! Captain Caius says that Cæsar has offered a large reward to anyone who will devise some way of overcoming the Breton fleet. I know you have some scheme; you've mentioned it more than once. Why don't you try for the reward?"

"Easiest thing in the world, my dear,"—and Jacquet chuckled in his beard. "Sickles will do the trick."

"Sickles?" Caius caught him up swiftly. "What do you mean by that?"

Jacquet winked. "If I told you, the secret would be out. What's this you and Virginis were saying about Cæsar being here?"

"He's in camp now!" Virginis exclaimed, her eyes alight. "And Captain Caius is going to arrange things so we can see him, one of these days."

CAIUS filled the skipper's wine-cup anew.

"We'll all be busy now," he observed. "Busier than ever. Cæsar means to drive the Veneti into the sea."

"And then what?" Jacquet grinned. "They're seamen, those fellows. These garlicky lubbers you've imported from Marseilles can't even handle a galley in the basin without fouling barges. Once those Bretons are at sea, you'll not touch them. Their ships are massive, high-sided, castled. Your ships are too frail to ram—"

"Once our legionaires get aboard, they'll put every Breton to the sword!" Caius broke in, a flush in his cheeks.

"Right. But they'll never board those Breton ships. And you've no pilots who know the waters." Captain Jacquet drained his cup and slammed it down. "You Romans are not so hot. You play hell in your courts with anyone who's not a Roman citizen, but you haven't any Roman citizens who can take a Breton ship or sail the Breton coast with a fleet."

Caius leaned forward intently. "But, Cap'n Jacquet, suppose we found such a man—and made him a Roman citizen?" he said softly. "Suppose I get Cæsar to send the Senate a recommendation to that effect? And on top of it, make this man master pilot of the fleet—one whose orders will be obeyed by every Roman skipper?"

Virginis caught her breath sharply. Jean Jacquet stared at the speaker. A Roman citizen! Why, that was an hon-



or to be sought only by the greatest of men! A Roman citizen, with rights and dignity no other could touch, with the power of looking anyone else in the eye and telling him to go to hell—a Roman citizen!

"Eh?" said Jacquet, and his jaw fell for an instant. "Look here—you don't mean me, do you?"

"I mean you," said Caius sharply. "You're the man to serve the turn, Jacquet. You can do it. If I can make Cæsar agree—what do you say?"

"Done!" Jacquet exclaimed. "Done, by the gods! Jean Jacquet a Roman citizen! What do you think of it, my dear?"

"It's wonderful!" breathed Virginis, but her blue eyes went to Caius, not to her husband.



"Sickles?" Caius caught him up.
"What do you mean by that?"

"And now," exclaimed Caius quickly, "what did you mean by mentioning a sickle?"

Jean Jacquet looked at him and grinned.

"That," he said, "is something I keep to myself, drunk or sober, till the time comes to make use of it. Otherwise, these Bretons would cheat me. And us Romans have to stick together, so let it be."

The gray eyes of Caius flashed slightly.

"If I report that to Cæsar," he said, "he'd have you crucified in a minute."

Then the wine showed, as Jean Jacquet snapped his fingers over the table.

"That for your Cæsar!" he exclaimed.

"A carousing, woman-chasing aristocrat who has no honor, decency or pride; his very soldiers sing scandalous songs about

him and give him nicknames that couldn't go through the mails. A good soldier, of course; but a cursed poor excuse for a gentleman, as we know gentlemen in France."

The thin nostrils of Caius had turned white. The two officers were staring at one another with bated breaths.

"Not so loud, my friend," said Caius warningly. "Cæsar has spies, you know, and tent walls are thin. Perhaps you do him wrong."

"Oh, he has his good side too,"—and Jacquet shrugged. "An energetic fellow, they say, always on the go. Crucify me? Nonsense; your Cæsar isn't a fool. Without me, he can't lick these Bretons. I heard today that one of their ships has just whipped three of the new galleys; did you hear about it? They're seamen. They know the coast and the islands—and you Romans can get no pilots worth a tinker's dam."

"We Romans, you should say, rather!" And Caius laughed. "Once you're a Roman citizen, you're safe from crucifixion, that's true. But there are other things."

"Please,"—Virginis leaned forward, pleadingly,—"I know Jean didn't mean to offend you by his talk about Cæsar."

"My dear lady,"—Caius turned to her with his charming smile,—"no apologies, I pray you! Cap'n Jacquet is dead right. This Cæsar of ours has no pride whatever; he'd let your honest husband stand on a housetop and curse him, so long as he was being well served and helped to win a victory. By the way, I hope to have you both meet Cæsar in a few days. I might arrange a luncheon, if you say the word."

"I'd love it!" Virginis exclaimed, her blue eyes eager. Caius nodded.

"Then we'll see. Cap'n Jacquet, I'll send a chariot for you at eight in the morning; we'll arrange a conference with some of the staff. How much time will you need to prepare to meet the Breton fleet?"

"Two days," said Jacquet.

"Eh? Very well. Tomorrow the army moves forward. The fleet will assemble at once—and if Cæsar beats the enemy by land, he'll depend on you to take care of their fleet."

"It's a bargain," said Captain Jean Jacquet. "But it'll be a matter of weeks before Cæsar walks over the Breton defenses."

He was right about that.

IN the morning, Caius sent for him and introduced him to the staff. Already the legions were on the march; the camp was all but deserted, the entire army had been hurled forward. And these Romans who met with Jacquet were more worried about the sea than the land. They did well to worry, said Jean Jacquet grimly.

"The Bretons have above two hundred ships—big ships," he told them. "Never mind the reports of your spies. I know the truth better than they. These are

shallow-water ships, flat-bottomed, with high bows and sterns, solidly built of oak with foot-square timbers fastened by spikes. Their sails are of leather. Under this heavy top-hamper the craft are unwieldy, but massive and solid, practically impregnable."

"And what can you do about it?" asked one of the captains, Lepidus by name.

"Take them," and the eyes of Jacquet twinkled. "All I want is full authority."

"You have it,"—and Caius laid down a wax-faced tablet. "There's your authority, over the seal of Cæsar himself. And he has written asking a special decree from the Senate, making you a Roman citizen. Your claims, by the way, are settled; the paymaster has the money waiting for you. Your salary as master pilot begins today. Are you satisfied?"

"Aye," said Jacquet, beaming.

"Then we leave you in charge—we're off in ten minutes to join the army. Kindly give my regards to your charming wife; I regret that Cæsar has already departed, and we must postpone the luncheon date."

As the chariot bearing Jacquet back to town whirled him away, he caught a roar of laughter from the staff officers in the tent, but thought nothing of it.

DECIMUS BRUTUS commanded the fleet for Rome; he was a fine officer with whom Jacquet could work admirably. And work he did, while the legions of Cæsar beat back the stubborn Bretons, town by town, driving them into the sea.

The fleet captains were picked men—some of them Romans, most of them Parthians from the far east. Jean Jacquet had models of the Breton craft built and rigged for them, he showed them how the lighter Roman galleys must adopt entirely new tactics; for against these massive ships built to breast the broad Atlantic, the usual ramming tactics were futile, the catapults and engines of the Roman ships were powerless.

And meantime, he had the armorers at work turning out sickles by the hundred, but to no man would he breathe a hint of his idea. . . .

During these days and weeks he had small comfort of Virginis. Now and again a messenger came with greetings from Captain Caius, bringing rich gifts to them both; at such times she would be radiant, brilliant, eager. She talked much of how they must go to Rome, once Jean Jacquet had won great place

for himself. But in general he divined a coldness in her, almost an unfriendliness; she had definitely changed.

It worried him, yet his bluff, frank spirit saw in her attitude only a passing indisposition. He, too, had changed in these days. His Roman citizenship was a certainty, and he was utterly delighted with it. He talked largely of "us Romans," he slapped soldiers and officers on the back, he strutted and posed like any actor; but so boyishly unaffected was his exuberance that no one resented it in the least, and the association of pilots of the Loire even made him honorary chairman.

"Why go to Rome?" he said one night, as he and Virginis sat at supper. "Better to stay here. Do you know how many Gauls are Roman citizens? None; I'm the only one. Here, I'm a great man, your place is among the first, my dear. In Rome, we'll be lost."

"What?" The blue eyes of Virginis flashed. "Not go to Rome? Jean, you're insane! Why, Rome's the center of the world! No telling what heights await you there—"

"I don't know," he broke in moodily. "Oh, I know you've set your heart on Rome, but I'm afraid of the place. It's too big. It's not our style. Cæsar, they say, often declares it's better to be the tops in a little village than the second man in Rome. He's right about it."

"Oh, Cæsar!" she exclaimed. "Cæsar! I'm sick of hearing the name. Well, if you don't go to Rome, I do—so think about that. We'll both go, and you'd better make up your mind to it."

"All right, my dear," and Jacquet grinned. "But first, we've got to lick these Bretons. Then, if Cæsar gets a triumph, we'll figure in it and you'll have your heart's desire."

It was next day that the messengers began to flood in.

Action! The Bretons were being driven into the sea. They were putting their wives and treasures aboard ship. Decimus Brutus strode into Jacquet's office with a letter just arrived.

"The fleet's assembling, cap'n," he said brusquely. "Here are orders—cut off the Breton fleet and destroy it. We must sail tonight. Ready?"

"Ready," said Jean Jacquet.

THAT night the fleet sailed, and Jean Jacquet with it, to meet the other squadrons. And if, next day, a cavalry escort left Painbœuf and took with it a

woman of cold and glorious beauty like moonlight—how was Captain Jacquet to know of it?

"*Ave, Cæsar! Hail, Cæsar!*"

The rolling shout of the legions, camped on the eastern promontory of the Bay of Quiberon, lifted and thundered across a sunlit morning, upon a scene such as few men in the world's history had ever witnessed, or would witness again. Cæsar and his veterans were gazing down from the height upon destiny.

Below, in the sheltered expanse of the bay, rode two hundred and more great Breton ships, filling the whole vast sea scene. Massive ships, heavy leathern sails aloft to the breeze; each one covered bow and stern with raw bull-hides to keep off boarders. Huge turreted ships, standing well inside the shallows and islets, crowded with men.

And, coming up across the sunrise, the three hundred Roman galleys, sails stowed and oars flashing. Three divisions of them—one heading straight for the enemy, the others spreading off to close the way to any escape.

"*Ave, Cæsar!*"

From the oncoming galleys lifted that rolling shout toward the glitter on the headland, where Cæsar sat watching.

Captain Jean Jacquet, with Decimus Brutus at his side, led the shout from the flagship, as he led the vanguard into action. The orders had been simple. Each captain was to follow the flagship, avoid ramming, and then do exactly as the flagship did.

Jacquet sent his flashing-oared galley straight in through the shallows, on at the nearest Breton vessel. Catapults were loosed, arrows curved in air, trumpets blared brazen on the sunlight. Close in and closer, while men died; then the voice of Captain Jacquet rang down the rowing benches.

"Oars—starboard! Stand by to ship. Ship!"

With machine-like precision, the starboard oars were run in. The galley was actually rubbing strakes with the high-walled Breton ship, dwarfed beside her impregnable walls.

Again Jacquet's voice rang forth.

"Hook-men to the starboard bulwarks. Get set!"

Men scrambled hastily along the bulwarks. In air rose long poles, each handled by six men, each pole having at the end a sharp, sickle-shaped blade. Feeling

above the Breton rail like giant fingers, the hooks fastened on to the shrouds of the towering ship.

"Bow men shove off!" shouted Jacquet. "Starboard oars stand by—stand by, all! Starboard helm—stand by to give way—'way together!"

The long poles were secured to the rowing benches with leather thongs. The galley was shoved clear, the oars were run out, the helm was put over hard a-starboard. The galley sheered away from the Breton ship—and the sharp sickle-blades cut through the standing rigging of the huge ship like twine.

As the galley shot away, the immense leathern sails of the Breton ship came slithering and tumbling down, covering the decks. The galley swept around to the other side of the stricken Breton. Again the long poles fingered up; down came the starboard standing rigging, with what sails remained—and the hooks held fast.

"Boarders, away!"

UPON the stunned and frantic Bretons above, spears and arrows played; ladders lifted, while the poles held fast the two ships. The killers went up—heavy-armed Romans, legionaries, butchers who knew their work and did it. Once they won place on a Breton deck, only killing remained.

The other galleys swept in upon the dismayed Bretons, each captain with a chart of the shallows and reefs, each galley with dozens of the long poles and sickle-blades. Ship after ship was reduced to a helpless hulk.

The Bretons tried to run for it, but escape was cut off. And the fast-darting galleys drove in with shearing poles; once those blades did their work, the heavy leathern sails came toppling. Men died, yes. Here and there galleys were smashed and went down. But, as the long hours passed, the wide expanse of the bay became dotted with hulks, drifting helpless, while the legionary killers did their steady and relentless work.

Some few of the great ships worked away, but were sooner or later caught, crippled and taken.

The afternoon drew on, the sun went westering, and the long and frightful Breton agony ran its course. . . .

That night, Decimus Brutus laid his flagship alongside the stone quay of the little port of Sarzeau, where torches and

cressets smoked ruddily. Cæsar was waiting there, and came aboard the moment the plank was down—a tall, imperious figure clad in senatorial toga, girdle negligently fastened. He greeted Brutus warmly.

"And this Captain Jacquet—where is he, Brutus?"

"Below. He'll not last long; he got an arrow through the body at the last ship we boarded."

"Take me to him."

Jean Jacquet opened his eyes and looked up. A smile touched his bearded lips.

"Caius!" he murmured. "Caius, give her—tell her—can't go to Rome now—"

Cæsar straightened up. He slipped off his toga and spread it over the dead figure, and turned to Brutus.

"Get me a toga—anything will do. This man receives burial as a Roman citizen. Now get rid of your armor and come along to a feast of victory. I want you to meet the most beautiful woman in all Gaul."

"So?" Brutus eyed Cæsar quizzically, then glanced down at the cloaked figure. "Hm! The gods are always kind to you, Julius. In this case, you've been saved a good bit of trouble, eh?"

The thin lips of Cæsar drew into a smile.

"Nonsense, Brutus! Tears for the dead, wine for the living; and if a lady wants to go to Rome, she'll go—one way or another. Get a move on! Do you want to keep me standing here naked all night?"

So was history written.

WHEN Professor Boggs had finished his story, Rear Admiral Lucas regarded him frowningly, but with a twinkle in his eye.

"A most immoral tale, my dear sir!" he said with mock disapproval. "Do you insinuate that the great Cæsar gallivanted around with another man's wife?"

Professor Boggs fairly snorted.

"I have shown you, sir, that the sickle was a prime weapon of naval warfare, and it remained so for centuries. Do you admit it?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said the officer. "But you might have gone into a little more detail on—er—some other aspects of the matter."

Even an Admiral, as one of the newspaper men observed, is human.

"Cleopatra's Beads," another colorful tale in this brilliant series of "Ships and Men," will appear in our forthcoming October issue.

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



*On the shell-torn Valencia road
Captain Dario and the Duchess
fight a battle of wills and wits.*

With a sudden
gesture she thrust
the paper toward
the flame. But he
caught her wrist.
"Please!" he
begged.

By
WILLIAM J. MAKIN

Lady of Spain

"AND now the other shoe, comrade. Of a truth, it will shine like the hide of a sweating bull before Belmonte makes the kill."

The shoe-polisher bent his back to the work. Blanco Dario, tall and straight, posed with one foot upon the wooden box.

"It is no day even for bulls to die at the hand of an *espada*," he mused aloud. The shoe-polisher chuckled.

"Yet many men and maybe women will die in the dust of Madrid before the sun goes down," he grinned, sardonically. "The day is ripe for killing, comrade."

From where he stood with one foot on the shoeblack's box, Blanco Dario, fair-haired Spaniard, gazed at the Puerta del Sol. The famous square of Madrid was being baked softly in the sunshine. De-

spite the six months' siege of the city, the pavements were thronged as usual. True, many of the swarthy faces were starved and desperate, and hungry eyes gazed at the cafés now boarded and closed. A little group stood chuckling before a cinema poster of "Mutiny on the Bounty." The huge, enraged face of Charles Laughton was pitted with shrapnel.

"The sunshine has brought forth the crowds," said Blanco Dario.

"That is so, comrade," said the shoe-polisher, reaching out for a dirty red rag. "They have not learned that there is death in the sunshine."

EVEN as he spoke, the shrill scream of a siren froze into immobility that circulating crowd. It was a warning wail of death.

Instinctively, the faces were turned toward the cloudless sky. Ears were cocked. There came a menacing, droning sound from the distance.

"There they come, comrade—four of them," called out the shoe-black, pointing. Blanco Dario could see the black bombers splitting the sky with their progress.

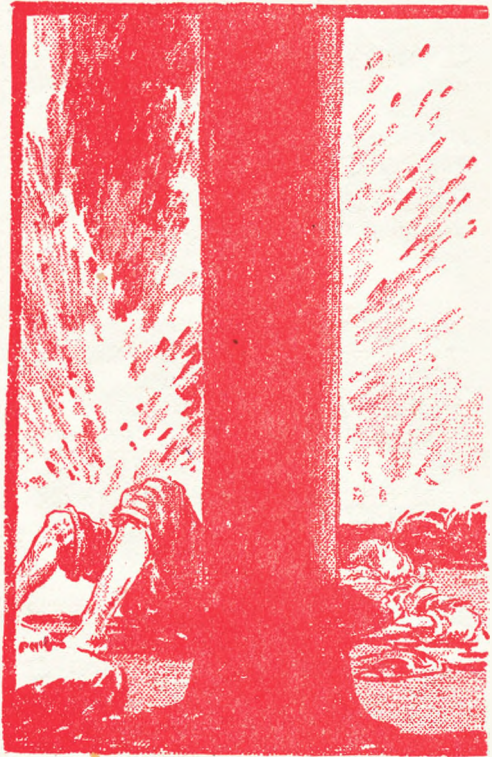
"Get on with my shoe!" he commanded, stirring the bundle of rags before him with his toe.

"*Si, señor.*"

As the shoe-polisher bowed his head and worked feverishly in his terror, the huge crowd in the Puerta del Sol seemed to be jerked into action by strings. They ran, scurried and tumbled to the nearest shelters. The yawning cave of the underground station in one corner of the square swallowed a swarming mob. The others dived into doorways. A woman, screaming aloud, ran back for her child, that was staring open-eyed at the sky. Clutching the child to her breast, she scurried away to shelter.

The dull roar of an exploding bomb could be heard in the distance. Like a mechanical beast seized with hysteria, a motorcar dashed into the square hooting and shrieking its warnings. A yellow tram stopped suddenly and spouted a crowd of terrified figures. All joined in the mad scramble for shelter.

All, except one, a well-dressed woman with a parasol. Rooted defiantly to the pavement with the shoe-polisher, Blanco Dario watched her progress with amazed eyes. The woman walked with dignity. She disdained even the suggestion of a hurried gait. And the absurd parasol



The mad clanging of an ambulance

was pointed toward the sky as though it would shelter her delicate pale features from exploding shrapnel and bombs as easily as it did from the summer sunshine.

"*Caramba!* She is brave—or mad," decided Blanco Dario.

He could hear the snapped barks of the anti-aircraft guns. Then another loud explosion of a dropped bomb. He saw a building slither in a cloud of smoke to the ground. A tongue of flame shot up.

The woman continued her leisurely progress across the deserted Puerta del Sol.

"*Cuidado!* Look out!" Dario yelled.

He was too late. The paving in the center of the square seemed to erupt as though some subterranean giant were pushing his way to freedom. There was a shattering explosion, a cloud of smoke, and a hail of lead spattering walls and windows. And from out of the smoke came trailing an open parasol, blown gently by the breeze.

Wrenching his dazzlingly polished shoe from the wooden stool and its crouching cleaner, Blanco Dario ran toward the spot where the bomb had exploded. Near the gaping hole lay the huddled figure



came to his ears. "Help me with this woman," he commanded.

of a woman. Her eyes were closed, but there was a faint smile of derision upon the beautiful pale face. The slightly rouged lips were parted as though in pleasurable excitement.

The mad clanging of an ambulance came to his ears as he lifted the figure from the ground. He shouted, and staggered toward it with his burden. It stopped alongside. Two scared faces peeked out from the driving seat.

"It is El Capitan Dario," gasped one of them.

"Help me with this woman," commanded Dario. "And then drive to the hospital."

"*Si, Capitan!*"

One of the men tumbled forth, gave a quick glance at the sky, and stretched out hands for the woman. Dario scrambled into the ambulance with her. The car jerked forward, and with a mad clanging of bells, it hurtled through the streets in the direction of the Plaza de Castelar.

Faces began to peer forth from doorways, eyes turned toward the sky.

"**N**OTHING to worry about, Captain Dario. She is only stunned. A day in bed, and she will be all right."

The white-smocked doctor smiled his encouragement to the fair-haired Spaniard who was lounging in the entrance hall of the Ritz hotel. This once fashionable center of Madrid was now a hospital. The cloak-room which had once held the hats and coats of pleasure-loving Spaniards now displayed old uniforms, pistol-holsters, belts, and even a machine-gun ranged against the pegs.

"Has she recovered consciousness?" asked Blanco Dario.

The doctor shook his head.

"I don't expect that for a couple of hours at least. Who is she, by the way? She looks a beauty."

"I'm curious to know," said Dario. "Nothing to identify her?"

"There's her dress," said the doctor. "It was badly torn by the explosion. It's in the operating theater, if you would like to see it."

"I think I would," decided Dario, and followed the quick step of the doctor into the polished corridors of the hotel.

The dress, a bluish-green affair of torn cloth, dangled over the back of a chair. It looked a pathetically inept garb. Dario took it in his firm, thin hands and examined it. A label, stitched to the neck, caught his eye. He whistled softly. The

dress had been made by a fashionable dressmaker whose shop was in the Rue de la Paix, Paris.

The doctor had turned away to examine a groaning lump of humanity that had been carried in on a stretcher. Dario was left to himself. He took the clinging, bluish-green fabric in his hands, sensed the subtle perfume that still pervaded it, as also the warmth of the living woman it had once clothed.

His thin hands caressed it with the appreciation of an artist. Something crackled in the skirt. He looked closer. A sheet of paper lay within the folds. Ruthlessly he tore the fabric apart and brought forth a written sheet. It consisted of a series of Spanish names.

Once again Blanco Dario whistled softly. He thrust the paper into his pocket and walked over to the doctor. The group seemed enveloped in ether.

"Yes, what is it?" asked the surgeon testily. He was probing into the lump of humanity stretched before him.

"That lady," said Dario. "I would like to question her when she recovers consciousness."

"Oh, very well," nodded the doctor. "I'll see that you're telephoned when she awakes. *Adios!*"

"*Adios!*" said Dario, and walked quickly away from the ether-pervaded room and the corridors with their subdued moans.

FOR the next three hours he was feverishly busy in the Government office facing the Plaza de Castelar. His activity was consequent upon that morning air-raid by the insurgents. Blanco Dario, once an artist with an *atelier* in Madrid, was now Captain Dario, whose business it was to supervise the evacuation of old men, women and children from Madrid.

A distasteful task. From out of the scared, fear-driven crowd that thronged his office, seeking the precious slips of paper that would carry them in convoys to freedom along the Valencia road, Dario had to weed out the possible fighters, the men still capable of bearing arms, and the women who could work among the wounded. Men blustered and cringed before him; women pleaded and wept bitterly. Only a belief in the cause and the future glory of Spain kept Dario to his nightmare task. He could, at moments, be relentless. He did not hesitate to send to the trenches men who were trying to sneak away to freedom.

There were moments when he wondered whether he was developing into a sea-green incorruptible, a Spanish Robespierre.

SEA green! It recalled to him that dress dangling over a chair-back, and the paper he had discovered. It recalled also the beautiful white face, with the closed eyes turned to the sunshiny sky over the Puerta del Sol. That was over three hours ago. He reached for the telephone and asked for the Ritz. There was an irritating delay in replying to his questions. At last the doctor himself spoke:

"A strange affair, indeed, Captain. The lady in question recovered consciousness an hour after you had left. It seems that she asked for her dress, which was refused. But when the nurse left the ward for a few moments, the lady slipped out of bed, dressed herself in a nurse's uniform, and walked out of the hospital."

"And you've no idea where she has gone?" stormed Dario.

"Not the slightest, Captain."

Cursing softly, Dario banged back the receiver and reached for his hat. . . .

Even as Captain Dario entered the Prado, he could hear the harsh symphony of battle that continued ceaselessly in the suburbs of Madrid. The boom of artillery, the staccato of machine-guns' fire, the rattle of musketry—it had become as regular as the one-time roar of traffic in the streets.

He passed a long queue of ragged desperate men and women, patiently huddling together so that they might be served with a little bread and the scraps of offal. At least the battlefields provided food in the shape of horseflesh, although much of it was rank and fly-blown before it reached the humans.

There was a terrifying hunger in their faces. But Blanco Dario was hungry too. He was hungry for the things he had had to forget—pictures, paint and the cunning of the old artists. His tall, straight figure passed eagerly into that semi-darkened labyrinth of the Prado Museum.

"*Salud!*"

"*Salud, comrade!*"

The bespectacled one-armed attendant seated in the doorway and reading a five-day-old newspaper, the *A.B.C.*, rose as he entered. He recognized Captain Dario, and knew that he would go on his accustomed stroll in the cellars.

Blanco Dario descended the steps. There in a tomblike light were the Goya grotesques. Those grim, macabre paintings of killings and executions, of battlefields and bloody bull-rings, were a lure to the young artist who had abandoned art to become a patriot. But in this spawn of death from a master's brush was real, vigorous life, the life of the people. This man of Aragon, son of poor laborers, had seen life through the eyes of a shrewd hungry peasant. All the fantastic energy of Spain was in his pigments.

Blanco Dario was in the mood for these bloody imaginings. He stopped, and peered in the semi-darkness at that painfully realistic picture of the massacre of the *Dos de Mayo*.

"And so the Spanish people spill their blood throughout the centuries."

THE words came softly to his ears. It seemed that a specter spoke them, a white face in a ghostly garb. It was almost a minute before Dario realized that it was a nurse who stood by his side—and that she was the woman he had picked up from the ground in the *Puerta del Sol*.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

A sad smile crossed her pale face.

"I had hoped to make your acquaintance earlier in the day, Captain Dario," she said in the same gentle tones. "Unfortunately, that bomb in the *Puerta del Sol* spoiled the introduction. I did hear, however, that you were good enough to carry me out of danger. I came to thank you for that."

He regarded her closely. The painter in him was struck by the medium pigmentation of her eyes. They might have been of that same bluish green as the dress she had worn. Dario could only think of Cervantes and Don Quixote's declaration: "I am persuaded that Dulcinea's eyes must be green emeralds, full and soft, with two rainbows for eyebrows."

"You knew that you would find me here?" he asked.

"Where else should one seek an artist but in the Prado?" she asked in turn.

"At least these precious paintings have survived the cursed bombing of our enemies," he retorted. He straightened himself, stiffly. "You should not have come here."

"Why not?"

"Because I intend to arrest you. You are an enemy of Spain."

There was no tremor in those green eyes, and no tremor in her voice as she said, calmly:

"I am Spanish, too."

From out of his pocket he thrust the damning slip of paper before her. In an accusatory voice he demanded:

"What then means this list of names? These people are traitors."

"They too are Spanish," she said.

"What is your business with them?" he demanded bluntly.

"I wanted them to escape—from Madrid," she replied. "They are old friends of mine. I was prepared to help them."

"Damned aristocrats, all of them," he blurted out.

"They may be," she admitted. "Yet to me they are men and women deserving of help."

He came closer to her.

"Do you realize that you are risking your life to help these worthless people, that I have only to give the word, and you would be placed against a wall and shot?"

She nodded, slowly.

"I realize everything. I came to Madrid to save these so-called 'worthless' people. They are true Spaniards, and believe in the future of Spain."

"A Spain under dictatorship or dissolute monarchy!" retorted Dario. "That is not the Spain we are hoping to build, even with the enemy battering at our gates." His long fingers closed about her arm. "Who are you?"

"The Duchess of Alcala," she replied simply.

A smile twisted his face. "We are all comrades in Madrid," he said.

"Then you may call me Comrade Antonia," she retorted.

"The Duchess of Alcala!" he muttered. "I might have guessed it from your bravado in the *Puerta del Sol*."

HE realized that before him stood the woman whom Government agents had been seeking throughout Spain. She it was who had organized an escaping club of aristocrats, men and women suspected of helping the insurgents, of betraying Government secrets, seeking only the restoration of the monarchy. From out of Madrid, Valencia and even Barcelona, these suspects had been smuggled. And when the Government agents like baffled hounds had come to the end of their chase, it was the name of the Duchess of Alcala that had been whispered to them.

"Were you not expecting me?" she asked.

"We suspected that you were in Madrid," he replied.

"Well, then?"

"What was your business with me this morning in the Puerta del Sol?" he asked.

"I wanted you to give me one of those precious pieces of paper that send Spaniards to freedom."

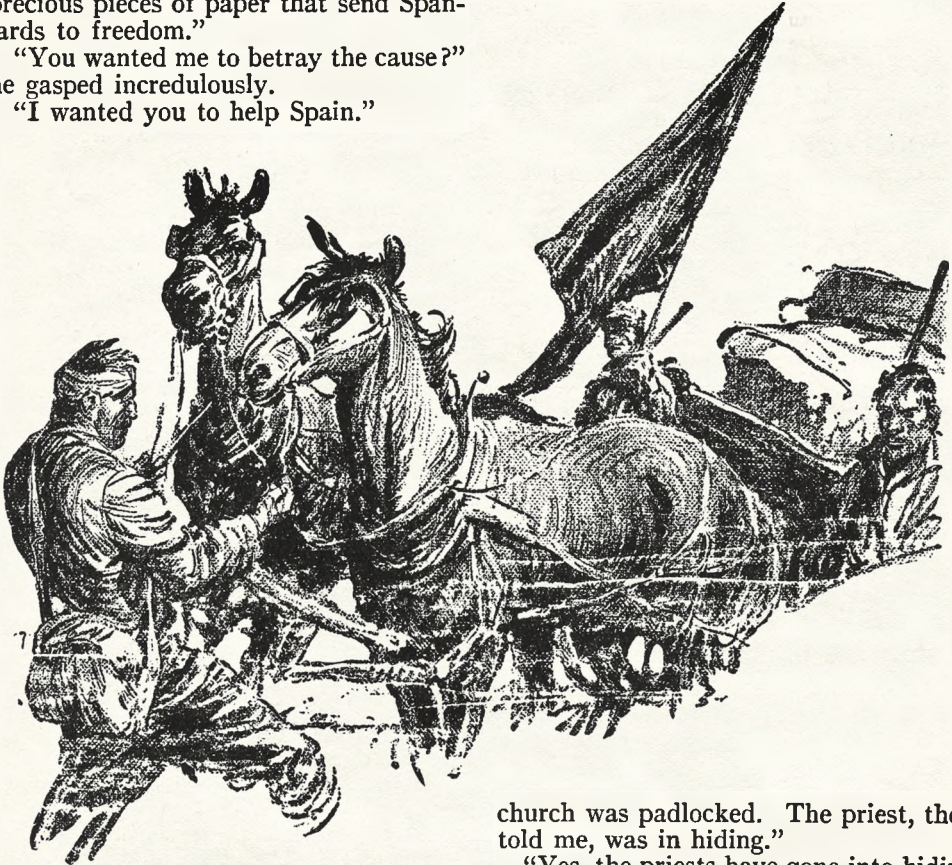
"You wanted me to betray the cause?" he gasped incredulously.

"I wanted you to help Spain."

They were close to each other. The fair-haired young Spaniard still held the arm of dark-haired Duchess of Alcala, who was still a girl.

"The killing of your husband should have warned you," he said.

"I tried to enter a church to pray for him," she replied. "But the door of the



"This is my Spain," he burst out, "the Spain of Madrid, its people, its poverty and its—"

"And its pictures!" she nodded, in the direction of the Goyas. "That too is my Spain, although I was exiled from it when King Alfonso was forced into abdication. Oh, yes, señor, I know that might be right, and that the people claimed to possess both qualities. My husband, the Duke of Alcala, chose to think differently. He was found bludgeoned to death amidst the ruins of his palace—my home."

"Blood is still being spilled in these streets," he said sternly.

"As it was even in the days of Goya," she remarked sadly. "And all for the sake of Spain."

church was padlocked. The priest, they told me, was in hiding."

"Yes, the priests have gone into hiding with those aristocrats whom you would have helped into freedom," he said.

She smiled again. "The aristocrats, as you call them, have achieved their freedom," she said.

"You mean these men and women—"

Once again he clutched the piece of paper, and she nodded.

"The passes you granted today to old men and women were not the only ones signed in your name. The first batch of refugees has already gone forth on the road to Valencia. They will be helped across the frontier into France. They are the men and women who will build up the new Spain, when you who call yourselves Spaniards have tired of killing each other in the name of liberty."

"So forgery is among your crimes too!" he shouted.

"To save the men and women of my country, I would commit any crime," she replied.

A sudden thought struck him. He glanced at his watch. He hated her in her smiling triumph. The watch told him that her triumph might be short-lived. It was just possible that the batch of refugees along the Valencia road had been held up by the civil guards.

"We shall see!" he snapped at her. Once again his hand closed upon her arm. He felt the warm flesh against his palm. "You are coming with me."

"Where?"

road. She was as cool and dignified as when she first began to cross the deserted Puerta del Sol. And still as beautiful. Savagely, Blanco Dario admitted that. He found himself unable to gaze for long into those bluish-green eyes.

"You drive a car exceedingly well," she condescended to comment.

"This is a matter of life and death," he growled, twisting the wheel to avoid what appeared an unavoidable collision with an ammunition-wagon.

"Life to you, and death to a number of brave Spaniards," she persisted.

"They are traitors."



He drove fast, even on the rutted roadways; but the Duchess seemed unperturbed at this desperate dash for the Valencia road.

"To the outposts of Madrid, along the Valencia road."

Without a second glance at the Goyas, he dragged her forth into the afternoon sunshine of Madrid.

HE drove fast in the Hispano-Suiza which was always at his disposal. Not even on the rutted roadways did he allow his foot to rise from the accelerator. An artillery train drawn by mules was ruthlessly ordered aside. A khaki-clad battalion of the International Brigade bowed, to the dust of his progress, but they continued to sing in hoarse voices their marching song, "The Red Flag."

He did not glance at the woman at his side. The Duchess of Alcala, or Comrade Antonia as she smilingly insisted upon being called, seemed unperturbed at this desperate dash for the Valencia

"To you, perhaps; but not to themselves."

He hated her all the more for her pert replies, hated her for her beauty and cool self-possession. If only she had been a sentimental harridan, one of those heavy-jowled women who showed signs of luxurious dissipation! Then he would have ordered a firing-squad and placed her against a wall without qualms. But the thought of bullets smacking into this pale slim body sickened him. He clenched his teeth.

"Please remember that you are my prisoner. Any attempt at escape, and I'll shoot you down."

She actually laughed—a ripple of infectious laughter that might have come from a schoolgirl.

"I really have no intention of escaping. I trust you implicitly."

He sounded his klaxon viciously. A group of soldiers jumped for the nearest ditch. He drove on with concentrated fury. Those green eyes would soon be gazing upon the horrors of reality.

Pleasant little puffs of smoke, like toy clouds of cotton-wool, could now be seen against the sky. Bursting shrapnel. Despite the roar of the powerful engine, the booming of the guns could be heard. An ambulance jolted past. A stained, bandaged leg stuck out from the back, incongruously. Two men, faces black with stubble and powder, staggered along the road, holding each other up. They were both wounded. A dead thing lay in the ditch, with shreds of clothing dangling like a fallen scarecrow. Blanco Dario took a savage delight in it. This was war. Let her look upon it. The painted canvases of Goya in their gilded frames were nothing to the reality of this road. But the fleeting visions he glimpsed through the windshield caused his fingers to itch for the feel of brushes and tubes. This, the terrible Spain of today, was worthy of a painter. It ought to be painted, in the fury of hate which now overwhelmed him.

He jammed on the brakes. The car shrilled to a standstill. They had arrived. It was an old inn with a crazy veranda surrounding it, and apparently holding the brick and wood together—a picturesque place where *Don Quixote* might have ordered *Sancho Panza* to stable his horse for the night.

WITH an ironic suggestion of hospitality, a brown-faced innkeeper came forth wiping his mouth. He was followed by two civil guards, who saluted quickly at the sight of Dario.

"The refugees! Have they gone through?" demanded Dario.

"*Si, Capitan!* Over an hour ago. All their papers were in order. We were advised to get them through quickly. The enemy are reported to be preparing an attack."

The civil guard who spoke was obviously pleased with his own efficiency.

"You examined their papers carefully?" demanded Dario.

"They all had your signature, *Capitan.*"

He waited for due commendation. Instead, there was a laugh. It came from the woman in the uniform of a nurse who was descending from the car. That laugh

seemed to transform the face of Blanco Dario.

"You fool!" he snapped at the surprised fellow in uniform.

THE woman strolled toward the fair-haired Spaniard.

"So we arrived too late!" she said quietly.

"I hope you're satisfied," he said. "It will be your last exploit, Duchess."

"That it succeeded, satisfies me," she nodded. "I have saved for the better days a group of men and women who love Spain. What does my own life matter?"

"At least, when I hand you over to the military authorities, I shall have rid Spain of a dangerous woman," he said relentlessly.

"Do you really think that?" she asked. The gaze of those green eyes were upon him. The beautiful features seemed very close. "I'm hungry," she added prosaically. "Maybe, if I am already condemned, I will be permitted to have a last meal in comfort?"

"You'll be lucky if you can get a meal in this place," said Dario.

She went up to the innkeeper. At first he shook his head in a sardonic grin. She continued to speak, sharply, peremptorily. The innkeeper changed his attitude. He bowed. He made a suggestion. She nodded. He made another suggestion. She smiled upon him. With a chuckle of delight he dived into the inn. . . .

"You're a very remarkable woman, Duchess," admitted Blanco Dario, an hour later.

They were seated facing each other at a table. Three candles flickered with a thin flame between them. They had just finished an appetizing omelette. Now she was munching cheese with gusto. And the bottle of wine was nearly empty. The white teeth as they bit into the cheese fascinated him.

"I do not find myself remarkable," she said.

"At least, you persuaded that innkeeper to provide us with such a meal as I have not eaten for months in Madrid."

She laughed. "That was easy. I told him who I was."

"The Duchess of Alcala!"

"Of course. He remembered me. Oh, do not be alarmed. He does not know me as the most dangerous woman in Spain, as you called me an hour ago. He only remembered that I often dined here in the happy days when Spain seemed content to doze in an eternal afternoon."

"Those afternoons were pleasant only for the rich—not for the poor devils of peasants."

She shook her head.

"I don't agree. I know something of the peasants. Yes, my mother was a peasant. Does that surprise you, Captain Dario? Remember, Goya was born of peasants. True, their lives were hard; but mantillas, exquisite lace and teardances at the Ritz do not make for real happiness. I know my mother was a happier woman than I am today. If life was hard, it was, at least peaceful."

"The youth of today must fight for freedom," he insisted. "We will not be cursed with servitude."

"There is no freedom in this world," she retorted. "Neither for you, Captain Dario, nor for me. You may change governments and even dethrone kings, but tyranny still goes on."

"While men kill and women betray!" he protested.

"Women seek only love," she said quietly.

FOR a moment there was silence. They looked at each other. Dario found himself trembling before the loveliness of the woman. It was true that she was a thing of beauty. The artist in him was sick at the thought of destroying beauty.

"I want you to tell me," he whispered through the flame of the candles, "for whom was the piece of paper that you desired so much when you walked into the Puerta del Sol this morning?"

"It was for myself. My work was finished. I decided to leave Spain and go back to my exile. '*Me voy a Francia,*' I said. Yes, I decided to go back to France."

"You could have forged a passport, as you did those others."

"That is true. Perhaps it was absurd chivalry on my part, a fantastic desire to achieve a real passport from you."

"A strange thought."

She shook her head. "A persistent thought. The motto of the Alcalas. It is always in my mind. '*Potius mori quam fœdari.*' Rather die than be sullied. Do you understand?"

"A peasant girl proving herself to be an aristocrat," he nodded. He dived his hand into his pocket. He brought forth a slip of paper, scribbled his signature upon it, and handed it to her.

"There, Duchess, is your passport. It

will carry you through to the Valencia road—and freedom."

Her face went deathly pale. Her hand holding the slip of paper trembled. The green eyes were dimmed with tears; with a sudden gesture she thrust the paper toward the flame of the candles.

But he was even quicker. He caught her wrist and held it. Without a word being spoken, the Duchess and the Captain realized that they were a woman and a man, in love.

"Please!" he begged.

She rose from the table. He caught her in his arms. They kissed. Even in that short embrace they were conscious of the guns thudding incessantly, and the fiendish rattle of machine-guns in the distance. The candles elongated their shadows against the timbered walls, giving a Velasquez richness to the gloom.

"We shall see each other again, my dear?" she begged.

"When the killing is finished," he murmured. "I shall never forget you."

"I hate the death that stalks through Spain," she burst out.

"It has brought me your love, and I am content," he said.

Once more they embraced. The growl of the guns became more menacing. Gently he drew her aside.

"You must go, at once. The road can only be held a little longer. The enemy are closing in. I want you free, my dear."

Her face stained with tears, the precious passport crumpled in her hand, for the last time they embraced.

"*Adios,* my dear."

"*Adios.*"

"I shall see you—when?" she asked, tearfully.

He shrugged. Once again he was the Spaniard.

"*Mañana*—the tomorrow of the new Spain."

SHE was gone. Mechanically he emptied the last of the wine into his glass. He raised it to the candlelight. It had all the richness of blood in it.

"To—*mañana,*" he said aloud, and drank at one gulp.

The rattle of the machine-guns came nearer. He could hear shouts, and the scurry of feet. The battle was coming nearer. There was killing to be done. Spaniard against Spaniard! He felt for his revolver and stalked out of the room.

Murder Mesa

PETE JORDAN was winded and panting by the time he reached the headquarters office. He had run most of the way back from Lookout Point.

He could see McKay, the Park supervisor, hunched at his lighted desk. Outside, sunset continued its brilliant red flood across the high flat top of Mesa Blanca. Only a few other squat adobe buildings were beginning to show lighted windows, for this was the first day that the Park was officially open.

At the office door, Pete Jordan paused, getting his facts clear. He didn't know McKay very well; didn't know whether the chief was a believing man or a suspicious one. There might be trouble. And Pete Jordan wanted no break in what had seemed a splendid summer's job. All he wanted here was to go on with his studies, and to give his lectures on archeology, for which he had been hired. . . . He hadn't particularly wanted to take that walk to Lookout Point. But the girl had asked him to go with her.

He opened the door. McKay looked up. "Will you bring a pair of glasses," Pete asked, entering, "and come out to the Point?"

McKay scowled. "What for, Jordan?" He was a spare, brown, weathered man, severely military in his green uniform.

Pete Jordan himself, having arrived only four hours ago, was still in his gray traveling-tweeds. He was bareheaded. He was tall, young. Light reflected upward from McKay's desk picked out sharply the straight, clean-lined features, the blue eyes, the curly blond hair.

"I'm not sure," he answered. "It was getting dark, and too far down, but I think there's a man's body at the foot of the cliff."

McKay jolted upright. "That's impossible! There's a four-foot safety wall clear around that Point. No one could possibly fall off!"

"Just the same," Pete said, "I think you ought to bring some glasses before it gets any darker." Better, he decided, not tell all he knew just yet.

McKay was standing now, reaching for binoculars on a shelf. He looked disturbed and a little angry. Things like



this shouldn't happen, with the Park season just opening and vacation tourists due to come pouring in.

They walked rapidly along the camp road, passed the store and dining-room with its wide front porch, came to the row of guest cottages beyond. The last one was where the girl was staying, Pete had left her there on his way back.

Then the road curved in a growth of cedar and desert pine, running close to the sheer drop of the mesa rim. They came to a sign: LOOKOUT POINT, and went down a short trail through shoulder-high brush to a circular clearing at the end.

Without speaking, McKay leaned across the rock safety wall, braced himself and focused the glasses downward. When he straightened and stepped back, the lines of his sun-weathered face were deep and hard.

He asked bluntly, "What brought you here so soon after you had arrived, Jordan?"

"The view," Pete said. "I had heard you could look south over half of New Mexico from this Point. So I took a walk."

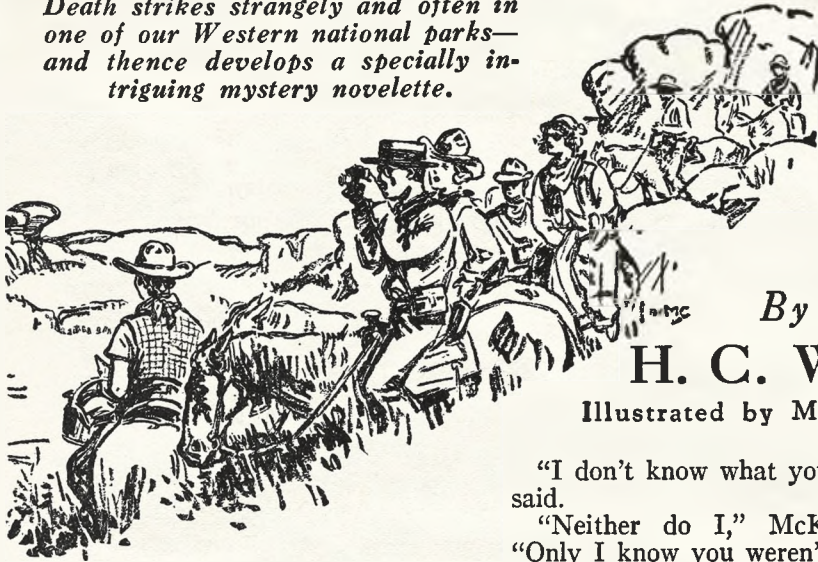
"Anyone else here?"

"Yes, a man named Craig. I don't know him. He was in the stage that brought us up from the junction, and I saw his name when we registered at the Park entrance."

"You mean you two walked down here together?"

Pete shook his head. "Craig was already in this clearing, alone, when I

Death strikes strangely and often in one of our Western national parks—and thence develops a specially intriguing mystery novelette.



By
H. C. WIRE

Illustrated by Monte Crews

reached the top of the trail. He saw me, came up and asked for a match and went on."

"Were you alone, Jordan?"

"No," Pete admitted reluctantly. "I was with a girl who came in today also. Her name is Carol Douglas."

Anger was again in the Park chief's tone as he stated flatly, "Just coincidence, of course. You three come in on the same stage, you come to the Point right away—and a man is dead! That man certainly couldn't be alive after that thousand-foot drop. Well, come on."

He was silent during their return to the office. Arriving, he went directly to his desk telephone. "I'm calling our county sheriff." When the call was put through he leaned back in his chair and considered Pete Jordan thoughtfully.

THEN he said slowly: "It may be suicide. If it's something else, you'll be questioned. So will Craig and that girl. I imagine you are all right, Jordan, although I don't know anything about you except your record. Just out of college, aren't you?"

"Yes." Pete named a midwest school.

"And you spent last summer at Grand Cañon, guiding and giving your campfire talks on archeology."

"That's right."

McKay nodded, slowly. "Then I don't need to tell you how it is in the National parks. Hundreds of people will start camping in here. We can't have a scare of any sort. And certainly we cannot have one of our own men involved in a trouble as serious as this may be."

"I don't know what you mean," Pete said.

"Neither do I," McKay admitted. "Only I know you weren't going to tell me about that girl. You were shielding her. That's all. Get your dinner, then go to your quarters and stay there."

IN a long three-hour wait, Pete was alone. Bill Blain, one of the full-time Park rangers who shared this small cabin with him did not come back. At intervals a variety of sounds passed outside. Soon after he had returned from the dining room, a car had roared in across the mesa. There had been a thud of horses—the Sheriff and rangers, he thought, going down to the body. Then the night settled into its hushed silence.

He built a blaze in the fireplace and unpacked his things, trying to be busy while time dragged, and trying not to let McKay's words trouble him too much. But he could not get Carol Douglas out of his mind. Surely she had nothing to do with this! Her asking him to go for a walk to see the view from Lookout Point was wholly natural and innocent. She was the most strikingly beautiful girl he had ever known, tall, slender, with a quiet poise of background and breeding. But she had not looked happy; that was what had made him talk to her, coming up from the junction. And she had responded warmly, as if glad to talk. It was not until they were at the Park entrance, and she had reached out to sign the registration-book, that he had noticed she wore an engagement ring.

His mind went to the other passenger on the stage, the stocky, bald, middle-aged man named Craig who had sat in the front seat with the driver, Duke Delaney. Craig had asked Delaney a lot of

questions about the Park. But going over those questions now, as much as he could remember, Pete saw no harm in them.

"Oh, skip it!" he told himself. "It may be only a case of suicide after all."

The horses returned from below the mesa. Shortly after that there was a knock on his door and McKay opened it. "All right," he said, "come with me."

IN the headquarters office blinds had been drawn. Three other people were in the room.

McKay said briefly, "Jordan, meet Tom White, our county sheriff."

A big, gray, ponderous man nodded, acknowledging the introduction. He sat in McKay's swivel chair behind a long table, with Carol Douglas seated at the table's end on his right and Craig at the end on his left.

Both Craig and the girl were in shadow, for there was only one light, a hooded desk lamp turned so that its rays fell upon an object directly in front of the Sheriff.

It was a brass box, about three inches square by an inch high, lying on a spread handkerchief. There were scratches and dents in it, as if it had fallen on rock.

"Jordan," Tom White asked with no opening talk, "did you ever know a Dr. Lake?"

"Lake?" Pete culled through names that came readily. This, he knew, was no case of suicide. "I can't recall anyone," he said.

The Sheriff moved his gaze to the girl. She was sitting very still. Shadow almost blotted out her black hair, leaving only the white oval of her face, her mouth with lips gently pressed together.

"Dr. Lake mean anything to you, Miss Douglas?" the Sheriff asked.

She spoke quietly. "How old a man? What did he look like?"

Tom White glanced at McKay, who had remained standing. "You'd better answer that. I never saw him alive."

"Well, scientific-looking," McKay offered. "That's what he was, a scientist of some sort. When he came here two months ago he wore a pointed beard. He let it grow and didn't shave. I couldn't say how old, because of the beard, but past forty, I imagine."

The girl shook her head. "I'm sure," she answered, "he was no one I ever knew."

"How about you, Craig?" White turned heavily in his chair.

"Means nothing to me," the bald man said. "In my business—I'm a stock promoter—we don't meet many scientific men."

Tom White nodded. Without lifting his hand from the table, he pointed one finger at the brass box. "Ever see this before, Jordan?"

"Not that one, perhaps," Pete said. "But I've seen others. I have one like it in my trunk."

"Sure it's in your trunk now?"

The question jolted; ran a queer cold sensation down Pete Jordan's spine. His trunk had come up with him on Delaney's stage. He hadn't finished unpacking. He was *not* sure!

"Never mind," White continued. "What do you use this thing for?"

"Well," Pete explained, and found his voice hoarse and his heart suddenly beating too fast, "a man can run a survey line with it, or make a fairly accurate map, or just use it as a good compass. Most Forest Service and Park men have them."

"And also," the Sheriff put in, "a man could be killed with it—say, if struck at the base of the brain." He swung his head unexpectedly. "Don't you think so, Craig?"

"Yes, indeed," Craig answered, pleasantly agreeable. "That compass looks heavy. I'm sure a hard blow could be struck with it."

THE Sheriff continued to look at him. "That's right. There was a wound at the base of Dr. Lake's skull that I am sure could not have come from hitting rock. He dropped straight, onto smooth sandstone."

White turned back to the compass and sat fingering the edge of the handkerchief without touching the metal box. "I'm going to ask you people to do something," he said in a moment. "Including you, McKay. I have no charges to make and I'll instruct the coroner to suspend his verdict. But I'm going to ask all of you to let me take your fingerprints. Any objections?"

"Yes."

Pete Jordan shifted his gaze quickly. It was Carol who had answered. "I object," she finished, "to any such criminal implication. I just don't like the idea."

"You can take mine, Sheriff," Craig offered readily.

Pete was about to say it was all right with him, too, when Tom White folded the handkerchief around the compass, put it in his pocket and stood up. "No,"

he said. "Changed my mind. That's all I want now."

Carol rose at once. Pete faced her, and caught urgent appeal in her eyes. He touched her arm. "I'll walk to your cottage with you."

She murmured, "I wish you would."

Tom White swung about and his casual voice put in, "If you don't mind, I'll escort Miss Douglas to her cabin."

Pete felt the girl's arm tighten in his grasp, pressing his fingers to her side. Then she released him. She smiled up at the big gray man. "Thank you, Sheriff. I'll be glad to have you, of course."

Intently Pete Jordan stared at her face, trying for some word or look from her. She avoided his eyes. Then she was walking out with Tom White's towering form behind her. And in a moment he too was outside, moving toward his quarters in a dazed turmoil of feeling. That girl was in trouble! And she had wanted to tell him something. *What?*

BILL BLAIN, a powerfully-built young red-head, was in the cabin, reading a magazine in front of the fire. He looked up, narrowed his eyes, then grinned. "I don't see any scars."

"What do you mean?" Entering, Pete went to his trunk, dug into it and with relief touched his compass. He dragged a chair to the hearth.

"Didn't Tom White put you through the third degree," Bill Blain asked, "and get a confession out of you? Let's turn in."

"No," Pete said. "I want to talk."

"What about?"

"This case."

Blain tossed his magazine onto the floor. "Oh, let it ride. Why bother? You wouldn't, if there wasn't a tall, dark, good-looking girl involved!"

"I could fall for her," Pete admitted. "But she's engaged. Seriously though, haven't you any ideas about this?"

"Sure," Blain grinned. "Three. You did it. Craig did it. That girl did it."

Pete bent forward. "I'm serious, Bill. This may get me in pretty deep; I don't know. What was Lake's work?"

"Anthropologist, geologist or something. He came in a couple of months ago and asked for a permit to study the cañons and cliff dwellings. He didn't need any guide." Bill Blain stood up. "Now listen. There's a big day coming tomorrow. I've got to drag you over the trails and show you the works, and at night you start your lectures. Sit up if



"Just coincidence, of course. You three come to the Point—and a man is dead."

you want to. Sit there and think about that girl and get yourself tangled some more. I'm going to pound my ear!"

Next day, Pete Jordan's real interest in the Park and the business of learning a guide's routine kept the surface of his mind occupied. Still, as he went over the trails with Bill Blain, getting directions and learning facts, he caught himself at times only half listening.

He wondered what Tom White had learned from Carol. What did the Sheriff suspect?

Coming out of the dining-hall at noon, he passed Duke Delaney and the stage-driver gave him a wink. "Nice business last night, huh? Nice for me!"

"What do you mean?"

"They hired my hack to drive that dead man to town. Boy, I'll charge plenty!"

Duke Delaney was small, dark, talkative and boastful. Yesterday Pete had been amused by him. Today he was not. Delaney had been in the ring. Admitted he was good. But this station-wagon business, he had boasted, was more money. That is what he meant now.

Pete did not see Carol nor Craig at all during the day. But that night the stocky man was at the campfire gathering, jovial and expansive in the middle of an appreciative group.

Many more tourists had arrived. The campsites and trailer grounds were spotted with cars. When the huge log fire was lighted, thirty-five or forty people sat upon the half-circle of benches to hear the Park's young archeologist give the first of his talks on the history of primitive western American man.

This was something Pete Jordan liked. It was informal. Everyone seemed interested. He stood with his back to the blaze, talking to the mass group.

In his limit of half an hour he sketched the theory of how western Indian tribes were thought to have originated in Asia; how they had migrated across what may have been a land connection between Siberia and Alaska, then had drifted southward, some splitting off into the mountains and deserts, others continuing on to form the civilizations of Mexico and South America.

His time passed quickly. At the end, he said, "If any of you have questions to ask, I'll try to answer them."

There was a moment's silence.

HE had become aware of Carol as soon as his lecture was well started. His glance had gone to her often, and in all this time she had not looked at him.

She sat off on his left, at the end of the semi-circle of benches. She had on a tan coat, open over brown knickers and a dark green leather jacket. What had drawn his glance was the way she remained so motionless, elbows on her knees with both hands cupping her chin, her eyes fixed intently upon the campfire.

Breaking the moment's silence, a voice said, "Yes, I have a question," and Pete turned to look at Craig seated directly in front of him.

"It isn't exactly concerning what you have just told us," Craig went on, "but it's part of history, you might say. I want to know if there's any buried treasure around here."

A man near him chuckled and there was a ripple of women's laughter.

Pete saw Carol lift her head and stare across at Craig. Then she straightened, looking at him, waiting for his answer.

Professionally, he said: "Precious metals were unknown to the tribes in this district. There are no mineral deposits here. So the chance of buried treasure is very remote."

"Yes, but how about back in the Spanish conquest days?" Craig argued. "You take some of those mule-trains loaded with gold that got lost."

"Those mule-trains loaded with gold," Pete said, "never existed."

Craig scowled, his smooth round face almost pouting. Then he shook his head and smiled. "I'm just a sucker, I guess."

Men and women near him laughed. Craig's smile became confident. "You know your stuff, of course, but I heard a buried-treasure story that I was telling some of these people here, and I still believe it."

Pete grinned. "That's all right."

There were no more questions. He stepped from the firelight and went to Carol as she stood up.

"Walk with me," he said. "I want to know something."

"Be careful, Pete." She was knotting a red handkerchief around her black hair. "I have a permanent escort, watching." Her glance went past him. Turning, he saw Sheriff White's vague figure almost a part of the cedar trunks that edged the clearing.

Facing her again, he spoke quickly. "I've got to know what you wanted to tell me last night."

"Nothing. It's too late now."

"But Carol!" he urged. "What is it? Is there something I can do?"

Her hands were raised, tying the knot over her forehead. They covered her face with shadow; he could read nothing. She was starting to turn away as she said, "I'd like to know that I can trust you—that's all—if I should need some one, badly."

"You can," he promised. Then she was walking on.

FOR two days Park life went along with a surface gayety and a summer vacation air. It was genuine gayety as far as the tourists were concerned; no word of trouble had sifted out to them. That was McKay's order. Pete led chattering, excited groups through Cliff Mansion and Piñon House, took them on students' tours to the restored kivas, continued his lecture at night and was aware of a grimmer current underneath all this only when he caught frequent glimpses of Sheriff White's huge form.

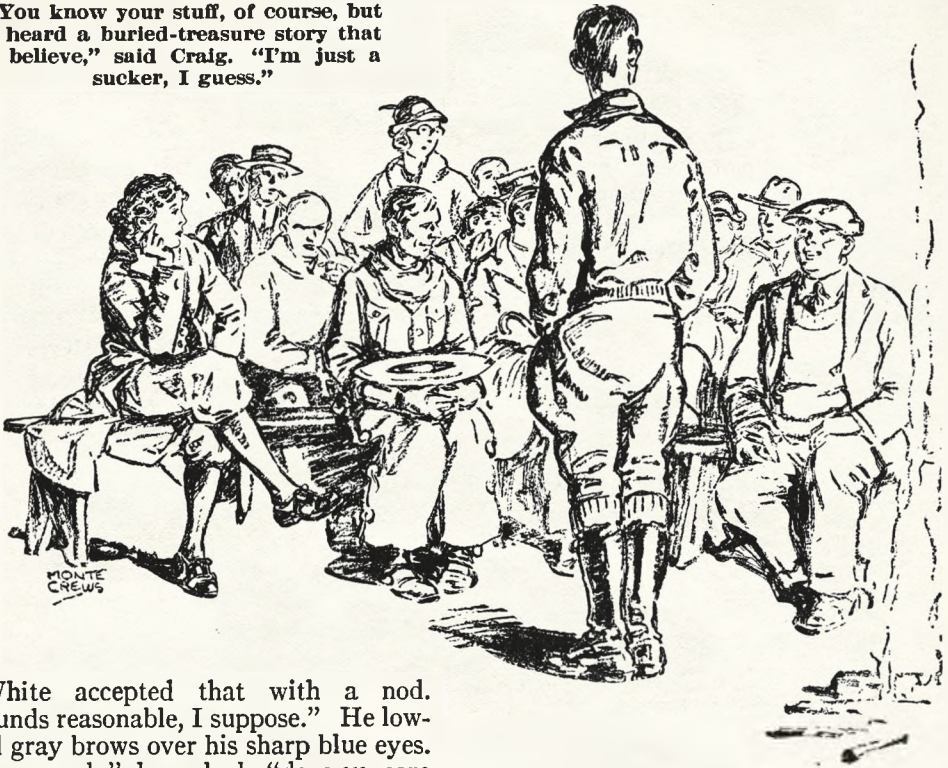
If the Sheriff was getting anywhere on this case he did not show it. Each evening he came to the campfire with Carol, and took up his post outside the lighted circle. But most of the time aside from that, he sat on the long shaded porch of the dining-hall, watching the campers.

On the afternoon of the second day Pete ran into him coming out of the administration building.

"Been looking for you," White said. He moved over and leaned against the plastered adobe wall. "What are you hiding, Jordan? I've been checking up, here and there. Why didn't you want to give a home address on the registration-book?"

"Because I expect to be in field work for a long time," Pete explained. "Wherever I stop now is home." He had put down simply, "*Mesa Blanca*."

"You know your stuff, of course, but I heard a buried-treasure story that I believe," said Craig. "I'm just a sucker, I guess."



White accepted that with a nod. "Sounds reasonable, I suppose." He lowered gray brows over his sharp blue eyes. "How much," he asked, "do you care about that Douglas girl?"

"Quite a lot, Sheriff," Pete said with no hesitation. It was true, and if it drew him deeper into this thing, that didn't matter. He knew his own innocence.

But Tom White looked relieved at the admission. "I figured you did. I wanted to be sure. I'm going to ask you to do something, Jordan. Don't let her go tramping around the mesa alone. Stay near her as much as you can. Of course you've got your job. I've been doing this, but I have to leave for a while."

"Yes, sure I'll keep watch," Pete promised. "You don't want to tell me why—who or what I'm guarding against?"

The man's gray head wagged slowly.

"Yes, I'll say what I think. I don't like to be so blind. It's Craig. I'd say Craig killed Dr. Lake. I don't know where the girl comes in." He was grave. "Leave Craig alone, Jordan. Don't let that kind of talk get back to him." He paused. Then, as if deciding to yield one necessary bit of information, he said, "Craig is not the one I'm afraid of now. I don't need to warn you to keep all this in your own head. I wouldn't even talk about it to the girl. She's in trouble enough." . . .

That same afternoon Pete had a late guide trip to Sun Temple. He met his group in the camp street. The dozen

men and women were in the open Park bus, and he had climbed into the front seat, when the driver beside him said, "Here's another."

Pete looked around. It was Carol, hurrying toward them from her cottage. She opened a door far back, stepped up, called a breathless, "All right. Thanks."

Their eyes met. Her face was flushed. He had never seen it so highly colored. She smiled, and then the bus started and for half an hour he had no chance to talk to her, nor be with her alone.

But he managed it when he had herded his group through the last of Sun Temple's sacred kivas. They were down in the dim pit of the ceremonial room. All others had climbed up the ladder ahead of them. And yet, now that he had his first moment to ask the questions that had burned so strongly, he did not do it. He looked at her, and knew suddenly that what she needed was to forget these things if she could.

At the foot of the ladder, he took her arm. "Wait, Carol. Just a minute. There's a camp dance tonight. I'm off duty. Go with me?"

"I'd love to, Pete!" Sudden eagerness swept the tired look from her eyes.

"Then I'll come to your cottage at eight."

"No, meet me outside the dining-hall."

He stared at her. "Why? Why not your cottage?"

"Because," she answered, starting up the ladder ahead of him, "I'm not going back."

It was a trivial thing to bother him as much as it did during the next two hours. He told himself it was. And yet, *why* hadn't she wanted to meet at her cottage?

He changed from his daytime laced boots and khaki breeches into bleached cords, a gray wool shirt and black tie. Nights were cold here on the six-thousand-foot elevation of the mesa, even in summer. He put on his leather jacket, then went to dinner.

CAROL was not in the camp room, and did not come in during the meal. But she was waiting for him on the porch when he went out, and even her quick smile did not wash away a sharp suspicion. Had she lied to him? If she hadn't gone back to her cottage, then where had she been all this time?

She took his arm as they went down the steps and her hand gave a warm clinging pressure. "This is fun, Pete! Will you promise me a full moon?"

He chuckled and matched her step, and held her close to his side. Away from her, he could warn himself against being involved with a girl he knew nothing about; with her, the feeling that she stirred in him made nothing else matter.

There was an undercurrent of excitement about her tonight, a tenseness of her body as they swayed together, and a keyed-up note in her voice that made him wonder. He tightened his arm and glanced down. His eye caught the curve of her fingers on his jacket sleeve, and he looked up quickly, staring at the profile of her face, telling himself there was no meaning in this . . . she had taken it off and had forgotten to put it back on. She was not wearing the diamond ring!

They moved along the road under shadowy cedars until the campfire glow was ahead. They had talked little. Her voice had quieted. Now she stopped and turned him to face her squarely.

"Pete," she asked, "tell me something. Do you believe I had anything to do with what has happened here?"

Tom White's advice came back to him: "I wouldn't talk about it even to the girl." He looked down at her, shook his head and smiled. "This is my night off. We're dancing. Everything else is out."

"But I've got to know."

"You mean, Carol, you've got to know what I think about you?"

"Yes."

"All right, you asked me." He caught her to him suddenly and kissed her. He crushed her, felt her soft lips part for one brief instant with a flood of warmth—then she was struggling from him, her body rigid in his arms.

He let her go and stared at her, shaken. "You asked me," he repeated.

"I did. And that's what I wanted to know." Her own voice was unsteady. "Don't be angry, Pete, please. Give me time." She took his arm again. The first blare of swing music struck out from the clearing ahead of them.

A blaze of logs flooded parked cars and the moving forms of people, and made pale yellow globes of electric lights that had been strung around the open-air dance floor. It was a vacation crowd, gay and noisy; a mixture of men and women in camp clothes, others from the guest cottages in evening dress, a few military-looking rangers in their dark green uniforms.

Pete took Carol into his arms and for a little while they moved without speaking, until they found their rhythm together and he felt that tenseness of her body ebb away.

She looked up then. "You're a grand dancer, Pete. I knew you would be."

He pressed her smooth hair with his cheek. "You're something special yourself!" She was sweet, yielding, pliant. He was—it swept over him wildly—dead in love with this girl!

He looked around for Bill Blain. The young red-head was not here and he wondered. Bill was always wanting a good time. How did he happen to miss this? Craig was on the floor. Later he picked out Duke Delaney sitting in his station-wagon, watching the dancers.

WITHOUT intermission the music went on. The orchestra, drawn from campers themselves, changed musicians often. Some were good, some were bad. It didn't matter. The campfire died and was built up again. When a silver light cut through the trees and a full moon floated above the mesa's rim, Pete said, "There! I promised you that!"

A pat of Carol's hand on his shoulder answered him. Then it was hardly a moment later that her voice shattered his growing sense of their closeness.

"Pete!"

He slowed his step. "What?"

"Dance me over to the edge—that way." She nodded her head away from the fire.

They threaded the crowd and stopped where the floor ended.

She let her arms fall. "You've got to excuse me. I have to leave—and alone. No, don't ask questions."

"If you want to go back," he offered, "I'll take you."

"You can't. You mustn't!" She caught his wrists. "Pete, you promised I could count on you, you'd help me. You can do it now. Let me go."

"But Carol," he said desperately, "I can't let you go into some danger I don't know anything about!"

"No, it isn't me. I'm in no danger." She was stepping back from him. "This is nothing that concerns you at all."

He searched her face, and found only the anguish of something she would not share with him. Now she was as remote, as, a moment ago, she had been close.

"All right," he told her. "You must know what you're doing." He waited, watching her go. Sheriff White had said, "Don't let that girl go tramping around the mesa alone." The instant she vanished he took a straight course through the cedars, moving quietly, and caught sight of her again a little behind him when he reached the road. A man was with her.

They must have met somewhere beyond the lighted clearing. They were coming on now, walking close together, their low voices carrying to him as they approached.

He had not left the thicket of trees. Their figures were directly in front of him when Carol turned her head. She was saying, "Paul, this has got to stop. Why did you come back?"

"Found something?"
Pete called. Craig
straightened and
moved quickly.



"Because," the answer came tonelessly, "I had to."

Desperately, she said, "You can't stay here! You said you'd leave."

They were passing now. Squinting, Pete brought the man into sharper focus, a tall man in a gray suit. It was no one he had seen here in the Park.

Carol's voice came back as they went on. Her head was still turned. "How many times must I tell you . . . that

isn't my reason. I don't think you did it. It's simply. . ." Only her tone, gentle now, continued audible, soon fading out.

Pete moved into the road. As long as there were trees he could follow in the shadows. But when the figures ahead passed into a lighted strip in front of the camp buildings, he halted. Feeling certain, a little later, that they were going at least as far as Carol's cabin, he went along behind the store, dining-room and guest houses, until cedars were once more around him.

The road would curve. He continued straight ahead and picked it up beyond the bend. Across from him was a notch in the brush where the trail to Lookout Point sloped off.

CAROL and the man had not stopped. But they were not talking now. He watched them come on, clearly visible in the flood of moonlight. It was Carol who said suddenly, "Paul, I'm going back. We settled all this today."

"A little farther," the man's voice urged. "It isn't settled."

"Yes, it is."

"Carol!"

His arms reached out. Pete heard the girl's quick, "No, Paul, and don't stay here any longer." Then she turned and ran.

The tall figure stood motionless in the middle of the road. Tense with the knowledge that he had been close to some revealing thing, and had just missed it, Pete moved back through the cedars, keeping Carol in sight.

She unlocked the door of her cottage, locked it again as she entered. He waited. Minutes passed and the place remained dark and silent. What was she doing? A mad desire urged him to go to her. But he felt the guilt of spying on her like this.

He returned to the road and walked along openly as far as the trail. There was no one at the turn-off, nor on ahead of him. Taking the narrow path, he went down until the clearing and the rock barrier were visible. No one was on the Point. The spot haunted him. The moment he turned his back upon it he had a childhood urge to run, as he used to run from graveyards. And that same cold tingling went up his spine.

Carol's cottage was still dark and hushed. He walked slowly, watching for a sign of her and saw none. On beyond it the camp street was deserted. . . .

Bill Blain did not come back. The first thing Pete saw when he opened his eyes in the morning was the empty cot across the room.

He wakened himself with a cold shower, dressed, and then walked past the administration building, saw that the bulletin board had him scheduled for an all-day trip.

McKay was in his office. Pete stopped and looked in.

"I'm not so good on a horse," he said. "Let me pass this trip onto one of the regulars."

Busy at the telephone, McKay answered without turning his angular face. "They're all on duty. You'll have to take it. Not a big party."

"Who's signed up?"

McKay flicked a paper over his desk.

Pete glanced down the list. Craig's name was there. Carol's was not.

At breakfast he asked the matron to send word to Miss Douglas about the trip. "I think she intended to go," he said, "and may have forgotten it." Before he had finished eating, a message came back that Miss Douglas was not up yet, and expected to remain in camp all day.

He hated to leave, and yet there was no way out. McKay would demand his reasons for refusing. Tom White had warned him not to talk about watching the girl. Then he knew that if she stayed in camp, no harm could come to her; and on this trip, he could keep an eye on Craig.

He went to the corrals and found his group waiting—Craig, another middle-aged man, and five college girls who had arrived in a camp trailer. Three of the girls he had already met. They were fun; tricked out today in black boots, whipcords and blue cotton "cowboy" shirts with bright scarfs around their hair, no hats. He grinned; they'd all have peeled noses before they got back!

Watching Craig approach his horse, he wondered why the man should want to go. For Craig was not a rider. He tried to mount from the wrong side. And then, stiff and awkward in the saddle, he endured a constant jolting punishment all the way down.

THEY came onto the lower mesa at eleven o'clock, and Pete spent an hour guiding the group through an unrestored cliff dwelling on a high, overhanging ledge. Dark, narrow passages connected some of the rooms. There were notched

poles to be climbed monkey-fashion from one tier of houses to another.

In the lead, giving the ruin's history, answering questions, he forgot for a little while that he meant to keep watch of Craig; it was not until the group was up on the rim again that he realized the man was missing.

"Lunch-time," he said. "Don't wait for me. I'll have mine later."

RETURNING down the short trail, he swung onto a ladder and descended to the first house top. In any other case he would have called out, but he was sure Craig had had no accident. An age-old powdering of dust deadened his step as he went along the flat roofs; he came to another ladder and let himself down quietly to a rock shelf.

Here he was on the narrow lip of the cliff, with a straight drop of several hundred feet below him—and then he saw Craig.

The man was farther along the cliff edge, crouched behind a small half-circle of masonry where these ancient people had always kept a lookout posted. He held something steadily in his hands, his head bent over it, his body hiding it from Pete's view.

"Found something?" Pete called to him. Craig straightened. He moved his hands quickly and stepped from behind the rocks.

Pete went toward him, making his voice sound worried when they met. "Thought you had fallen off! What happened?"

He had caught a set look on Craig's round face, that flicked away so quickly he might have imagined it.

Craig chuckled. "Worried, were you? Got myself lost, that's all. Stopped to poke around one of those floors back there, looking for pottery, and didn't see which way you went."

That was plausible enough; a man could get turned around in these passages. Pete's glance dropped briefly to the side pocket of Craig's coat, lifted again without lingering. But he had seen the outline of some object in there. It might be only a cigarette-case or a tobacco-can . . . or it might be a compass.

Craig stepped forward, close in front of him. "Jordan, I'd like to let you in on something. I've let some of the camp tourists in on it, but you'd say I'm crazy. You don't believe in buried treasure."

"Not here, I don't."

"What if I told you I had a map?"

Pete smiled. "The West is full of buried-treasure maps."

For the first time, Craig's smooth manner left him. With sudden belligerence he said, "There's a treasure here and I'm going to organize a hunt! I suppose you'll try to queer it!"

"The crowd's having lunch," Pete told him. "I think we'd better go up."

He turned. He did not know what warning made him flatten back against the wall, next instant. Craig was close behind him, within arm's reach, and one of the man's short, thick arms was checked in an outward move. But grinning, he asked, "What's the matter, Jordan?"—and went on ahead.

Pete's legs felt weak. He didn't doubt for a minute that Craig would have pushed him from the cliff. They were alone. It would be an accident—"Pete Jordan, archeologist, slips from ledge and plunges five hundred feet to his death!"

"Swell!" Pete thought. "But let's figure this out. What has Craig got against me?"

Following up the ladder, he could see only one reason for Craig's act. Craig was forcing this idea of buried treasure. Perhaps he did know something. The chance was a thousand to one—but there was that one chance. It might be loot from the days of the old Santa Fe Trail, hidden by a gang who never returned. Then why didn't Craig simply dig it up? Why organize a hunt? And why get homicidal when some one said it wasn't likely? That was the only reason Pete could figure—Craig wanted to get rid of him because he discredited the treasure yarn.

The morning's ride and the hour's prowling through the cliff ruins had been strenuous. After sandwiches and coffee, and a short time of lying in the shade, his group was willing to start back.

Carol—thinking about her, seeing her visibly, feeling sudden frequent misgivings—had never been far from Pete all day. Now the urge to get back to camp was definite and goading. He led such a fast pace up the back trail that in a little while a girl behind him called, "Say, cowboy, hold that bronc'!"

IT was late afternoon when he topped out of the mesa rim and swung toward the Park corrals. And then he did not need the corral boss' curt order to tell him something had happened.

The horse wrangler said: "McKay wants you, Jordan. Told me to send you to the office as soon as you got in."



McKay measured him with cold eyes. "That man was found dead this morning below Lookout Point. He drove in here yesterday, asked for Carol Douglas and went to her cottage. That's the last any of us saw him." He paused. "I warned you about getting involved with that girl. It didn't seem to stop you. I'm sorry, Jordan."

The Park chief, Pete knew, could make an arrest if he chose. He thought McKay meant that now. "If you try to hang this on Carol Douglas," he said, "you'll be up a blind alley. I'll swear that man was alive when she left him. You can do what you like about me."

"About you?" McKay repeated. "You're going on with your job. Whatever is done, Tom White will do it. The worst thing about this is that some

Angrily Pete said, "This girl has had enough, McKay! Why frighten her any more?"

He had already seen the knots of campers, small groups gathered near tents and cars, huddled, staying close together as humans do when tragedy has struck. Something had happened—and this time everyone knew!

McKay was standing behind his desk, tight-lipped, hard. "Where were you last night, Jordan?"

"At the dance."

"With Miss Douglas?"

"Yes." Pete's hands gripped the hat in his hands. "What's happened to her?"

"Nothing—not to the girl. Were you with her all the time?"

"No. She left early." He decided to tell about last night. "She met a man. I followed them along the rim road, then followed her back to her cottage."

"Did she stay there?"

"As far as I know. I came on to my quarters and turned in."

"What did the man look like, Jordan?"

"Tall, about your build, or mine, and wore a gray suit."

woman tourist out for an early walk discovered the dead man. Now it's all over camp. There's a rumor going around that one of our Indians did it. We've got to stop that talk! Understand? When you give your lecture tonight, you get out of the past and give them something about the present. Tell them about these tribes here. You spike that rumor right now!"

"I'll do my best," Pete promised.

McKay jerked around as the telephone rang. He picked up the instrument. "White? Oh, not in yet? You don't know where he is? . . . Well, when he comes in tell him to call the Park."

The irritable, keyed-up tension seemed to have penetrated everywhere, even to the usually unruffled Bill Blain. When Pete entered their quarters, Bill was sitting with his elbows propped on his knees, his red head braced on doubled fists. He did not look up.

Pete stared at him. "I'd say it was a hangover."

Bill turned his face. "You'd be hanging over too, if you had stood guard on a dead man all day!"

"Where's the body now?"

"A deputy from the Sheriff's office had Delaney haul it down."

"Any identification?" Pete crossed the room, pulled off his shirt and started water running in the washbowl.

"I didn't go through him," Bill Blain said. "Not my business. His car had Nevada license-plates and they can be traced, maybe, if they aren't stolen ones or something." Angrily, he added, "I don't know what's holding McKay! Tom White is the law in this country, sure, but if I was in McKay's place I'd make a few of you people talk!"

Bent, soaping his hands, Pete looked around. "A few of us? What do you mean?"

"Nothing happened here," Bill Blain stated, "until you and that girl and Craig came to the mesa."

"Enlarge a little on that," Pete said. "Tell me where I come in."

"Sure. The girl's got you going. She went to the dance with you, then quit you cold. All I know is what I hear, and the camp is talking plenty. Some one saw you follow her. The next thing we know a guy in a gray suit is shoved over the Point." Blain shrugged. "I'm no sleuth. But get the bull instinct aroused and there's usually a fight."

"You know how that is, don't you?"

"Huh?"

Pete rubbed the soap slowly. "Where were you last night, Bill? How much did it arouse the bull when Carol wouldn't go to town with you?"

"Who told you that?"

"She did, filling in the gap before we danced. I didn't think much about it until just now."

Bill Blain's face turned a deeper red and Pete laughed. "You see? Suspicion is easy in a time like this. So let's cut it out until we get some real proof."

When he walked into the dining-hall, the girl at the cashier's desk handed him a sealed envelope. He took it to his table before ripping off the end. The note in a neat flowing handwriting said: "*Where is Tom White? I've got to see him, or you. I'll be at the campfire tonight. Meet me afterwards. Please!*" It was unsigned.

HE got through the meal somehow, hardly tasting it. He was aware of a hushed tension over the filled room. There was little of the usual noise and laughter. Carol did not come in.

McKay opened the campfire talk that night. Standing with the red glow behind him, straight, military, the Park chief made a reassuring figure.

He spoke easily. "Most of you know by now that we have had an unfortunate thing happen here. And you have heard some false rumors about it. I want you to understand how completely false they are. You are in no danger whatever from the Indians we have on the mesa. So to give you a better picture of these people, I have asked our archeologist to bring his story into the present—tell you about these tribes as they are today."

WHEN Pete took McKay's place, he had already located Carol, on his left, at the end of the benches where she always sat. And in the interval of waiting, he watched Craig—who had a way, Pete admitted, of making people like him, with his easy, jovial manner.

He too, always had a certain place, directly in the center of the half-circle. Tonight he had continued a low-voiced conversation even while McKay was speaking. He held a folded paper in his hand, now and then tapping it.

Whatever that conversation was about, Pete saw that it was more important to Craig, and to a man and woman on either side of him, than any information on the mesa Indian tribes.

He made his talk brief, explaining how these tribes had never been brutal or warlike, how they had, in fact, become cliff-dwellers for their own safety. They were now, as they always had been, a docile type, carrying on peaceful lives.

Perhaps what he said had an effect; he felt at least the audience had been diverted. He offered to answer questions. None was asked.

As he was about to leave the fire, Craig's voice stopped him.

"One-track mind here," Craig said, smiling, "is still on the subject of buried treasure. Before this gathering breaks up, I'd like to see if I can get any of the folks interested in a hunt tomorrow."

All faces promptly turned toward him.

Craig beamed. "I thought that would get a rise! Nothing like buried treasure to stir up your blood." He waved the oblong of folded paper. "What I've got here is a map. Don't believe in it much myself, but you never can tell. It would take one man a couple of years to search the cañon marked where there might be something. So I propose to take along a crowd, and I'll go fifty-fifty with anyone who digs up the loot."

"Generous!" somebody laughed.

"Sure," Craig agreed. "Jordan," he said flatteringly, "you're pretty well in-

formed. I'd like to get one point from you. All right?"

Pete hesitated; felt himself being drawn cunningly into this. Then he nodded. "Go ahead."

"You say this couldn't be Spanish treasure," Craig went on. "And I guess you're right. But there was a case down in Texas last year. I read about it in the newspapers. Quite a fortune in old money and bullion dug up, and they said it must have been planted a long time ago by outlaws. Couldn't this be something like that?"

It was one chance Pete had thought of. "Well, yes," he admitted, "it might be."

"Good," Craig said. "That makes me feel better. I paid a little money for this map. Bought it from an old fellow who's dead now, and I didn't want to think I'd been altogether a sucker. If we get up a party, will you guide us?"

"You'll have to ask McKay."

From where he had taken a seat, the Park man asked, "How long a trip? There are limits, you know."

"Not too long," Craig answered. "Devil's Cañon, to start with."

McKay frowned, hesitating. Pete looked farther along the benches and found Carol staring at him intently. She gave her head a quick shake.

Then McKay was saying, "It's all right, I suppose. Jordan will guide you. Get a list of your party now so we can have horses ready in the morning."

"Fine!" Craig swung up on his short legs. "Folks, it's an open invitation!"

As Pete left the group, McKay stopped him and said, "I'll send one of the regulars with you."

"No," Pete refused. "Don't do it. Let Craig have his own way. I'll be careful." He went on to where Carol waited, took her arm and moved with her into the shadows.

WHEN they were beyond sight of anyone watching, she turned her whole body suddenly to face him. "Pete! Don't go on that trip tomorrow! Please!"

"Why?" he demanded. "What do you know?"

"I'm afraid of it. Take me somewhere," she added, "where we can talk."

He left the road and took a short trail to a wide clearing laced with the rock walls of an ancient community house. He felt safe here. They could watch in any direction.

She walked beside him in strained silence, and did not speak even when they

had sat down together on a flat rock of one of the walls.

"I got your note, Carol," he said. "I haven't seen Tom White since yesterday afternoon. Nobody has. Why must you see him?"

"To tell him about last night. Pete, you can't be involved in this any more! I know what the camp is saying—that you followed me from the dance, that I met another man, and now he is dead."

"It doesn't matter." He covered both her hands with his. "Only one thing does. . . . Darling, I love you."

She caught her breath. Her eyes filled. "And that's why it does matter, Pete. . . . I knew it so soon. That first night I asked you to walk with me, only because I wanted to be with you. Then when something happened, I hoped you wouldn't tell we even knew each other."

"You mean, you knew there was going to be trouble, even then?"

"No. My whole reason for coming here was simply a blind hunch."

"Tell me about it, Carol."

SHE turned from him, staring ahead into the darkness. "That man, Pete—Paul Norton was his name—and I were engaged. Months ago I knew it ought to end. It happened in the first place only because we were two young people buried off in a mining-camp together. Then because of other things I couldn't break it. I came here partly to get away and work it out. It seemed best to make a clean end and so I sent back his ring with a letter telling him how it all looked. Instead of accepting it like that, he came here."

Her voice lowered, her hands tightened on her knees. "I had no idea he was so at the end of everything. I didn't—really love him. But I would have done anything to stop what happened."

Pete stared at her, a cold wave of realization sweeping over him. "Carol—you mean—"

"Yes. He must have jumped from the Point as soon as we parted that night."

For a long moment he could not answer; then the girl's controlled voice was saying, "He was worried more than I knew. Paul was general manager of a mining company my father owns in Nevada. There was trouble. He took the blame and it ate on him. That is why I didn't break our engagement long ago."

"What sort of trouble?" Pete asked.

"A robbery. They were just getting started, and six months ago made their

first mill run. Bullion was in the safe, a small fortune. That night the safe was robbed."

"Carol!" Pete cried. "A fortune in gold?"

"Yes." She faced him.

But he let her go on.

"Paul wasn't guilty," she said. "I was telling him that night, I didn't think he did it. There was another man I suspected. An Ed Bradley. I didn't like him. He had been trying to make me go away with him—always talking about this Park and how we could be unknown here. He worked in the office at heavy times, like during a mill run and would have known about the bullion. Afterward, I didn't see him around the mining-camp. My hunch was that he had robbed us and was hiding here. But I've asked. Ed was thirty-five, small dark mustache—no such man was seen."

"Of course not!" Pete broke in, unable to hold back any longer. "You said this robbery happened six months ago. A man calling himself 'Dr. Lake' came here two months ago. Why wasn't he Ed Bradley, growing a beard in the meantime and posing as a scientist?"

"But why, Pete?"

"To get rid of the gold. Carol, that's it! Have you ever seen Craig before?"

"Never."

"Good! Then Craig has no idea who you are. Look. Don't you know the government these days keeps watch of all the gold in the country? You can't get rid of any amount without proof of where it came from. If Ed Bradley had gone to the mint with a fortune in new gold, he would have been caught. So there had to be a partner. Craig. Bradley brought the bullion here and planted it. Craig comes along, gets up a treasure hunt and makes a 'discovery.' Takes a whole crowd along. There's his proof of where it came from. Craig has been building up this treasure yarn at the campfires. Tonight he made me admit there might be some loot hidden here by early-day outlaws. Don't you see? The gold has been melted, recast, even treated, I'll bet, to look buried for years."

PETE paused, breathless with this idea. "That man Craig *is* smooth," he said in a moment. "And hard, too. He plans to hog the whole thing. He got directions from Bradley that first night, then wiped him out. That's the way it looks now."

"I can't believe it!" Carol gasped.

"You ought to know by this time," he answered, "what men will do for gold. I think Craig would have held off his treasure hunt for awhile after getting rid of Bradley. But it looks as if he's afraid some one might get ahead of him. How much did you tell White?"

"Everything. Shall we tell McKay?"

"No. McKay would only call off that trip tomorrow. I want Craig to go through with it. I'll watch him, let him lead me to the spot. But I'll see that he doesn't dig up his loot."

"If you go, Pete," Carol said quietly, "I'm going with you. Don't argue, either. If—" She broke off. "Look!" Terror choked her voice. "Look over there! Isn't that some one?"

THEY had sat talking long enough for the moon to rise high, and the black band of shadow cast by the edge of cedars around the clearing had dissolved away. Against the trees Pete saw the figure of a man.

"Carol, get down behind these rocks."

She crouched.

"I'm going to see who it is."

He took a step, and then the man moved out toward him. He groped along the low wall for a weapon. The man's pace quickened, bringing his figure into plainer view, a spare body, wide hat, then the belt that slanted at his waist and the dark shape of a gun holster.

Then his voice snapped across the narrowing distance. "Jordan?"

"Yes."

The man came on. He was close now. "I'm a deputy from the Sheriff's office." He twisted his coat lapel and showed a badge. "That girl's name Douglas?"

"It is."

"I've been hunting you two. Been sitting right here for an hour, I suppose?"

"Something like that. What of it?"

"Nothing, as far as I'm concerned," the deputy said. "But it may mean plenty to you. Come along."

Carol stood up and took Pete's arm. "What does he want? Why did he come onto us like that?"

Pete covered her hand with a reassuring grasp. "Don't talk."

They passed the dead campfire and the empty half-circle of benches, entered the deserted street and were moving along the dark row of guest cottages, when suddenly she whispered, "I didn't leave a light in my place!"

The farther two buildings showed light behind drawn window blinds.

The one where Craig stayed was first. They came abreast of it. The door was partly open and the deputy turned in.

Only a table lamp was burning in the small front room. Its opaque shade threw a sharp cone downward, and the first thing Pete Jordan saw was a brass compass box on an unfolded sheet of paper.

Then McKay's voice took his glance into the room's shadow. Bill Blain stood beside McKay and near Bill was the Park's gray-haired night watchman.

Coldly, McKay asked: "Where were they?"

"Over on the flat," the deputy said, "sittin' on some rocks."

McKay nodded toward an open door. "You two go in there."

That side room also was dimly lighted. With Carol, Pete crossed toward it and stepped inside.

HE swung back next instant, his arm holding her. She had stifled a scream with her face against his jacket.

Angrily, he said, "This girl has had enough, McKay! Why frighten her any more?"

"I know," McKay apologized. "But I had to be sure of something. I'm sorry, Miss Douglas."

She lifted her head. "Oh, it's all right. Has Sheriff White come back?"

"No, he hasn't." McKay looked haggard, and Pete Jordan felt a sudden sympathy for his chief.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"Not long after the campfire." McKay nodded at the night watchman. "On his first round, Miller saw the door was open, with the house dark, and reported it. I came back and found Craig dead in that room. Blain came with me."

"Shot?"

"No mark on him of any kind."

Pete glanced at the brass compass and paper on the table. "What about these?"

"They were right there. . . . Don't touch them!"

"I wouldn't." Pete had bent over, looking at the paper. On it was printed in pencil: "230 D45." Nothing more.

"Only one thing I couldn't find," McKay was saying. "I don't believe in that buried-treasure map. But somebody did, perhaps, and killed Craig for it." He moved heavily. "Blain, you can go. Miss Douglas, I don't want you to stay alone in your cottage. I'll arrange for a room at the Inn. You wait a minute too, Jordan."

When Blain and old Miller had gone, he said, "This calls off the treasure-hunt tomorrow. And yet we'd have to give some explanation. I don't want the camp to know. Perhaps some other trip—"

"Why?" Pete asked. "Let's not make any change at all. When Craig doesn't show up at the start, I'll have to smooth it over, but when we get going I can keep the crowd interested enough." More than ever he wanted to go. He was thinking of those figures: 230 D45.

McKay considered him, frowning. "I can't see any danger to the party," he said at last. "That seems the best way out."

When Pete entered their cabin Bill Blain was already half stripped for turning in.

"Put your clothes on," Pete said. "Bill, you've got a gun, haven't you?"

"Sure."

"Then get it and come with me."

"Hey! Wait now. What is this?"

"We're going moonlight surveying."

"We," said Bill Blain flatly, "are going no such a damn' place. You can, but not this crackpot. I'm going to bed!"

"Will you lend me your gun?" Pete asked.

Blain opened a drawer, brought up a belt and holster and handed them over without speaking.

Pete went to his trunk, felt beneath the packed clothes and found his surveying compass. At the door, he asked, "Keep this to yourself, will you?"

He walked in deep shadow of the cedars until the rim road was ahead and he could make out the turn-off on the Point trail. Standing motionless, he searched the growth of brush. It looked safe. He stepped out, entered the narrow path and moved quickly down to the cliff.

Laying his compass on the flat top of the rock wall, he leveled it with the bubble, then raised the two sights on the brass box edges. Again, before stooping to take a reading, he watched back up the Point trail.

THE meaning of those penciled figures seemed clear enough—230 meant the number of degrees from north; D45 meant degrees of dip. That first night, Pete thought, Craig must have been using his own compass, and had not touched the one found with "Dr. Lake's" body.

He crouched, holding his eye to the sights. The first reading was easy; but



"Carol, see here!
It's the real thing
—an old stage-
line express-box!"

he had to guess the downward slant. He squinted to sharpen the outlines of the country that lay far below him bathed in the full flood of the moon. The vertical hair of the front sight was against a distant bald-faced cliff. The black gash out of which it rose he knew was Devil's Cañon. That much checked up. Devil's Cañon was where Craig had said the treasure-hunt would start. But the cliff told nothing. It seemed blank, until, squinting again, he made out a vague dark spot, low down. A cave with a cliff-dwelling ruins? It must be!

He slipped the compass into his coat pocket, turned—stopped dead still, with a half-seen movement sending a cold wave over him. Nothing stirred on the trail now. He waited. Minutes passed with no further sign; but that chilled sense of having been watched tingled in his blood all the way to the cabin.

The treasure-hunt was scheduled for an early start, and at half-past seven in the morning Pete found more than a dozen tourists at the corrals.

Horses had been saddled. The party was only waiting for him and for Craig. He picked out Carol and went to her.

She was in riding-clothes, and last night's sleeplessness was almost hidden by a feverish flush of excitement. But he said: "I don't want you to go now. Not after what happened."

"I'm going just the same, Pete," she told him firmly. "We got into this together, we'll get out the same way. Can we start now?"

Others were asking the same question. Some one called, "Let's go!"

He knew she would not give in; he silently held the stirrup for her.

His own animal was a tall bay. He stepped up into the saddle and then

there was a time of good-natured confusion, as inexperienced riders got their reins tangled, dropped lunch-boxes, and tried to think the patient Park horses were bucking broncos. The grinning corral boss straightened out the worst of them.

A middle-aged man with a trench-shovel tied behind his saddle rode over and asked: "Where's Craig?"

Pete shook his head. "Late, maybe."

"Or maybe he's backed out on us," the man offered. "Decided not to share that treasure of his after all."

PETE waited a moment longer until their impatience grew. Then he called to the corral boss: "Jake, I don't want to hold up the trip. We'll start. You can just say we've gone on and will be somewhere down the Devil's Cañon trail." Leading out, with Carol next behind him, he knew from the laughter and gay talk of others as they fell into line, that Craig's absence had caused no immediate concern.

The bald cliff that he had located on last night's survey was farther than it had appeared. He entered Devil's Cañon high up toward the source and for two hours rode down the narrow gash with walls of sandstone rising sheer on either side. As the cañon depth increased, the light faded, and there was a cold flow of air in this winding gorge where direct sunshine never penetrated.

He threaded among jagged chunks of rock, forced a passage through half a mile of bottom choked with desert brush, and then abruptly the walls swung apart.

Pete drew rein. The party came around him, hushed by the sight ahead.

He had known this moment many times before, and yet it never failed to quiet him, as it was quieting these others who, perhaps, were having their first glimpse of a spot where centuries ago a human race had lived and died, leaving now only the remains of their unique homes.

Farther along, the cañon narrowed again. But this was a circular amphitheater they stared into, filled with sunlight, forested with gray desert pine on the bottom, its high cliffs pocketed by shallow caves in which the mud dwellings had been built tier upon tier. And now that the clatter of horses' hoofs had stopped, there hung over the place a sense of eternal, unbroken silence.

The strain was too much and a man's voice burst out: "Good Lord! Mister, where's that treasure?"

Pete waved an arm over the amphitheater. "This is my hunch. Since Craig hasn't turned up, we'll have to start without his map. But I'm sure we can't be wrong." He pointed to the left wall where the ruins were low and easily reached. "I'd say begin over there: spread out and each choose your own ground; one spot's as good as another."

He led on into the bottom and halted under the scrub pines. "We'll leave the horses and lunches here. And let's set a time limit. We ought to gather again in about two hours."

Busy with tying the animals, he waited until the group had scattered and vanished. Carol had stayed with him. "Our move now," he told her. "Let's go."

The bald cliff, like a high bulging forehead with a long gash across the front, was off on the right of the amphitheater, away from the side where he had sent the treasure-hunters. Reaching the base of it, he found a notched cedar pole slanting up to the first ledge.

"Old enough," he said, examining it. "This is one that the original cliff-dwellers used."

"But would it have been standing like that all this time?" Carol asked.

"Maybe. Maybe not." He looked at her gravely. "You know this is dangerous—there's no telling. I feel safe." He touched Bill Blain's gun that he was wearing in a belt holster. "I wish you'd let me scout around first."

"Do you think I'd stop now?" she asked. "Go on—good heavens, Pete—I want to see what's here!"

"All right," he gave in. He went up the pole ahead of her, then caught her hand when she came to the top and pulled her back from the cliff lip.

RAINS had melted the mud wall formerly guarding the edge. Now the sandstone shelf was smooth and rounded.

The lower tier of houses had no entrance from the level of the cave floor. "There ought to be a ladder. Be careful," he warned. "We'll look this way first." Taking her hand, he followed the bellying curve of mud structures with the cave roof arching high overhead until the buildings rose three tiers above him.

They found no ladder, but Pete discovered a hole in the lower wall. He thrust his head in, saw another notched post leading up through the top of a small box room.

Again he went first, then pulled Carol up through the round opening.

She stood beside him, breathless, gazing down.

"Better keep your eyes up," he said. They were now high above the treetops.

The walls of the second tier of houses were back five feet, so that he had come out upon another long narrow ledge. There were doors entering the rooms here and he turned and peered into one of them. Then he shook his head. "I've got a hunch. I know these dwellings pretty well—been in lots of them like this. There's only one good place if a man wanted to hide something."

THEY edged along the shelf until it seemed they had come to the end. A wall reaching to the cave roof blocked them. But low down was a slit, hardly more than the width of Pete's body. He forced himself through, calling next moment: "Carol! We're right! Come on."

She stooped and followed. Rising beside him, she gasped, "You do pick the darndest places!"

"Don't blame me. Look!" He swept his hand around a pocket that had been hollowed in the sandstone. Rows of shelves had been dug into the soft rock. The edge of the circular floor was lined with masonry, forming bins.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The storeroom. Everything," he explained, "was kept here, all the food the cliff people raised, and a supply of water, in case of an attack. That's the reason for this keyhole door. The tribe would gather in this place, then even if some of the enemy did climb up here only one at a time could come through—and he'd be met with a club. There used to be an outer wall sealing this room up tight." Pete moved and gazed over the lip. The cañon bottom far below was silent and empty. Coming back, he said, "You watch at the door. I'll take a look."

As Carol crouched in front of the slot, he began to search the bins. Striking matches, he glanced inside of each one, came to the last and had found nothing. He turned, frowning at the floor. His eyes were on his own footprints, where he had crossed packed earth that had been leveled over the rock. Suddenly he stepped out into the center, jabbing his heels down hard. In the middle was a soft spot.

Carol pivoted on her heels, facing him. "Pete, what is it?"

"I don't know. Wait." He found a broken piece of pottery and dropped onto his knees, using it as a scoop.

The earth came away easily. Six inches under the surface he scraped metal. He dug faster. There was a flat sheet of rusted iron, then two straps, copper-riveted.

"Carol! All clear out there?"

She looked through the slot. "Yes."

"Then come here!"

She knelt beside him and he swept dry dust away with his hand. His heart was pounding. "It's the real thing!" he exclaimed. "See here—a museum piece—an old stage-line express-box!" He felt at the end of the iron chest, found a handle and tugged.

"Here." Carol thrust her fingers into a handle at the other end and they tugged together. But the box was heavy; they hardly moved it.

"Wait," Pete said. "Let's open it first."

There was no lock on the hasp. He dug away more earth, exposing the top fully, then lifted it back.

Carol's gasp sounded beside him.

He looked down. "There you are." Small crude bars of dull yellow metal filled the chest. An oxide, as of great age, tarnished them. "If I didn't know better," Pete said, "I'd believe myself they had been here at least a hundred years. Craig and your Ed Bradley knew what they were doing."

YES, brother, but *you* didn't! Don't touch that gun!"

For one second Pete Jordan froze, paralyzed. Then he caught the girl's hand. He turned. Delaney was crouched in the keyhole doorway, a revolver leveled.

"But you're pretty bright, at that," the hack-driver said. He stood up and came on in. "I didn't know how good you were, until I saw you use that compass last night. That was something I hadn't figured out. So I let you lead me here today!"

With one hand on Carol's arm, Pete rose and stared at the thin dark face. "What of it, Delaney? You can't get by with anything here."

"Can't I!" The gun moved. "Step over there, both of you. *Step*, I said! And keep stepping."

"You fool!" Pete stood rooted. "You'll have to shoot, first. Then a dozen people down there in that cañon will know something's wrong."

"And do I care?" Delaney scoffed. "I'll get away."

Pete stalled, stretching out the time. "You'll never get out of the Park—"

"Shut up!" Delaney stabbed with the gun.

Drawing the girl with him, Pete stepped back, away from the cliff edge. Delaney came forward, his face savage.

The movement brought the narrow opening into full view behind him. . . .

There had been no tell-tale sound. With effort Pete Jordan kept a set face. Then in a single lunge a huge figure burst through, and Tom White's great voice filled the room:

"Don't anyone move! You're covered, Delaney. Drop that gun!"

Surprisingly quick for so heavy a man, he leaped across and towered over the hack-driver's smaller form. "Delaney, two can play this trailing game. Didn't think of that, did you?"

WITH a jerk Delaney had started to swing around. The Sheriff's gun-muzzle stopped him. Now he stood motionless while handcuffs were snapped onto his wrists, hands behind his back.

Then he turned on White: "You big cow-wrangler! You can't make this stick! Sure, you followed me. What of it? You find this pair here, too. We all had the same hunch about that buried-treasure yarn of Craig's. You've got nothing on me!"

"Only one thing," White said: "That hack of yours was good business. You carried the luggage. When a man calling himself 'Dr. Lake' came in, you must have thought his trunk was mighty heavy, and you got curious. Lake complained to me, said he thought you were prying into people's stuff up here. No, you didn't kill Lake. You just waited. Then Craig came along and did that job for his own reasons. I don't know what you tried to get out of Craig last night—the map, or something better—and I suppose he wouldn't let you in on where the gold was hid. So you killed him."

"You lie!"

"Fingerprints don't lie, Delaney. You're an ex-prizefighter. I remembered that. You knew where to hit Craig, but you grabbed his arm when he fell, or maybe when you hit him. And you left your thumbprint on his wristwatch. I checked it with prints on the steering-wheel of your hack. Yes, you're smart, Delaney. Just not quite smart enough!"

White swung his gray head a little to look at the girl. "Lake was Ed Bradley, Miss Douglas. Fingerprints told me that, too. I compared them with things he had handled in your father's office."

"You mean—" she began.

The Sheriff smiled. "That's right. I flew over to Nevada and saw your father there. He took a later plane out of Reno yesterday afternoon and ought to be on the mesa when you get back.

"Jordan, I'll take Delaney and pack this box out on his horse. You give me an hour head-start, then bring your party along. They needn't know what has happened."

It was a tired but satisfied group that Pete Jordan led onto the mesa top in the evening. They had found no treasure, but the trip had been interesting.

Tom White was at the corrals, and said to Carol: "He's here."

She turned to Pete and touched his shoulder. Her eyes shone. "You've got to meet my dad. He's a grand person. Come to dinner."

He promised; and later, meeting the tall, sun-browned mining man, he felt instantly that the girl was right about John Douglas.

Tom White had stayed. Over the meal they avoided all talk of the things that happened. The Sheriff seemed content with his gathered information. Only once, he said: "Jordan, there is a point we ought to settle. No one could trace that gold, melted and recast the way it was; and under those bars were a lot of eight-sided slugs like the 'Forty-miners used for money. It could be called real outlaw loot, and you found it. You can claim it, I think."

"But I didn't," Pete denied, and grinned. "Carol found it!"

The Sheriff nodded. "I thought so."

CAROL talked little during the dinner. After coffee her father put his hand on hers and said: "I'm afraid this has been too much. You look tired—"

"No, I'm not a bit!" she said quickly. "I was just thinking I'd like to walk. Will you, Pete?"

She stood up. Pete rose with her.

Out on the steps when she pressed his arm, he said, "Your father is going home tomorrow. But you aren't, Carol." He looked down at her face close to his shoulder. "Are you?"

She did not answer. They moved on into the quiet darkness of the camp street. Then he stopped and turned her to him. "It's a queer life I'm offering. Archeologists are a queer lot—"

She came into his arms then, smiling. "They suit me, Pete. At least I know one who does!"

The distinguished author of "Caravan Treasure" here gives us the story of a weird cruise through the East Indies, and its surprising outcome.

The Wild Girl



By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

JAN KROMHOUT, sitting on the veranda of his jungle hut, watched a silver gibbon or *wou-wou* climb along the limb of a tapan tree. There was a soft smile on the face of the big Dutch naturalist. The ape, to judge by his movements, was very old, and he climbed carefully. He reached a fork and seated himself, then with his long fingers he combed his beard and chased several small insects in the fur on his stomach.

"He is waiting for his wife," said Kromhout.

"Looks rather tottery," I commented.

"Ja, he is very old," said Kromhout.

"He is one of the oldest of the *Hylobates leuciscus* that I have ever seen. Last year I thought he would die. He was so sick that he let me carry him in here and feed him. He thought he was dying, too. He did so. He looked at me as much as to say: 'What are you nursing me for? I am through with this jungle life. I am going somewhere else.'"

The gibbon from his high position looked down on the naturalist and made a grimace. He coursed another flea along a hip circuit, made a kill; then leaning back, he closed his eyes and dozed.

Jan Kromhout spoke.

"Did you ever hear of the steamer *Soerakarta*?" he asked.

"The *Soerakarta*?" I cried. "Why—why, of course!"

The mention of the steamer brought to my mind all the stories I had ever heard of that nearly legendary vessel—the S.S. *Soerakarta* that during the latter months of her life never charged a passenger for a voyage! The dream ship that waddled up and down the hot seas of the Malay, filled with guests who ate and drank of the best without paying a single guilder to the owner! Visiting little lost ports, debarking those who were tired of the owner's hospitality, taking aboard new voyagers whose only qualification was good-fellowship.

Jan Kromhout took a drink of schnapps, smiled over the excited manner in which I had answered his question, then stirred me again with a short statement. "I was a passenger on the *Soerakarta*," he said quietly. "I mean that I was a guest of General Van Shoorn. For five months I was on that steamer."

Now, if a man whom I knew to be absolutely truthful had calmly informed me that he had sailed out of Palos Harbor with Christopher Columbus on board the

Santa Maria, the effect upon me would have been similar to that produced by Kromhout's statement. I had heard many extraordinary stories of the *Soerakarta*, but I had never met a man who had sailed on her with the millionaire General Van Shoorn. Old men, sitting on rotten wharves in ports from which the god of trade had fled, had told me that they had seen her during those golden days of free cruising. They would gabble of the strange passengers that came ashore from her—carousing devils from all ports of Malaysia. How some, tired of the vessel, stayed; and how others, hearing of the fine food and drink aboard the steamer, took their places.

"You never told me!" I cried, swinging upon Kromhout.

"You never asked me," he said gently. "I have never told you the Christian name of my father, or the breed of the little dog I played with on Nieuwe Kerk Straat in Amsterdam when I was a boy. I would have told you if you had asked."

"But—but the *Soerakarta*!" I shouted. "Why—why, she was the ship of romance! She was something that poets would sing of! She was a million dreams turned into wood and iron! She had the pennant of poesy on her foremast!"

The big Dutchman considered my excited remarks in silence. He glanced at the old gibbon on the limb of the tapan tree. "It is funny to think of the silly things that are stored up in the memory of fools," he said bitingly. "Always I have been puzzled. The world is so hungry for trash. Bits of colored rag and tinsel. *Ja*. The red and yellow petticoats of a gypsy will get the eye when she is walking close to an honest *Frau* in fine homespun. Poesy? What the devil is poesy but bits of colored nonsense! There have been great Dutchmen in Java and Sumatra, men like Daendels and Piltter van der Broeck; but they have been forgotten, while the name of General Van Shoorn stays in the brains of thousands because he owned the *Soerakarta* and pulled a lot of fools around the Malay and charged them nothing."

I ACCEPTED the slap without showing annoyance. I wanted to hear Kromhout's story of his voyage on the *Soerakarta*, and it would have been inadvisable to argue with him.

"I knew General Van Shoorn before he owned the ship that he named after his home town," began Kromhout finally. "Do you know the town of Soerakarta?"

Neen? It is just six hundred kilometers from Batavia, and it is a nice place. The natives call it Solo, and right there is the palace of the Soesoehunan. The Dutch have given him a little zoo to play with, and they have taught him to say yes or no when they want him to say yes or no. The Dutch are as good as the English in teaching colored rulers how to speak up quick. *Ja*, they are.

GENERAL VAN SHOORN had twenty million guilders, and a bad heart—very bad! I was in Batavia when he came down to see a big specialist. That specialist listened to Van Shoorn's heart like you would listen to the ticking of a cheap watch. For five, ten, fifteen minutes he listened; then he straightened himself up and said: 'In six months you will be flying.'

"Flying where?" asked the General, pulling on his shirt.

"I don't know," said that specialist. 'P'raps to the Milky Way, p'raps to that red star that they call Betelgeuse. There must be plenty of places to fly to up there! My fee is three hundred gulden.'

General Van Shoorn was sixty years of age. He had never married, and all his blood relations were dead. He went out of that doctor's office in Molinvliet West, and he took a carriage down to Tandjong Priok, the port of Batavia. He was thinking what he would do with those six months. It is not much time, six months.

He sat down at Tandjong Priok and stared at the big ships. Some of them were filling their bellies with rubber and coffee and pepper and rattan and sugar and tin; and others were spewing out stuff that they had brought from America and Europe. And there was one steamer that was lying in the outer harbor, and she looked deserted.

Van Shoorn asked a sailor about her. He was told that the firm in Amsterdam that owned her had gone bankrupt. They could not pay her port dues, and her captain and crew had left her because they had got no wages. There were only two watchmen on board her.

"There was a nice breeze coming in from the Java Sea. It carried all the fine perfumes of the Malay—the hot spicy perfumes that stir the blood. They rolled in from the Karimata Strait, from the Anambas and Tambelan Islands, and they whispered to General Van Shoorn. They told him of little lost ports where the casuarina trees make soft music,

where mystery has not been crushed by the big feet of western men, where there are still primitive graces that were ours in the days when the world was young.

"I know how they spoke to Van Shoorn, because I met him next day in the Deutsche Turnverein, and he told me. I thought he had gone mad. He had bought that boat by cable. He had given orders to chandlers and outfitters to get her ready with all possible speed. He had changed her name to *Soerakarta*, and was rushing around Batavia inviting every friend of his to go on a cruise.

"You will come, Kromhout?" he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"Anywhere!" he cried. "Up and down the Malay. I have six months to live! I have twenty million guilders—I am going to enjoy myself!"

"He had a sheet of paper in his hand, and he wrote my name on it before I could say anything. 'That makes twenty-eight,' he said. 'She has sixty cabins. If you know of any good fellows, give them an invitation. We will sail as soon as she is ready.'"

JAN KROMHOUT paused, looked up at the old monkey and lifted his glass. I had a belief that the gibbon bowed his head in courtly salute. Quite a fellow, was the ape; there was a man-of-the-world air about him.

"I met General Van Shoorn three days later at the Handelsbank," continued Kromhout. "I told him that I did not think I could go. 'But you must, Kromhout!' he cried. 'I have a great idea. When we are ready to start, every one of my guests will write down the name of a port he would like to go to. We will put them in a hat, and get the barman at the Hôtel des Indes to draw one out. We will go straight to that port. When we are tired of it, we will have another drawing. Of course, they must be ports of the Malay.'"

"It is silly," I said to him.

"Of course it is silly!" he snapped. "But this is the first time I have had a chance to do something silly. I have been too busy making money, and now I find that I have but six months to live. Why can't I be silly? Are you coming?"

"I am not," I said; and I left him as he ran after the big fat Dutch manager of the *Nederlandsch Handels Maatschappij* to give him an invitation.

"Three nights later I was in the bar of the Hôtel des Indes. Van Shoorn was there with thirty-seven men who had ac-

cepted his offer of a free trip. Each one of those men put down on a bit of paper the name of a port in the Malay. They put the names in Van Shoorn's topee, and the barman drew one out.

"It was funny. For days and months I had been hoping that I could go to Amboyna. I do not know why; it was just one of those things that get into one's head. *Ja*, it was Amboyna that the barman pulled out of the hat. Next morning I packed my bag and went on board the *Soerakarta*. There were forty of us as we pulled out of Tandjong Priok. We sang '*Wien Nierlandsch*' at the top of our lungs. There was much champagne drunk. Much."

Possibly the memories of that morning made Kromhout reach again for his glass of schnapps. As he lifted the glass, the old ape in the tree lifted his paw in salute. The ape had made a keen study of the Dutchman's movements.

"They were good fellows, those boys on the *Soerakarta*," continued Kromhout. "They ate and they drank and they sang and they played cards, and they had not a care in the world. It is nice to forget life. We Dutch have a proverb, '*De tijd is aan God en ons*—Time is God's and ours.' It was so on the *Soerakarta* as we rolled down the Java Sea. *Ja, ja*. Some of them were married, but they forgot their wives. Some of them had big business affairs, but they pushed them out of their heads. They lay in the sunshine and forgot their names, and I think that is something like a prayer. If the good Lord looked down on that steamer, I bet He would have smiled.

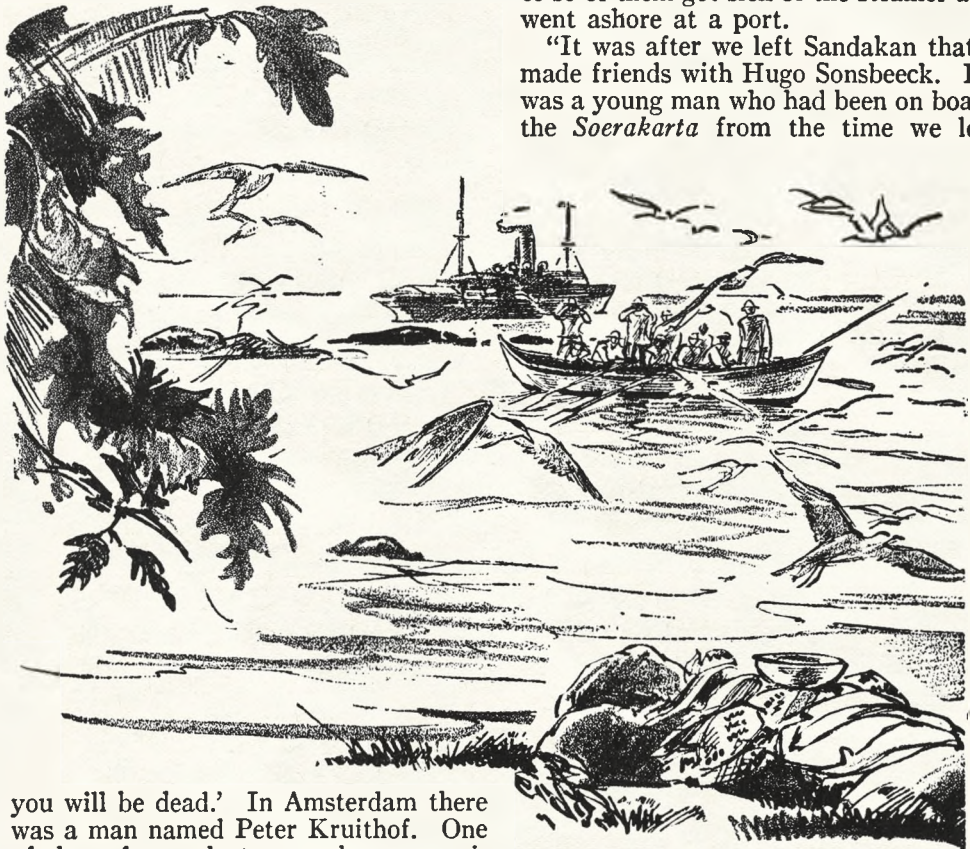
"We came to Amboyna, and I said good-by to all those men, thinking that I was going to stay there. But Amboyna did not taste quite right to me after that trip. It is not much, Amboyna. It was not the place that I had dreamed it would be. There is too much dark blood in the Dutch of Amboyna. It is the bad thing of the Orient. There are folk there that have a drop of all the bloods of the East in their veins, but they think they are Dutch!"

"WELL, in two days I was sick of that place. I heard the siren of the *Soerakarta*, and I ran down and caught the last boat for the steamer. When we all got on board, each of us wrote another little scrap of paper, and the barkeeper pulled one out of Van Shoorn's topee. Van Shoorn called out the name of the sailing-master. It was Makassar. *Idid*

not care. I was beginning to like that steamer. I was sorry for General Van Shoorn. In his cabin he had a calendar with the six months marked off in red ink, but he was never sad. Myself, I do not go near those doctors. They think it funny to say to a man, 'In three months

"That steamer was loaded with souvenirs—with brass gongs and knives, and bits of silver-work and bird-of-paradise feathers, and batik calico and sarongs. And there were seventy-four different kinds of parrots, and so many monkeys that no one bothered when half a dozen or so of them got sick of the steamer and went ashore at a port.

"It was after we left Sandakan that I made friends with Hugo Sonsbeeck. He was a young man who had been on board the *Soerakarta* from the time we left



you will be dead.' In Amsterdam there was a man named Peter Kruithof. One of those funny doctors made an examination of Peter and told him he would be dead in a month. Peter Kruithof killed him and was hanged. The medical papers did not say anything about it. They thought lots of patients might do what Peter did.

"We went to Bali, and from there to Bandjermassin. Then we went across the Celebes Sea to Sandakan, still pulling bits of paper out of Van Shoorn's hat!

"The people of the ports heard about that plan, the harbor-masters and the pilots; and they thought we were all mad. They would stare at the captain when he said he did not know what port he was going to till we had made the drawing. The *Soerakarta* became famous. They told tales about us at Bangkok and Penang, at Zamboanga and Port Moresby. And we waddled here and there, eating and drinking and collecting souvenirs.

Tandjong Priok, but I had not spoken to him. That night after we left Sandakan, I found him sitting by himself. He was nearly drunk, and he was crying like a baby.

"I asked him what was wrong, and after a long time, he told me. Each time there had been a vote as to where that steamer should go, he had written down the name of a tiny island in the Pater-noster Group—a little speck of ground that had fallen from the shovel of the Almighty when He was building Asia. It was called Upeil. Seven times that youngster had written it down, but the barman had never drawn it.

"'Why do you wish to go there?' I asked.

"'I have a reason,' he snapped.

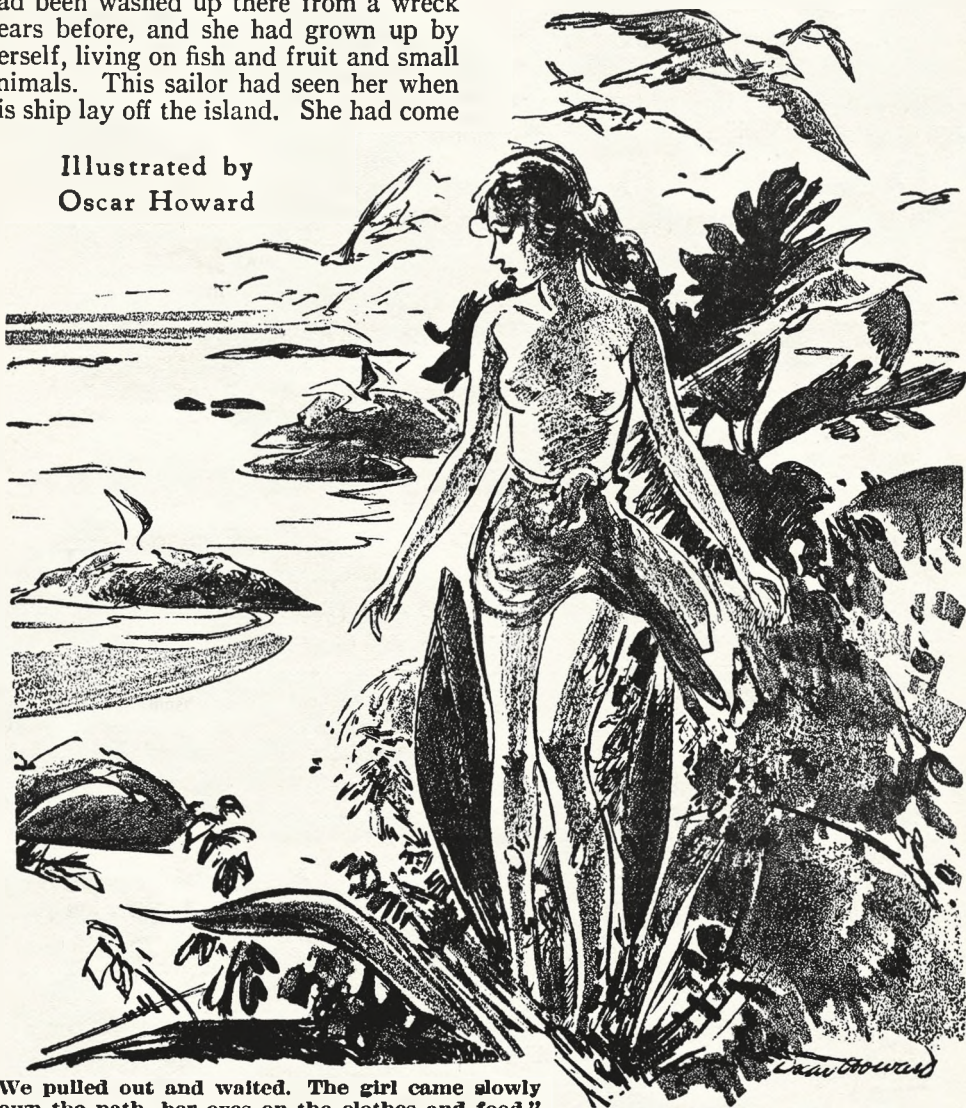
"'Ja, you have a reason,' I said; 'but if you tell me the reason I might help you.'

"After a long while that young fellow told me. One day on the Koningsplein at Batavia he had given a few cents to a sailor, and that sailor had told him a story about Upeil. He had said that there was a white girl living there. She had been washed up there from a wreck years before, and she had grown up by herself, living on fish and fruit and small animals. This sailor had seen her when his ship lay off the island. She had come

"Upeil?" cried old Van Shoorn. "Where the devil is Upeil?"

"He sent for the navigating officer, and they found it on the chart. There was no harbor. There were coral reefs in shore. A ship would have to lay out

Illustrated by
Oscar Howard



"We pulled out and waited. The girl came slowly down the path, her eyes on the clothes and food."

to the top of a cliff and peered down at them, but when they put out a boat, she had fled into the palm trees.

"The story had got into that young man's head. He wanted to go to Upeil.

"I was sorry for him. Very quietly I told some of my friends on board the *Soerakarta*, some of them who did not care where they went to. We decided to play a trick on Van Shoorn. At the next drawing nine of us wrote *Upeil* on our voting papers, and the barman pulled one of those papers from the hat.

two or three miles and send a boat in through the passage in the reefs.

"Van Shoorn hesitated. Then he said: 'All right! We made a rule, and we'll stick to it. We're going to Upeil.'"

Kromhout paused to moisten his lips. The gibbon on the tapan limb opened his eyes when he sensed the interruption in the narrative, and once again he lifted his right paw as the naturalist drank.

"We picked up that island one morning when the Java Sea was filled with all the fine odors of the Malay. *Ja*, it was

a beautiful morning. And all the men on the *Soerakarta* were laughing and joking because they knew then why that young fellow wanted to go to Upeil. They had heard the story, and they were all on deck with glasses, watching for that girl who lived there. They did not believe it, of course. They thought it a great joke that a drunken sailor had told in return for the price of a meal.

THE *Soerakarta* stood about two miles offshore; and eight of us, with Van Shoorn, went off in one of the boats. The young fellow was with us. He was much excited, and now and then he got mad with the others who were poking fun at him.

"There she is!" one of those fellows would yell; and when he swung round to look, they would laugh themselves sick.

"That passage was difficult. There were coral-mushrooms that were just a few inches under water, so that you did not see them till the boat was right on top of them. They were bad. They would come up out of thirty fathoms of water, and they were big enough to tear the side out of a ship. Van Shoorn thought if there was a girl on that island, the ship that had brought her there had struck one of those mushrooms.

"We made a landing in a little cove. The cliffs ran up straight above our heads. We climbed out of the boat onto a beach of pounded coral, and we stood around with silly grins on our faces. Just for a few minutes we stood there; then I caught sight of that young fellow's face.

"He was staring upward at the top of the cliff. *Ja!* And his face was not the face he had three minutes before. It was plastered with astonishment, with wonder, with joy. And he was gurgling like an ape with a bone in its throat.

"She was there! *Ja*, the girl! Standing on the very top of the cliff, looking down at us. Outlined against the sky!

"I have never seen anything prettier than that girl as she stood on that cliff. Never! She had nothing on her but a scrap of cloth around her loins, but she was dressed in her own innocence. Do you know what I mean? She made us who were staring at her feel like damned fools that had blundered into a place we had no right to enter.

"She did not move, and we did not move. Like a statue she stood there. *Ja*, like a golden statue. And we, with our heads up like startled giraffes, stared at her, feeling ashamed at what we were

doing, but not able to pull our silly faces away.

"Van Shoorn was the first to come to his senses. He walked to the boat and took out the lunch that we had brought with us. He spread it on the beach, the sandwiches and the coffee, and he made motions with his arms that it was hers if she wished it.

"Get back in the boat and give her a chance!" he snapped, and we hopped back into the boat like naughty boys who had been caught peeping through the window of a girls' school.

"Pull away!" said Van Shoorn. "We'll frighten her if we stay here!"

"That young fellow Hugo Sonsbeeck made as if he would leap back on the beach, but Van Shoorn grabbed him by the collar. 'You stay where you are!' he snapped. 'Leave this business to me!'

"But I first heard of her!" whined the young man. 'She—she is mine!'

"Like hell she is!" said Van Shoorn.

"That young Sonsbeeck was fighting mad, but Van Shoorn was in a temper.

WE pulled back to the *Soerakarta*, and that steamer had a list on her because every man on her was at the rail with glasses watching the shore. They had seen the girl, from the ship.

"For more than an hour we watched her standing on the top of the cliff; then she started to climb down to the beach. She walked around those sandwiches as if she thought them a trap. *Ja*, like a nice animal she circled them, till at last she was sure that there was no danger and squatted down beside them.

"Those men on the steamer would not go down to the saloon for lunch. They would not leave the rail. They had food served to them there, and they jabbered like a lot of old women. Van Shoorn had much trouble with them. Now and then a bunch of them would say, 'Let's go ashore and talk to her!' and Van Shoorn had to stop them from stealing the boats.

"After lunch there was a great argument. Van Shoorn decided to take that girl some clothes, and every man on that steamer ran to get the sarongs and the shawls that he had bought for a wife or sweetheart back in Batavia.

"They piled them on the deck, and Van Shoorn swore at them. He was getting mad. Much mad. *Ja!* That young fool Hugo Sonsbeeck had his arms full of batik underwear that he had bought for his sister, and he wanted to carry the whole lot of it ashore to the girl.

"Your stuff is not going, and you are not going!" shouted Van Shoorn; but at that, the boy cried so hard that a lot of us asked Van Shoorn to let him go.

"We took the clothes and some more food to the beach. The girl had seen us coming, and she had raced up to the top of the cliff. She watched us as we laid the presents on the sand. Van Shoorn had not brought any of that souvenir stuff—sarongs and silk underwear; but he had brought his overcoat, on the chance that the girl might like it. The others grinned as he laid it on the sand beside the fluffy stuff. *Ja*, they grinned a lot. It was old, that overcoat, old like Van Shoorn himself. Old and friendly.

"When we had spread out the stuff, we pulled out to sea for about half a mile and waited. The girl came slowly down the cliff path, her eyes on the clothes and the food. On tiptoes she came toward the pile of petticoats, circled them and sniffed at them. She picked up one piece after the other. Nice pieces: Javanese *slendangs* made of beautiful cloth; *pandjangs* to wrap around her waist, all covered with patterns in gold thread; and little caps of silk with silver tassels. They were very generous, those fellows!

"We watched her from the boat. Five times she went round that spread of nice clothing; then she did something that made us laugh. She picked up that old coat of Van Shoorn's, turned it round and round as if she were trying to get the hang of it; then she put it on inside out and walked up the track to the top of the cliff. Now and then she stopped and listened to the laughter that came from the boat."

KROMHOUT paused and looked up at the old gibbon. The monkey sat up expectantly. With the air of a boulevardier, he stroked his whiskers, straightened his shoulders and gave a pat to the ruffled hair on his stomach.

"His wife is coming," whispered Kromhout.

From the leafy branches above the old ape dropped a graceful lady of his own breed, a lithe, alert female who moved with the speed and grace which characterize the gibbon, a speed which makes it possible for them to leap at small birds and capture them on the wing.

The lady gibbon reached the old chap. She was playful. She patted him on the nose with her long paw; and when he protested mildly, she gave him a dig in the ribs that brought a grunt that seemed

to delight her. She danced around him, swung by two fingers from a bough above his head, then startled him by turning a complete somersault in midair and catching a limb as she was dropping toward the ground.

Jan Kromhout's broad face showed his pleasure. "She does that every day," he whispered. "It tickles him. She is very nice. I think he is pleased that I nursed him back to life when he thought he was going to die. *Ja*, I think he is pleased. That is why he lifts his paw when he sees me taking a drink of schnapps."

MY eagerness to hear the finish of the story of the wild girl made me interrupt the naturalist's contemplation of the gibbons. "Did they coax her aboard the *Soerakarta*?" I asked.

"*Ja*, they did," answered Kromhout. "It took five days to make that girl believe that no one wished to hurt her. They filled the beach with all sorts of things, trying to please her. I was a little tired of that business. On the third day I said it might be better to leave her there as she seemed to be happy, and that young fool Hugo Sonsbeeck tried to hit me. He did not sleep during those five days. He stayed on deck all night with a lamp, making signals to the shore. He made me sick with his goings-on.

"When we got that girl on board, we were all tired. Van Shoorn held a drawing to see where we would go, and the barman pulled out a piece of paper with Batavia on it. . . . I will tell you something: Every bit of paper in Van Shoorn's hat had Batavia on it! *Ja*, Van Shoorn's too."

"And the girl?" I asked. "Did she marry this young Hugo Sonsbeeck?"

"*Neen!*" snapped Kromhout. "She married old Van Shoorn. That specialist who said he would die in six months was a fool. That was seventeen years ago, but he is still alive. That girl lives with him on his big estate at *Soerakarta*. She is very clever with animals. She can imitate the cries of all the birds and apes of the Malay. Once when I was standing in front of the Hotel Sleir at *Soerakarta*, she hissed like a cobra in my ear. I hopped so quick that I fell and sprained my ankle. I was very mad with her, but she only laughed at me."

Jan Kromhout lifted his glass and looked upward at the old gibbon on the limb. But the gibbon did not respond. He was asleep, his beautiful young wife cuddled in his long arms.

GUNPOWDER

By GORDON KEYNE

The Story Thus Far:

"FOR that much money," exclaimed the American secret agent Luther Grimm, "I'd steal and beg and rob and murder. For myself? No! For my father, facing the enemy with empty guns! For my brothers, condemned to the hell of a prison-ship and imprisonment because the army had no powder or food! For my mother and sister, alone in a country overrun by hired mercenaries. And I cover it up with fine words—for Dr. Franklin, for the Congress, for Washington! For my own people—aye!"

For his own people, indeed, Grimm had already risked life and suffered wounds both on American battlefields and here in Europe. Now he was hot on the trail of the vast sum the beleaguered colonies so sorely needed—and it was a woman's money! For through his friend the French agent St. Denis he had learned that the exiled young Russian Duchess Marie of Courland had been left two hundred million francs by her father. The money was held by two Berlin bankers awaiting her arrival to claim it in person. And both she and her inheritance were of course threatened by ruthless birds of prey: by her own sister Flora, married to the foppish but able German Count Otto von Osbrock; by Frederick the Great of Prussia, eager for money to finance new wars; by England, represented by their unscrupulous agent Mortlake; and by France.

It was with France that Marie of Courland made terms when she contrived to escape from the convent in which she had been imprisoned. In exchange for half her fortune, France had undertaken to protect her and the other half, and had agreed to share the money with the American colonies. Remained, however, to get the money out of Germany.

So Luther Grimm and St. Denis had crossed the border, had met the lovely young Duchess and were proceeding toward Berlin when Mortlake and Count Otto learned of their journey and instigated several attacks upon them. The Duchess Marie went on, in disguise. But Grimm and St. Denis were decoyed

aboard a boat to cross the Rhine, were set upon by Count Otto and his men, and St. Denis was killed through trickery, while Grimm was hunted like a wild beast. He escaped again, however, and rejoined Marie; together they managed to continue their journey as far as Wittenberg, only sixty miles from Berlin—from Berlin where Count Otto and Mortlake were even now gaining audience with the Emperor Frederick to win his authority for the murder of Grimm and the imprisonment of Marie. And as a result Grimm was decoyed to an inn where three professional swordsmen hired by Count Otto came to kill him. There was honor among assassins, however; they attacked Grimm singly; and one by one he killed all three. Wounded, dazed, he had slumped weakly into a chair, almost unconscious among his fallen foes—when Marie's servitor Jacques appeared and dragged him out to her carriage. (*The story continues in detail:*)

"WHAT'S happened?" called Marie. And Grimm, brought somewhat to himself by the ministrations of Jacques, straightened up. Her voice, the fresh air—yes, it was true. Marie was here, not Mortlake. A sudden laugh broke on his lips, as he came to the carriage.

"Get in, get in!" Marie swung open the door. "Mortlake's here. I saw him. He had police with him. He spoke of you, he was going to arrest me—oh, we must be off quickly!"

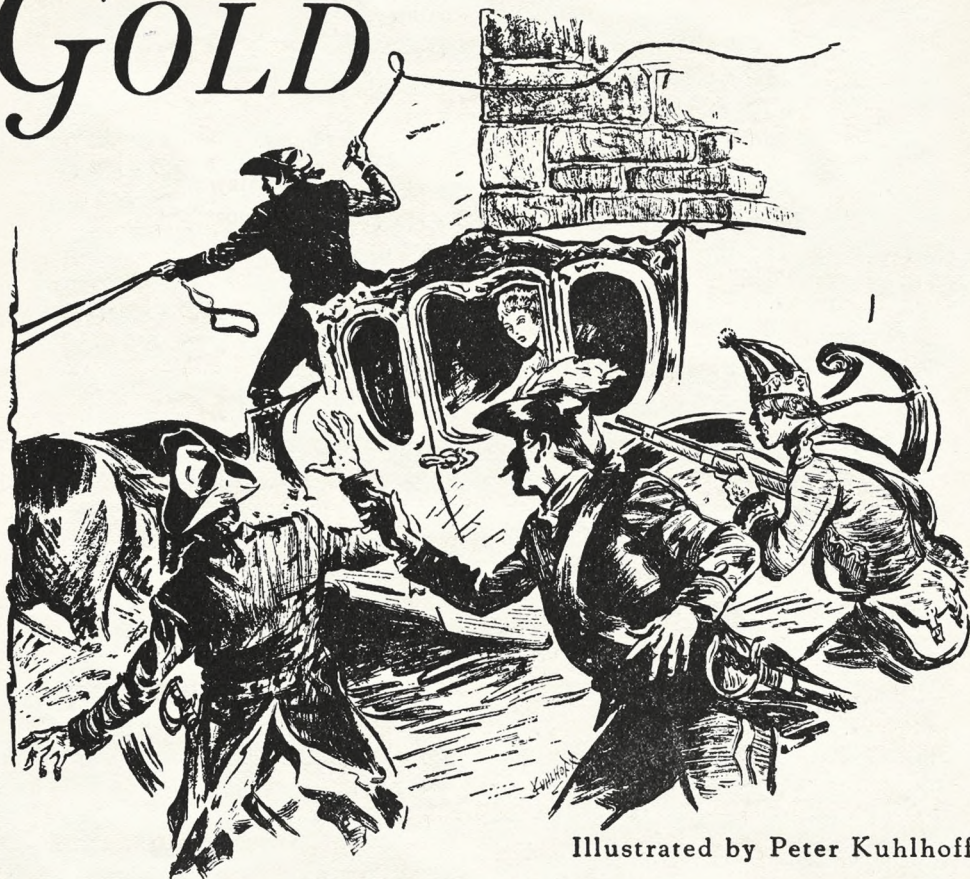
"I believe you!" Grimm swung up into the carriage. He waved his hand at the landlord and grooms, who had begun to bawl curses afresh; taking a gold-piece from his pocket, he flung it at them as Jacques started the horses. "Help yourselves to the dead gentlemen, lads! Their money's still good, if they're not!"

His eyes dancing, he fell back on the cushions. Marie stared at him.

"Dead gentlemen? What are you talking about? What are those men shouting about? Are you drunk?"

"Drunk, yes; drunk with beating the devil at his own game." With a deep

GOLD



Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff

breath, he relaxed. "Mortlake brought three men here to kill me. Well, they failed. What's that you said? You saw him?"

She shivered. "Yes, yes. He was at the door of the carriage— What are we to do?"

"That depends." Grimm inspected her curiously. "How the devil did you get away from him? What happened?"

"I—I hardly know," she faltered. "He was there, speaking to me; his one eye was like fire. He mentioned you. I knew him; I was terrified—"

Grimm patted her hand. "There, there, take it easy! I can't imagine how he failed to nip you. Police, you say?"

"Two of them." The toilet case was at her feet, still open. The mirror lay beside her. She pointed to it. "I was holding this. I struck at him—the way you strike out at something horrible in the darkness—oh, I was beside myself!"

She looked at her hand as though in horror, then at the mirror. Luther Grimm followed her gaze. He saw the smudge of nearly dried blood on the metal, and whistled softly as he picked it up.

"You hit him with the edge of this?" He swung the mirror and nodded. "A deadly thing, upon my soul! I with the saber, you with the mirror—ha! We've done well, you and I. But I hope you didn't kill him. I want that pleasure myself." He put down the mirror and looked back through the little rear window of the carriage.

"No pursuit," he said coolly. "So far, at least. Devil take me, comrade, if you're not one in a thousand! Let's see; Mortlake must have been watching in the town, perhaps at the gates, for our arrival. He followed us to the inn, left his friends there to kill me, went back himself to nab you—hm! I think all's safe ahead. When you came, I thought it Mortlake coming back to finish me. I'd got a clip over the head that left me dazed—bah! Forget it all. Comrade, you've been my good angel throughout. By God, I've beaten them at their own game, and I'll do it again! We'll look ahead and not back, eh?"

"Never back, always ahead," she repeated, a glow in her face. And Grimm smiled again as he met her eyes.

Sunset and darkness drew down. They came to a village, made a hasty stop at the little tavern, and were on again with directions, food and wine. An hour later Jacques pulled up the horses and they dined by light of the carriage lanterns. It was only another hour to the next post tavern.

"We'll get fresh horses there," Grimm said to old Jacques. "We'll take on a postilion to drive and let you sleep inside. Keep going? By all means. Sixty miles to Berlin, and we must be there tomorrow night."

More than this he refused to say. As the horses raced on, he sat with biting eagerness in his spirit and plans taking shape in every detail. Once in Berlin, he would no longer be on the defensive. There, the game would be in his hands to play, the attack would be his to make.

At the next post-house they managed to secure fresh horses by dint of gold, with a postilion to take the reins. The worn-out Jacques fell asleep in the carriage. Opposite, Marie sat with Luther Grimm's arm bracing her against lurches of the vehicle; and they slept by snatches.

SIXTY miles—five post-stations and changes of horses—night wearing into day, day drawing on apace, with hasty pauses for refreshment but none for sleep. At the last halt, twelve miles out of Berlin, Grimm learned that a city-bound diligence would be along in a few moments—indeed, they had passed it on the road. He booked a place in it for himself, came back to the carriage as the horses were being changed, and abruptly bade the surprised Marie farewell.

"Safer now if we separate," he said. "Go straight to the Hôtel de Paris. Here's a note for Madame Rufin, who keeps the lodgings. She knows me; she can be trusted. As soon as you get there, go to bed and sleep for an hour. Then I'll come for you."

Astonishment, surprise, dismay, struggled in her eyes.

"You'll come for me? To go where?" Grimm's eyes twinkled gayly.

"To get your inheritance—and money for the Continental Army! *Au revoir*, my dear, and good luck. You should be in Berlin by sunset or soon after."

He bent his lips to her fingers, gestured to Jacques, who had resumed the reins, and the carriage rolled away. . . .

Grimm had time only for a hasty bite and a flagon of wine when the diligence came in. He took his place, and with

swift changes of horses and shift of mail sacks, they were off. These last twelve miles passed swiftly. Sunset came, the daylight died; the pale stars were just appearing, when the journey was ended.

BERLIN! Grimm alighted stiffly. Then as he strode unrecognized through the streets of Frederick's capital, the old keen thrill of the game surged across his pulse-beats, filled his veins, sent his spirit soaring. Luck was with him!

He came to the residence of the French ambassador, a spacious mansion set amid walled gardens. The gates were open, carriages thronged the drive, the house was glittering with lights. Grimm approached one of the lackeys at the gate.

"The Marquis d'Evrecourt is obviously at home?"

"He's entertaining at dinner, monsieur."

"Good. I've just arrived from Paris with important dispatches. Take me into the house by a side entrance, and summon your master."

"Have the kindness to follow me, monsieur."

Grimm was taken past the *portecochère* to a rear entrance and so into the house. With passing glimpses of a splendid assemblage, he was led to a large neat library, the *cabinet du travail* or working-office of the ambassador, and left to wait.

He was not long alone. The door opened. Evrecourt, in court attire, splendid with jeweled orders, came into the room and stopped short at sight of him.

"M. Grimm!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, this is a happy surprise—I've been hoping you would come—"

Grimm smiled thinly. "And my business, I fear, threatens your evening's peace and quiet. Have you any word from Versailles for me? From the Count de Vergennes?"

"Yes, here in the desk. Be seated, I beg of you. While you're in the city, you must make your home with me."

Grimm made no response, but seated himself and got out his pipe and pouch.

From a drawer of his desk, Evrecourt took a letter addressed to him by the minister of France, together with a sealed enclosure bearing Grimm's name. He handed them to Grimm, who glanced first at the open letter. Vergennes had written briefly:

If M. Luther Grimm comes to you, I beg that you will hand him the enclosed, and place all your resources at his disposal.

With a heart-leap, Grimm tore open the sealed enclosure, glanced at it, then looked up as Evrecourt addressed him:

"My friend, I must warn you that I've heard some queer rumors. A word here, a word there. The King himself asked me yesterday whether you had not been implicated in some abduction. I assured him it was absurd. Apparently you've become well and unfavorably known of late. I don't understand it."

"No matter." Grimm filled his pipe, and glanced at the ormolu clock on the desk. "My dear Evrecourt, it's now seven-thirty. In an hour's time, we decide the fate of Europe in this room. Do you know two bankers in the city named Arnheim and Pfalzar?"

"VERY well indeed," said the startled ambassador. "Arnheim is pro-France and has powerful business connections in Paris. He's dining here tonight, with his wife; they've not arrived yet."

Grimm's blue eyes flashed. "Good! And Pfalzar?"

"Not so good. A dour, hard old Prussian who hates everything French. I believe his interests lie rather in Russia and Hamburg. Both men are honest and of the highest standing. Their houses have no banking equals here."

"Very well. Send to Pfalzar and ask him to be here at eight-thirty to the minute. Say that urgent business concerning a matter of two hundred million francs has arisen. At the same hour, bring Arnheim to this room. I'll be here, with a lady, to talk with these gentlemen. Can you arrange this?"

"Of course." Evrecourt eyed him keenly. "Two hundred millions? Then you certainly have discovered Aladdin's treasure cave! What else?"

"This." Luther Grimm lighted his pipe at a candle, and then spoke rapidly, curtly. The ambassador listened, but passed from uneasiness to consternation.

"My dear monsieur," he broke in at last, with a trace of formality, "what you ask is—well, it's preposterous! It's contrary to all diplomatic custom. As ambassador of France, I'd be outraging my position here. Further, do you know the King?"

"No, but I've met him. He's eccentric, of course—"

"Eccentric? He's a madman at times! He's capable of anything, anything! He has no regard whatever for conventions—"

"Neither have I."

"But he'd probably arrest me, throw me into prison."

Grimm saw that the stumblingblock he had feared was before him.

"Come, put an end to this nonsense," he said brusquely. His harsh, flinty features became cold as ice. "Are you aware that Frederick is about to become an ally of England and to declare war on France?"

"Eh?" Evrecourt stared blankly. "Of course not. Such a thing is out of the question. It's absurd. Why, he's preparing to make war on Austria!"

"Perhaps." Grimm puffed at his pipe, and his blue eyes chilled. "Friendship, my dear Marquis, must be forgotten in this emergency. Unless you do as I request, France faces ruin, as does my own country, as do my own people. Do you actually refuse to do as I request?"

"I must." Evrecourt spoke stiffly. "In my opinion, such an action would be an outrage to my position!"

"Let's trust that you'll change your mind very quickly." Luther Grimm removed the pipe from his mouth, and spoke slowly. "Unless you do, you'll leave this room under arrest; you'll leave Berlin inside an hour as a prisoner; and you'll end your journey in the Bastille. In your place, I'll appoint myself ambassador to the court of Berlin. Now, the choice is yours. Speak up—which is it to be?"

Evrecourt flushed deeply, then paled.

"M. Grimm, have—you become a madman?"

By way of reply, Grimm extended the sealed letter he had just ripped open. Evrecourt took it, glanced at it, and his eyes dilated. The epistle was curt:

DE PAR LE ROI: (In the King's name)

Sieur Luther Grimm is given entire authority to act for France.

Signed, LOUIS

Countersigned, Vergennes."

"This—but this is unheard-of! It is incredible—past belief!" stammered the ambassador.

Grimm laughed harshly, his eyes alight with gay flames.

"You just mentioned Aladdin; well, here's Aladdin's lamp, my dear Evrecourt. My friend Franklin knows me and knows his business, eh? Vergennes is utterly desperate. If Frederick becomes an ally of England, with a war chest all provided, France is lost, the war in America is hopeless. So, having some slight faith in my ability, they run the



As the Countess fled toward the gate, two figures were beside her in a flash. One

risk of sending me this authority. Now, I'm equally desperate, and my time's short. Let me have your decision, if you please."

The other made a gesture of futility.

"I'm in your hands; I'll do as you say. The responsibility is yours."

"Upon your word of honor, my dear Marquis?"

"Yes."

"Very well. This highly dangerous document has served its purpose, so I'll play fair with Vergennes." And leaning forward, Grimm held the note to the flame of a candle and watched it burn. "I'm off. I'll be back at eight-thirty, perhaps before then. I need two men to take my orders. You have agents at work here?"

"Yes, yes; I can reach them, that is. They're not in the house."

"Naturally not." Grimm rose, laughed, and clapped the confused man on the shoulder. "Come, Evrecourt! We're friends; we work together, for the same cause. I intend to see Frederick tomorrow. The police, I might add, would greatly appreciate getting their hands on me. Thus, I can't seek an interview in the regular way."

"See Frederick? You're utterly insane!" broke out Evrecourt chokingly. "If you do what you propose tonight, Frederick will have you shot on sight!"

Grimm chuckled. "That's my risk. Suggest something. How can I see him, or where, in some informal manner?"

The ambassador shrugged. "He stands on no formality, disregards all ceremony, makes appointments with his own hand. I'm to ride with him in the morning, to inspect his school for army cadets at



Low cry escaped her lips, unheard.

Potsdam. We're to be there at nine. That is, I *was* to ride with him," added Evrecourt unhappily. "If you pull off this *coup* tonight, I'll probably be in prison tomorrow."

"Thanks; I'll keep your appointment at Potsdam, then. Come, cheer up! What I want you to do, this night, is no more than a threat. And it's for France, remember."

Evrecourt regarded him with lowering gaze, angry and resentful now.

"I'm not so sure of that, M. Grimm. I distrust your motives; I've heard queer rumors about you. You're no Frenchman. When I was in Paris in the spring, I understood you had left the service and had slipped away to America with young Lafayette in defiance of the royal orders. Now you show up here and prate about France, and order me to risk my po-

sition, to overturn the whole delicate foundation of diplomacy—"

Grimm lost patience.

"My dear Evrecourt, you're quite right," he broke out icily. "When you were in Paris, I was fighting the British in America. I've just come from there, racked with fever, with British bayonet-wounds across my body, my family and friends ragged and starving and desperate. A new nation is coming into life over there—and the damned diplomacy you talk about is trying to strangle it at birth. So I prate of France? Very well; have the truth: France be hanged! I'm not working for France—but you are! I'm working for my own people. I suppose your fine instincts revolt at grubbing around in the dirt for the sake of taking a woman's money away from her?"

"They do!" said Evrecourt with a certain hauteur, and Grimm's eyes blazed.

"Mine don't. I'd grub in the gutters of hell in such a cause! That woman made an offer. France has accepted it. I've accepted it, also. Why? To get her money? Let us say, rather—to save the woman herself! France stands chivalric, noble, knightly, to protect a poor woman against her enemies. France is the champion of the helpless, against the rapacity of rogues and thieves! That's the way France regards it. That's the way you should regard it."

Evrecourt gave him a keen glance, then impulsively extended his hand.

"I apologize, *mon ami*; also, allow me to say that I fear you are a terrible liar. Money, your friends, your country—bah! Perhaps that was your first aim. Now it is something else—it's a woman for whom you're fighting. Am I right?"

Grimm hesitated as their hands met. He shrugged, and relaxed his tension.

"Frankly—perhaps you are. . . . You mentioned two agents at hand. Who are they?"

Evrecourt named them, and Grimm beamed in delight; he knew them both.

"Splendid! Get word to them; have them report to me at the Hôtel de Paris in twenty minutes; kindly instruct them that I'm to be obeyed implicitly. And will you have the kindness to supply me with a carriage and driver at once?"

The ambassador assented. Grimm went on thoughtfully.

"Hm! Good thing we have two trusty men here. If I were in the place of Count von Osbrock, I'd certainly have a police spy keeping watch on the houses and offices of those two bankers."

"Osbrock?" Evrecourt's brows lifted slightly. "What has he to do with all this? Of course, the girl is his sister-in-law, but I don't see—"

Luther Grimm chuckled. "What you don't see, my dear Evrecourt, will remain painless. Better leave it that way."

So it came to pass, in the course of the evening, that the police spy who was keeping an eye on the residence of the banker Pfalzar was approached by two strangers. They engaged him in conversation, and without the least warning knocked him on the head.

As for the spy watching Arnheim's house, that was different. He was not bothered, since the banker was away from home for the evening.

IT was a curious group that gathered in the study of the French ambassador, a group eying one another with mingled emotions, and not pleasant ones either.

Luther Grimm was cool, alert, saying little. Marquis d'Evrecourt, to do him justice, played with a suave firmness the part to which he was forced. Marie, radiant but inwardly excited, watched the two bankers with smiling confidence as they examined her documents.

Of the two bankers, Arnheim was affable but nervous; Pfalzar was openly hostile. He was an iron-jawed man with shrewd and arrogant eyes, a totally different type from his more cultured fellow. He said what he thought.

"This demand, made in such a way and at such a time, is absurd," he declared with harsh finality. "I refuse to have anything to do with it."

"What?" Marie leaned forward in dismay. "Why, how can you say such a thing? You cannot refuse!"

Pfalzar bent his shaggy brows on her. "How do we know you're the person to whom these documents refer? No!"

"I stand as guarantee," said Evrecourt with dignity.

"You?" Pfalzar shot him a savage look. "And what are you in this matter?"

"France."

Pfalzar grunted, disconcerted. Arnheim turned to him anxiously.

"The documents are in order, as you see. This young lady is guaranteed by France. Further, we both know her, though I have not seen her for some time. The proof is fully satisfactory, Pfalzar; and as an honest man you cannot deny it. Unless we meet the conditions of our trust, we cannot uphold our reputation as bankers—"

"Very well; granted!" Pfalzar snorted again. "But the demand must be made in the ordinary course of business, not in the dead of night and unexpectedly."

"It seems to me," put in Luther Grimm calmly, "that all the essential conditions have been met."

"That is true; yet the impossible is demanded of us." Arnheim turned to him with a helpless gesture. "We do not carry two hundred million francs in a waistcoat pocket. The books must be checked over by accountants; outstanding sums must be called in and verified; interest charges must be—"

Marie intervened with a smile.

"Gentlemen, you are right, quite right! However, here on the table are quills, ink and paper; to write bills-of-exchange requires only a few moments. Let me suggest a way out of your dilemma. Write bills on Paris for one hundred millions, payable to me or to my order. I'll then give you a receipt in full for the entire amount of my inheritance, leaving the amount in blank, on your word of honor that the balance due will be sent me in Paris within the next thirty days."

The bankers stared at her amazedly.

"What? Are you a fool?" exclaimed Pfalzar harshly. "You'd take our bare word?"

She flung him a quick bright smile.

"I follow the example of my father in trusting you, Herr Pfalzar. This will close the matter of your trust. It will leave you owing me approximately half the balance of my inheritance. As protection, if you desire to do so, give me a joint note to this effect, leaving the amount unspecified."

THE banker met the eagerly assenting gaze of his colleague. He hesitated; then his thin lips clamped shut for an instant.

"No," he broke out. "The money cannot go to you without our joint approval. I refuse to give mine here and now. Come to my office tomorrow, see to the affair in the usual way, and it's all very well. But I'll not be coerced into this unprecedented sort of thing. It's against all my principles."

To Luther Grimm, it was clear that this man was in the confidence either of Count Otto or of King Frederick. He glanced at Evrecourt and made a slight gesture. The ambassador rose and beckoned pleasantly to Pfalzar.

"Will you step to the window with me?" he said. The banker scowled, then

rose and accompanied him. Grimm followed them both.

Pulling back the heavy curtain, Evrecourt pointed to the courtyard below, where a berlin was being fetched out and horses harnessed to it.

"In that carriage, my dear Pfalzar, is an extra large luggage-boot," said the ambassador confidentially. "A bound and gagged man might lie in it unseen, perfectly hidden, until the Prussian frontier was passed. He would, of course, be extremely uncomfortable. During his indefinite absence, his business would assuredly suffer very heavily—"

"WHAT do you imply?" growled Pfalzar, turning in fury. "Do you dare have the impudence to threaten me?"

"Alas, I would not venture. But this gentleman would." And with his most affable smile, Evrecourt indicated Grimm. "This Herr Grimm has no respect whatever for persons or laws. The carriage, yonder, takes him out of Berlin in ten minutes, my dear Pfalzar. And if you persist in your attitude—he takes you with him. Bound and gagged."

"What? You'd lend yourself, your position, to such an outrage?" Pfalzar gasped. "It's known to my family that I came here, at your request. If I don't return, the King will call you to answer in short order! Ambassador or no, he'd have you taken out and shot!"

"You may be right." And the marquis was unable to suppress a sigh. "However, that would not help you; you'd be far from here, and going farther."

"Precisely," put in Grimm. He met the glare of Pfalzar with his whimsical smile, but there was no smile in his blue eyes. "And while it would be a pity if M. d'Evrecourt were shot, how much greater a pity it were if Prussia were to become an ally of England!"

His gaze countered that of Pfalzar. He perceived instantly that the banker was aware of the entire intrigue; his shot went home and left the other speechless.

"You see what's at stake," he went on cheerfully. "Of course, if you insist on becoming a martyr to further the purposes of Otto von Osbrock, I'll oblige you. But I fear your reputation as a holder of trust-funds, as a financier, as a business man, will suffer irreparable damage."

Pfalzar was silent for a moment; the choleric hue of his empurpled features died into a slow pallor. Evrecourt let fall the curtain again. Their low words

had not reached the others. Marie was talking with Arnheim.

"Very well, I must assent, it seems," snapped Pfalzar with a growling oath. "But I promise you His Majesty shall know of this outrage within the hour!"

"That," said Grimm, "is your privilege. Long before then, I'll be heading for the frontier with the young lady yonder; and we'll not be caught. If M. d'Evrecourt suffers, it will be in the service of his country."

Fuming, the banker rejoined his associate and gruffly gave his consent to the proposal of Marie.

"A moment of figuring, and we can arrange everything," said Arnheim. "To what address in Paris, mademoiselle, do we send the balance due you?"

Grimm struck in: "Why, if you please, in care of Dr. Benjamin Franklin, a gentleman who's quite well known there. But you may turn over the bills to M. d'Evrecourt, who'll forward them with his diplomatic dispatches."

The marquis was charmed to be of service, and said so. While the two bankers figured, Luther Grimm caught the eye of their host and drew him aside for a brief word in private.

"Have a courier ready to get off with that carriage the moment those bills-of-exchange are turned over, and Marie assigns them to M. de Vergennes. Get your man off on the instant, understand?"

Evrecourt's eyes opened. "But you said you were leaving—"

Grimm broke into a laugh. "While they're scouring the highways for me tomorrow, I'll be talking with Frederick. Quick! Get your messenger ready. And if you're in prison tomorrow, I'll either have you out before evening, or join you there."

Which was small consolation to the Marquis d'Evrecourt.

HALF an hour passed before the papers were written out, signed and delivered. From odd remarks exchanged with the disgruntled Pfalzar, Grimm picked up one item of keen interest—the King believed that he had abducted Marie of Courland; and the girl herself was supposed to be deranged. It needed only this, to give Luther Grimm full cognizance of Count Otto's cards and how they had been played.

The affair was finished. Evrecourt led the bankers away, blandly insisting that the furious Pfalzar meet his other guests. The courier departed in the berlin at full

gallop. Luther Grimm handed Marie into his waiting carriage, and they left the music and the gay lights behind.

"Well, it's done!" exclaimed Marie. "It seems like a dream—and it's all over. What do we do now?"

"Hold our tongues." Grimm gestured toward the embassy driver. He gave an address at some little distance from the Hôtel de Paris. Upon reaching it, he dismissed the carriage, and they walked on to the little hostelry.

MADAME RUFIN herself admitted them. Luther Grimm had ordered supper prepared, and the good widow herself brought it to Marie's room, with old Jacques assisting. She departed; Jacques, beaming with delight, served them.

Here, for the first time, Grimm could relax. Here he was in safety. Madame Rufin was discreet and close-mouthed, and she also served France. She informed him that two men were waiting in his room. These were the two agents put at his disposal, and Grimm nodded. He sent them word that they should await him, and the widow departed.

"Now for you, Marie," he exclaimed. "You're all through here. I advise you to leave instantly. The city will be searched for us within another hour; tomorrow will be too late. I can get a carriage, and you can get off with Jacques—"

"Are you leaving?" she put in.

"I have work to do."

"Then I remain too," she said, watching him with radiant eyes.

Grimm reflected, and nodded. "After all, that might be the safest plan. They won't be certain whether we've gone or are still here. . . . Hm! At least, they'll be looking for you as you are. Can you change back to your man's costume? . . . Then do so, by all means. Do it the first thing in the morning, before you show yourself anywhere. Don't leave this house. I'll be off early. I must be at Potsdam by nine, to see the King."

"And suppose he puts you in prison?"

Grimm's eyes glittered. "A dozen Fredericks couldn't do that—with Mortlake here, with Osbrock at hand! St. Denis is not yet paid for in full. Also, I must settle matters with the King, clap a stopper on the lies Osbrock has told, and arrange the business of France. I've worked until now for my own country. Now I must justify the trust M. de Vergennes has put in me, and win Evrecourt's game for him. We'll see what Frederick says in the morning. So, my

dear Marie, a last glass of wine and I'll be off. Here's to luck and beauty!"

In his own room, Grimm spoke briefly with the two French agents awaiting him.

"Count von Osbrock has a residence here?"

"Two, monsieur. One in the city, one just outside."

"Employ more men if you need them. Before noon tomorrow, I must know whether he has with him a one-eyed man. This man is English. He may have a cut or scar on his face."

They departed; and Grimm, thoroughly wearied, turned in. Achievement, achievement! Even in his dreams, this thought pushed him on. Now he had only to finish his work, round it off. . . .

It was sharp nine of the clock, that next morning, when Frederick and two orderlies arrived at the inn below his Potsdam castle and the building where the corps of Pomeranian cadets were housed.

The King left his orderlies at the inn. Afoot, he ascended the path leading beside its famous closed and shuttered windows. It was now many years since Frederick, walking along that same path, had chanced to look in upon a beauty at her toilet; but the force of that shock was still reflected in the shuttered windows, never since opened.

Lean and agile despite his age, he mounted rapidly to the buildings above. His hat was old, dirty and comfortable. His frayed blue uniform with red facings was spattered on the breast with snuff, and he was in a vile temper, having placed the Marquis d'Evrecourt under arrest early that morning.

THE King briefly inspected the quarters of his cadets—boys of fifteen, destined for future greatness. The rooms were almost bare of furniture. The beds were wretched; the few tables and chairs were of unpainted pine. One of the unhappy tutors occupying this monument to parsimony mentioned to the King that a gentleman was waiting to see him, and indicated a man strolling in the gardens.

Frederick presently entered the gardens and approached the loitering man, obviously a notary, who limped slightly and had a stoop. The King halted, swore lustily, and switched his patched boots with his stick.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded at the top of his voice. "What are you doing here?"

The notary turned to him with a grin.

"Oh, hello! I suppose you're the gardener, eh? You needn't shout. I'm not deaf, thank heaven! I was cured of my deafness last year. When the devil will that unfortunate King of yours arrive? I'm tired of waiting for him."

"Oh, you are, eh?" barked Frederick. "You speak German like a fool."

"And you speak it like a Frenchman. Thank God, I'm no German!" retorted the notary angrily in French.

"Oh! That's different," Frederick said in the same language. "Why do you expect to see the King?"

"So you're French too!" The notary beamed. "No German could speak our language with such purity. And to think I took you for one of these rascally Prussians!"

The sharp gray eyes of the King softened. Nothing so pleased him as to be thought more French than the French.

"Come, answer my questions!" he said sharply. "Why do you call the King unfortunate? That's no way to speak of a great man like him."

LUTHER GRIMM chuckled. The part of a notary was his best rôle; hence he had chosen it for this occasion. He did not fear recognition from the King, but he knew that Berlin was humming with spies this morning.

"Well, just between you and me, this Frederick is damned unlucky in his friends and servants. Things go on that he doesn't know about. Like those officers of his getting killed day before yesterday at Wittenberg. And why? All because they wanted to cut the throat of that fellow Grimm."

Frederick's bitter features became positively livid.

"Grimm? You damned scoundrel, what are you talking about? What's this about officers?" He was shouting again.

Grimm snarled at him angrily: "Keep your names to yourself, or I'll report you to the King when he comes! Hm! It's like that man Grimm said to me—your doddering old King is played for a fool by the very men he trusts the most."

"Grimm? Doddering old—*arrgh!*" exploded Frederick. "Listen to me, fellow! You're uttering words that'll put you behind the bars unless you explain them quickly, d'you hear?"

Grimm rubbed his unshaven chin and grinned.

"Aye, that's what Grimm said. I'm not afraid of the King, or you either. He told me they'd try to shut my mouth. This

fellow Osbrock would do it quick enough, just as he sent those officers to shut Grimm's mouth."

Frederick eyed him keenly.

"I don't know whether you're a fool or a madman," he said slowly, "but I mean to find out. Osbrock, eh? See here, my man, I know the King very well indeed. I can help you with him. Tell me about these officers and this man Grimm."

"Of course, of course!" And the notary nodded amiably. "Well, I was at the tavern myself and saw it all. A big swaggering Norman, the Chevalier something—"

"Eh? The Chevalier de Castine—the best drill-officer in the army!"

"Right; that's the name. Then there was a queer man with a face like a skull, and a handsome Hungarian, a baron—"

"The finest cavalry leader in Europe!" exclaimed Frederick. "Yes; I remember now; Osbrock got leave for them. Name of the devil! You must be telling the truth!"

"Of course I am. Didn't I see this man Grimm kill them one after the other? He tried to get out of it, but they were there to kill him. They were paid for it; they said so. Well, he killed them instead! And later, I had a talk with him—"

Frederick broke in with an air of stupefaction:

"Wait! Do you mean to tell me that three of the best swordsmen in the army were killed by one man?"

"Good God, are you deaf?" shouted Grimm angrily. "Of course they were. And it's—here's a funny thing—he wanted to see the King, too, and this Osbrock wanted him killed first. Something about a woman; he was accused of having kidnaped her, when Osbrock was the one who had done it. I don't know the details. He said he was bringing the woman to Berlin as proof of his story. She was in a carriage outside—a lovely woman, with the eyes of an angel—"

"Angels! Angels be damned!" Frederick began to stride up and down, lightning aflame in his eyes. "What devil's work have I chanced on here, eh? Damned if I like any of it. Osbrock, eh? Grimm—that *verdammt* interfering spy!"

"SPY?" echoed the notary vacantly. "Perhaps, perhaps; he seemed to know what he was talking about. He said they'd tricked the poor King, and I was to tell him so if I saw him."

"Tricked him?" Frederick swung around. "Who did? What about?"

"That nobleman with the queer name—Osbrock, that's it. Trying to keep the King from going to war with Austria. And there was something about money, too; about that woman who's supposed to be insane but who is nothing of the sort—"

A groan of furious chagrin escaped the King.

"Oh, you blasted idiot! For five minutes of clear-brained information, I—why, I'd give you anything! And you're a dunce. You can't talk."

Grimm straightened up.

"Is that a promise, Your Majesty?" he said in his natural voice.

Startled, the King stared at him.

"What the devil do you mean?" Anger and astonishment conflicted in the keen gray eyes. "Then you know me?"

"Yes, sire. No other man can curse so fluently as Frederick the Great." And Grimm's eyes twinkled. "Keep your word. Promise me immunity, a free pardon for M. d'Evrecourt—and I'll give

you all the clear-brained information you can digest."

"So you've tricked me, eh?"

"Your pardon; I ask your forgiveness, sire. It's the only thing I have to ask from you—that, and your word of honor."

For a little space Frederick stood quite motionless, hands clasped on his stick, lips compressed.

"Very well," he said suddenly, brusquely. "You have my promise. Who are you?"

Grimm threw back his shoulders, removed hat and wig and spectacles, and bowed profoundly. It was no moment to be slack in respect.

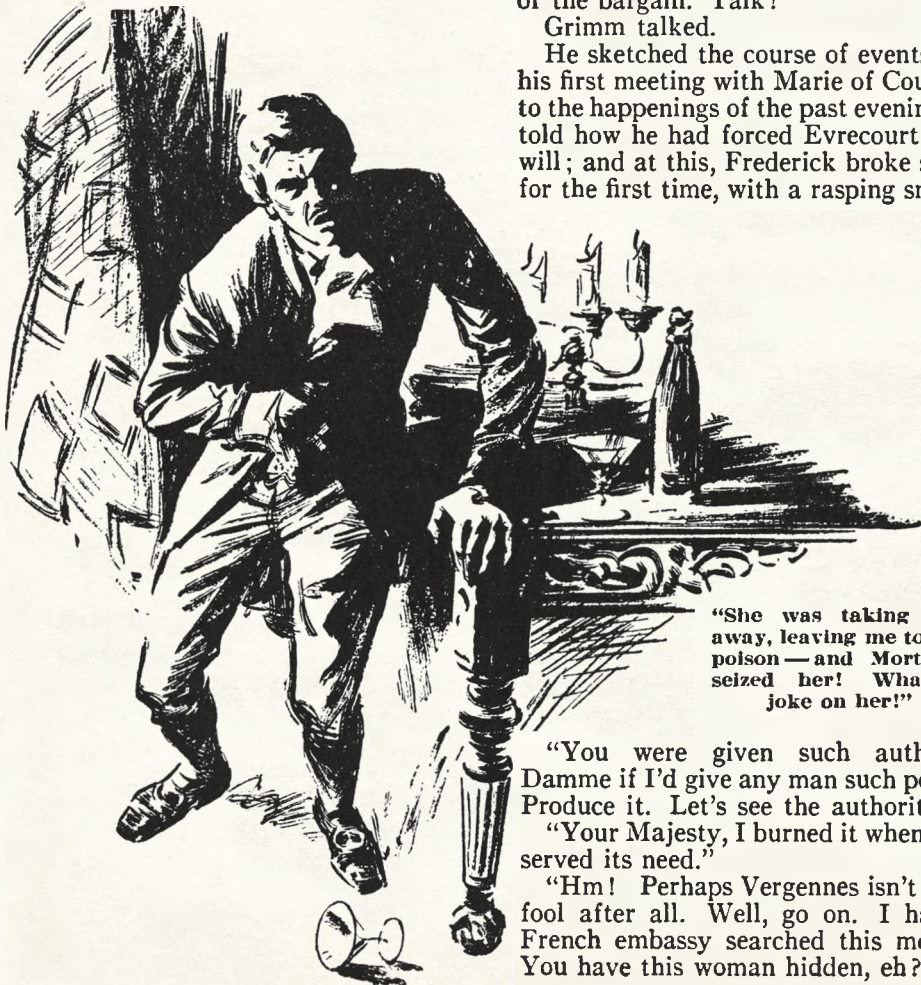
"Luther Grimm of Philadelphia, Your Majesty. I think we've met before."

Frederick's bony old hands tightened over the knob of his stick until the knuckles stood out white. His nostrils dilated.

"By God, I should have you hanged and quartered—and I may do so yet!" he said slowly. "Let's see you keep your side of the bargain. Talk!"

Grimm talked.

He sketched the course of events from his first meeting with Marie of Courland, to the happenings of the past evening. He told how he had forced Evrecourt to his will; and at this, Frederick broke silence for the first time, with a rasping snort.



"She was taking you away, leaving me to the poison—and Mortlake seized her! What a joke on her!"

"You were given such authority? Damme if I'd give any man such powers! Produce it. Let's see the authority."

"Your Majesty, I burned it when it had served its need."

"Hm! Perhaps Vergennes isn't such a fool after all. Well, go on. I had the French embassy searched this morning. You have this woman hidden, eh?"

"Certainly, sire. She's not safe from Osbrock or her sister. And you should not have blamed poor Evrecourt. If you could have heard him sigh when Pflzar threatened him with your anger—"

A croaking laugh broke from the King.

"I've promised you immunity, but not the woman. So Osbrock lied about her, eh? Told me she had offered me half her inheritance if I'd secure her in the balance—and he meant to take that for himself, eh? Well, I can still find her."

"Another man in your place, sire," said Grimm, "might still find her and wring out of her the balance of her inheritance; but you won't."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because you've been saved from being made the dupe of England, the dupe of Austria, and the dupe of rascals. Also, because Your Majesty is one of the few men who are really kings by nature; and a king does not make war on women."

Frederick rasped: "No better reason?"

"Yes, sire. The sentiment of your heart, which you conceal from all eyes."



"You're a fool, a cursed fool!" snapped the King. "Do you really expect me to believe all this farrago of nonsense you've told me?"

Grimm bowed.

"I expect Your Majesty to prove the truth of it from Osbrock himself."

"Hm! I've heard the confession of your chief assistant, you rascal—one of the best secret agents in the French service, who knows your very thoughts! He has confessed everything to me. It's enough to hang you a dozen times over. I suppose you dare to proclaim this man a liar, eh? What's his name—Mortlake?"

Grimm, who had made no mention of the Englishman, was astounded.

"Mortlake? Your Majesty mistakes. Ask your own courtiers, your Marshal Keith, anyone! Mortlake has been an English agent for years—a free lance as well, serving anyone who paid him—a man whose entire life is given to getting money. Why, it was this man who led those three officers to Wittenberg to kill me! Ask the English ambassador here in regard to Mortlake, if you like."

It was Frederick's turn to be astonished. This reply, more than anything else, opened his eyes to the truth of Grimm's story.

Without a word more, as though unable to trust his own voice, the King turned his back and stalked stiffly away. The strange interview was ended.

Luther Grimm regained his waiting horse and spurred for Berlin. For good or ill, his work was done; and he was still alive and free.

As he rode, he began to realize how luck had played into his hand, in this interview. His spirits rose; triumph flooded into his heart. All was accomplished now. Count Otto was blocked, defeated, ruined; France was saved; the King's eyes were opened to the truth. . . . There remained—Marie.

IT was close to noon, when he strode into the little hostelry. Madame Ruffin met him with blank, wondering gaze. His two secret agents were there, awaiting him; but Marie, said the widow, had left an hour ago. Grimm stared.

"Left? For where?"

"She did not say, monsieur," rejoined Madame Ruffin. "She packed hastily and departed, with her servant Jacques."

"But how, how? Departed? It's incredible!" Grimm exclaimed. "Was she dressed as a woman?"

"No, monsieur—as a man."

"Quick! Summon those two men—"

The two agents yielded no information. Osbrock's country house, they said, was closed, although the Countess von Osbrock was thought to be there. Osbrock himself was at his house in the city, and Mortlake was with him.

In the midst of Grimm's dismayed questions, Madame Rufin dragged in a chambermaid, who stammered out what she knew. There had been a caller for madame. A man with a carriage, a German, a servant of some kind. And here was a crumpled paper that had been left on the floor of the girl's room. The chambermaid had found it.

Luther Grimm seized it and stared at it, dumfounded. It was addressed to Marie: "*Come quickly with the bearer. Bring everything.* —Grimm."

It was not his writing; but Marie did not know his writing.

CHAPTER XII

NOON, of the same day.

Count Otto von Osbrock, garbed in the richest of cut velvet from Genoa, his lace alone worth a fortune, and mounted on a Hungarian charger for which the King had once offered him five thousand thalers, rode into the courtyard of a small but elegantly appointed country house just outside Berlin.

"Is Her Highness here?" he asked the groom who came to take his horse.

"She has been out most of the morning, my lord, and has just returned. She is leaving again in a few minutes."

"If anyone asks for me, send him in at once."

With a pat to his little yellow mustache, Count Otto entered the house. While this was his property, it was used chiefly by his wife, who here retained certain servants of her own.

He entered a grand salon, furnished in the French fashion, where Flora sat writing. She greeted him gayly, eagerly.

"All goes well, Otto?" she inquired. "I haven't seen you since yesterday—"

"All has gone very badly," he returned in his calm, simpering fashion. He took a vial of perfume from his pocket and sniffed it delicately. "I've been canvassing my friends this morning, my dear Flora. It seems that I have none."

Her eyes sharpened. "What do you mean? What's happened?"

"The worst," he replied calmly. "I've ordered a carriage to be here in an hour, with my best horses—that is to say, the fastest horses in Prussia."

"Otto! You can't mean—why, it's impossible!" A shrill note came into her voice. "Tell me what's happened!"

"Calm yourself, my dear; this is no moment for excitement or for fainting-

spells," he said. "Our friend Grimm has played the devil. Mortlake, who should have stopped him, bungled the job. I've dismissed Mortlake, by the way, from my employ. Last night, at the house of the French ambassador, your charming sister took over her inheritance. More correctly, she took half of it in bills-of-exchange on Paris, which have gone to M. de Vergennes. The balance is to be sent her there, within the month."

"Oh!" A short, sharp cry broke from Flora. "But that's—why, Otto, that's splendid! For us, the situation's better than ever!"

Count Otto eyed her curiously.

"You have a singular optimism," he observed gently, but with a trace of irony. "The King was furious about your sister, but failed to find her. An hour ago I met him as he was returning from Potsdam. I spoke to him; he gave me just one look, and passed me by. Evidently the worst has happened. Word has come from Vienna that the Emperor has rejected the ultimatum and is moving more troops into Bavaria. Failure on all sides, you see? I expect to be arrested at any time, but I've arranged to receive warning. Hence, the horses and carriage."

Flora studied him for a moment, a fleck of excitement in her lovely eyes.

"So you canvassed all your friends—and found none," she said in a low voice. "Did you expect to find one here?"

"That's for you to say, my dear." And Count Otto smiled. "I've told you the worst; there's nothing for it but flight. You need not share my failure, my disgrace. You can—"

"Perhaps I can retrieve it," she said slowly, thoughtfully.

HE lifted his head a little and met her intent gaze. A touch of warmth, of real feeling, came into his face.

"My dear Flora, I've never sufficiently appreciated you," he said in a quiet voice. "Most women would abandon the sinking ship; instead, you offer help! And such help as yours may be invaluable. I offer you my compliments, and my devotion. As a wife, you are magnificent."

"Never mind compliments," she said, almost brusquely. "You've lost your bid at power. Well, suppose we go back to Osbrock together? At least, the Rhineland is open to you, and your ancestral estates. If your game is lost here—begin another. I offer you wealth, which means power. A hundred million francs. It's yours."

His pale eyes kindled as he watched her. He forgot his affectation.

"A hundred millions! Are you in earnest?" he ejaculated. "Why, with such a sum we could put half Europe under our feet! But where is it to come from?"

She smiled slightly. "I've been at work this morning. Marie is locked up in the secret room; she's in man's costume. Her servant is tied up in the stables."

COUNT OTTO stared at her for one long moment. Then he leaped to his feet, transfigured with new energy.

"Where did you find her? How?"

"By chance. I saw her servant in the street; it was old Jacques, whom I knew well. I followed him, found where she was lodged. The rest was easy. But now, Otto, listen to me!" Her eyes hardened suddenly; her face chilled. "I offer you all this on one condition alone—that you do not interfere with my plans."

"With all my heart! Whom do they concern?"

"This man Luther Grimm." As she uttered the name, a flash passed through her lovely features—a flash of emotion as vivid, as ominous, as terrible, as lightning. "Remember, no interference! You've lost your game. I intend to play mine in my own way."

He nodded, then glanced around as a lackey knocked and entered.

"Excellency, a man with one eye is here. He demands speech with you."

"So? Mortlake again, eh? And now he demands, does he? Very well. Show him in at once." As the lackey bowed and departed, Count Otto whipped a brass pistol from under his coat. He laid it in his lap, as he sat. "Quick, Flora! Into the alcove, behind the curtains."

The woman rose and went to a window-alcove. She parted the curtains and vanished behind them. They had scarcely ceased moving when Mortlake was ushered into the room.

He came forward a step, saw the pistol in Count Otto's lap, and with a slight smile, bowed. Across his forehead was the cicatrice of a fresh, unhealed wound.

"Excellency," he said, "you dismissed me, but you forgot to pay me."

"Did you come here to get your money?" Count Otto sneered.

"That is all; I have need of it."

Count Otto put his hand into his pocket, drew out a purse, and tossed it to Mortlake. The latter caught it nimbly.

"Thank you. If you had not paid me, I would have killed you. However, you're

a man of your word; good! Therefore we may once more be working together."

"Optimism seems in the air this morning," observed Count Otto dryly. "May I inquire why you think we may once more be associated?"

"I've heard stories about that woman, this morning—your sister-in-law."

"All Berlin has heard stories today about Marie of Courland. Well?"

"Since I'm no longer in your employ," said Mortlake in his phlegmatic way, "I intend to catch her for myself, retrieve my failure, and perhaps you'll find it worth your while to join me in obtaining the half of her fortune that remains."

Count Otto chuckled amusedly.

"Your ambition does you credit, Mortlake," he said affably. "Very well; if you can manage it, by all means do so! Yes, she should be worth a hundred millions; and this time her bare signature will turn over the money. After the proper pressure has been exerted on her, of course. And now, perhaps, I may be relieved of your presence?"

The Englishman bowed and strode out of the room. Count Otto, with another chuckle, sniffed at his little vial.

"A damned dangerous rascal!" he said, as Flora appeared from behind the curtains. "He little dreams Marie is safely stowed away—eh?"

Flora, holding the curtains aside, beckoned. "Here, come to the window! Is that your carriage? The one that just drove in?"

Count Otto joined her, and his voice took on sharp anxiety.

"Yes, yes! And there's a messenger coming. Flora, I fear the worst; if it's arrest, we've no time—"

"Fear nothing, Otto," said she composedly. "Frederick won't arrest you—not when you know so many secrets. He'll merely banish you."

Count Otto made no response. A fine perspiration stood out on his forehead.

TWO minutes later the messenger was brought in, and handed him a sealed note. Count Otto tore it open, read it, and gave the man a coin.

"Tell your master," he said, "that I thank him for his kindness."

The messenger bowed and departed. Flora darted at her husband.

"Well? Well? What is it?"

"As always, my dear, you're right." Count Otto smiled. "The King has just signed a decree, declaring war against Austria, and moving every army corps—"



"Tell me where Mortlake is, or you'll be hanged within two minutes."

"But you, Otto! Never mind that. You!"

"I?" Count Otto flicked his lace handkerchief lightly. "Oh, I'm relieved of all authority. My property here is confiscated. I have forty-eight hours in which to get out of Prussia, on pain of arrest."

Her face lit up. "No worse? Good! Then we leave here tonight, and take our hundred million francs with us!"

"And our friend Luther Grimm?"

"That's my affair, not yours." Her eyes flashed. "Remember our agreement! You do your share; I'll give the orders this time. And no questions."

Count Otto shrugged.

"Very well, my dear. That man is the cause of all our troubles. My one regret is that he refused to come to terms with me."

"I don't intend to stop short with regrets," said Flora. As her husband met those beautiful but implacable eyes, he shivered slightly. "Now, I'm off. I have an important errand. I'll be back in less than an hour, for luncheon. *Au revoir!*"

"But," he broke in, "about leaving—"

"We don't leave until evening," she said curtly, and swished away.

LUTHER GRIMM, haggard and anxious, was pacing his room in the little Hôtel de Paris, when Flora von Osbrock was announced.

Grimm had accomplished nothing in the way of tracing Marie. His two agents had learned nothing; they were now engaging a dozen more trusty men. He

had applied to the police, and the town residence of Osbrock had just been searched, to no avail.

He had learned of Osbrock's disgrace; it did not interest him. Mortlake seemed to have vanished bodily. The city was buzzing with wild rumors of war against Austria. Then, when Grimm heard that Flora was awaiting him in the hotel salon, he knew instantly that his search was ended. The mere fact that she knew where to find him, was eloquent.

Grimm walked in on her and closed the door behind him. She regarded him amiably, and he braced himself against the worst. Her smiling greeting, her radiant affability, told him enough.

"My dear Monsieur Grimm, I don't think we need mince words," she said. And she sighed. "Poor Otto! I've never seen a man so totally disheartened—"

Grimm surveyed her with icy eyes. "Never mind all that, madame. Where's Marie?"

Her brows lifted. "Would you really like to know? I don't think the rôle of a man suits her very well."

This was enough to prove everything. With an effort, he kept himself in hand.

"You, then, are responsible for her disappearance?"

"Yes."

The Countess, with this one word, abandoned mockery. She leaned forward, and made an imploring gesture.

"Listen, please! Marie is unharmed. You've beaten us, monsieur; your victory is complete and crushing. You're a hard

and bitter man. My husband is ruined, broken, desperate. It's no longer a question of fighting, but of asking terms, of seeking our safety—"

"You seek it in a strange way, then," snapped Grimm. "By carrying off your sister!"

"That was before I knew the worst, before I knew you'd beaten us," she said. Anxiety and despair struggled in her lovely features. "But now that it's done—don't you see? It's our one chance. And I'm here to plead with you, to bargain. Otto will turn over this man Mortlake to you; he'll do anything you ask. I'll release Marie—"

"There's only one thing I want out of you and your husband," Grimm cut in harshly. "That's the chance to meet him sword in hand, and avenge the murder of my friend St. Denis."

"Very well; you shall have the chance," she said promptly.

Grimm eyed her.

"I don't believe a word you say. I suppose you have Marie at your house outside town, eh?"

She uttered a little ringing laugh. "Do you think I'd be so crude, when the police could trace me, when you could follow me, when the King himself has been trying to find her? Why, that would be the first place anyone would seek her."

"Wait." Grimm strode to the door. At his call, one of his two agents appeared. "Get word to the police instantly. Take what men you have, join the police, and search Osbrock's country place outside town."

The agent disappeared. Grimm swung back and eyed the Countess anew.

"We'll soon see."

"You can't find her when she's not there," Flora said composedly.

"Well, what do you want from me? Money?"

"No. Come out there this evening at seven—by that time you'll be satisfied that she's beyond your reach. We're leaving soon after; we must get out of Prussia at once. Otto has dismissed that man Mortlake. He wants your friendship—"

Grimm laughed harshly. "I've told you what I want from him."

"Very well. But now, tonight, let us get off safely. Listen! Otto has documents of the greatest value to France—copies of Frederick's negotiations with England, letters, everything! He has others at Osbrock. He'll hand them over to you. I'll release Marie. If you insist that he fight you, he'll do that later. But

what we want, what we must have now, is a chance to get across the frontier!"

Despite himself, Grimm was impressed by her emotion. Her whole plea was quite illogical—but then, she was a woman.

"Suppose you release Marie here and now," he snapped.

"No! I can't do that until dark. The friends who are detaining her would become involved. I've promised to assure their safety. Come! Is it yes or no?"

Luther Grimm swiftly balanced her words. A trick? Perhaps. Fighting to save her husband? Perhaps. As he looked at her, he saw tears suffusing her eyes; she was watching him anxiously, desperately. Yes, the two of them were in panic, were ruined, were facing disaster. For Marie's sake, then—

"Done. I'll be there at seven," said Grimm. "But I'll not be alone, mind!"

"No matter. Otto fears you above everyone else. Let us get away from here, and you can have anything you ask."

With the simple words, she departed, leaving Luther Grimm almost convinced that he had chosen wisely.

THE Countess drove home to her villa. There she gave swift orders. Not ten minutes later, Grimm's agent and a dozen police arrived with a warrant to search the premises. They searched, found nothing and no one to answer their search, and departed.

Count Otto and his wife stood at a window, watching the police ride off.

"Apparently you wish to keep me in the dark, my dear," said Osbrock mildly. She turned with a triumphant smile.

"Not now, Otto. Marie is in the secret chamber, off my room. That servant of hers is safely drugged and gone; he'll wake up tomorrow ten miles away. And at seven tonight you'll receive this man Grimm and talk terms with him."

"Eh?" Count Otto blinked. "I will?"

"Precisely. At that moment your carriage, with the fastest horses in Prussia, will be waiting behind the stables, at the back of the grounds by the little rear gate. At seven-thirty we'll be on our way—with Marie. True, Grimm will bring other men with him, but they'll be waiting in the courtyard. We'll slip out the back way to the stables and the carriage. Are you satisfied?"

Count Otto reflected. "No; but I foresee that this evening I shall be fully satisfied."

"Right!" A flash lit her radiant eyes. "I'll have Tokay wine for our guest when

he comes. And I advise you not to drink from the bottle with the imperial seal. The rest, I leave to your imagination."

Count Otto looked at her for a moment; then his brows lifted.

"Oh!" he said thoughtfully.

THE day was overcast, with rain in the air; darkness came early.

The few of his possessions which Count Otto had been able to pack, were bundled off in a carriage. As yet, the police had not arrived to confiscate everything here. His own carriage, with the best horses, were waiting behind the wall back of the stables, where the shrubbery concealed a little gate, seldom used and almost unknown to exist.

A few moments before seven Count Otto was sitting in the salon writing a letter, when his wife entered hurriedly.

"Quick, Otto—he's here!" she exclaimed. "Men with him, probably police. You receive him, bring him in. I'm going to the stables to make sure about the carriage and get Marie placed. My two men should be there, but we can take nothing for granted. Remember—be humble and agree to everything, promise everything! The wine's the thing."

"And no imperial Tokay for me," said Count Otto, with a smile.

Flora hurried through the house, and out into the night air by the rear. She crossed the gardens. A small stable building loomed dark and deserted, and she skirted this. Behind, the dark shrubbery loomed, and the gate. Through it she passed, to where the harnessed carriage stood waiting, a lantern lit but partially covered.

Two men were there, holding the spirited horses. Her own men, Russians, servants who had been with her for years, men whom she could trust implicitly.

"All's ready?" she breathed, low-voiced.

"All, highness."

"Good. You're leaving at once, with me. Count Otto is not coming. Go to the house, to my boudoir, and move aside the picture of my father. A keyhole is behind it; here's the key." She thrust it at them. Her voice was little more than a whisper, but instinct with energy. "My sister is there in the clothes of a man—you brought her this morning. In the secret chamber; you know the place. Bring her here. If she cries out, if she makes any resistance, silence her at all costs."

"Very well, highness. But we must tie these horses—"

"Give me the reins. I'll hold them," she exclaimed impatiently. "Hurry! Say nothing to Count Otto or anyone else. Return swiftly with her—we leave instantly!"

The two men slipped away.

Countess Flora, at the horses' heads, held them, patted them, spoke soothingly. The lantern was on the ground close by. The shawl fell away from her pale gold hair; her face stood out in the dim light of the lantern like some old cameo, her features distinct, beautiful, perfect.

There was a stir in the shrubbery, and with a startled question, the Countess turned. A man appeared, three others behind him; as she fled toward the gate, two figures were beside her in a flash. One low cry escaped her lips, unheard.

Meantime, in the courtyard of the villa, a score of horsemen halted and dismounted. Some were police, others were Grimm's men.

Two lackeys, with ready torches aflame, opened the doors. Count Otto appeared there in the ruddy flickering light, and bowed as Grimm came up the steps. Grimm turned and flung an order at the men below.

"Guard the gates; let no one leave. If I call, be ready to enter." He turned and looked at Count Otto. "Good evening to you. I've come as arranged."

"Enter, and welcome," said Count Otto affably. "Madame is dressing, I believe; but our discussion may proceed without her."

He led Grimm into the big salon, now in a soft glow of light from candles set in massive silver sconces. Ignoring the invitation to be seated, Grimm stood glancing about, alert and suspicious. His gaze came to rest on Count Otto, who met that intent look and gestured helplessly.

"Monsieur, what's past is past," he said gently.

"But must be paid for," was Grimm's harsh comment.

Count Otto bowed.

"I'm in no position to deny, apologize, or refuse. I'm like a swordsman who has been disarmed and is at the mercy of his opponent, monsieur."

"Not yet, but I trust soon," said Grimm implacably.

HE paused, as the doors were thrown open. A lackey entered, bearing a silver tray which he deposited on the table. The tray bore curious and delicate goblets of Venetian glass, and two dusty bottles. When the lackey was gone and

the doors were closed again, Count Otto broke silence.

"Monsieur, I stand ready to make you every amend in my power for what is past. I have an entire *dossier* of diplomatic documents ready to turn over. The man Mortlake is in security, and I can place him in your hands—"

"Devil take him and your documents," broke in Luther Grimm. "I want Marie of Courland, alive and unhurt; and I want you to answer to me for the murder of St. Denis."

"Agreed. Wherever and whenever you like. We may arrange the time and place this evening. It must be beyond the Prussian frontier, however. If by some accident I were hurt and detained on Prussian soil, I'd be imprisoned."

Grimm nodded. This was fair enough. "You'll not be hurt. You'll be killed," he said curtly.

"Ah! In that, we differ." Count Otto looked at him with a smile, and moved to the table. He touched one of the bottles reverently. "Tokay from the imperial cellars! A toast together. By the way, my wife has sent for Marie; she'll be here very shortly."

AS he poured wine into the goblets, he paused midway, to bend an earnest look on Luther Grimm.

"I don't pretend, monsieur, that we go out of this room friends. No, I'll not play the hypocrite. I've had my day. I've played for high stakes, and lost. And yet you, who have won, can afford to be generous. I appealed to you once before—"

"And you murdered my friend," said Grimm uncompromisingly. He watched Count Otto pour into one glass from a plain bottle. The other bottle had a leaden seal dangling from a ribbon. "Not to mention what happened in the Wittenberg tavern."

"You have no reason to complain about that." And Count Otto laughed a little. "However, I lost; I'm ready to grant whatever satisfaction you seek. We can discuss the matter like gentlemen."

Negligently, he extended the glass which he had filled from the imperial bottle. Grimm shook his head.

"Thanks, no. Pour me another, from the same bottle you're sampling. It might be safer."

Count Otto's brows lifted.

"Oh, I see! Upon my word, you suspect me, eh? Very well."

He put aside the two goblets, and poured two others from the plain bottle.

One of these he lifted to his lips and emptied, then refilled the glass. Grimm accepted the other.

COUNT OTTO took up his glass again, and sniffed it. His smoothly powdered features betrayed not the least indication of dismay or confusion. After all, this was his wife's game. If the American had been too sharp to chance poisoned wine, let her get out of it as best she could.

"It's obvious that I could scarcely poison you without sharing your fate," he observed dryly. "To the future—to our mutual satisfaction!"

Grimm touched glasses, and sipped the Tokay, which was admirable.

"I'll ride to the frontier with you," said Grimm. "Once across, we can pause and settle matters. I intend to kill you as you killed St. Denis—but without a trick."

Count Otto shrugged, and emptied his glass again.

"The opportunity shall be yours," he said amiably. "It will be a pleasure to kill you, in some ways; and yet I shall regret doing it. I still think that if we were to work together—well, we shall see. May I refill your glass?"

Grimm, who had scarcely tasted the wine, shook his head, then drank the rest of the contents of his glass.

"I came here for action, not wine. Where is the Countess?"

"Slow, like all women, at dressing. Marie should arrive at any moment. Flora has not harmed her in the least—"

"If there's been any attempt to force a signature out of her," Grimm said coldly, "neither one of you will leave this place as you expect."

Count Otto shook his head. "No. I think Flora had such an idea at first, but she abandoned it. If—"

He turned sharply. The doors were flung open, and a man appeared. He was one of the two Russians who served the Countess. He looked agitated, and held a paper in his hand.

"Pardon, your highness," he said to Count Otto. "May I have a word with you?"

"You may not," lashed out Grimm's voice. "If you've anything to say, say it in front of me."

Count Otto made a gesture of assent. The man came forward, stammering.

"Highness, the carriage! It is gone. Madame sent us for—for the young lady. We came back with her—the carriage was gone. We found this by the lantern."

And he extended the paper to Count Otto, who snatched at it.

"What's all this?" demanded Luther Grimm with quick suspicion. "What carriage?"

"My carriage; it was to take us away." Count Otto passed one hand across his forehead. "Upon my word—here, read this, Grimm! That man says he has made off with her, with Marie! I don't understand it—"

Grimm seized the paper from his hand. The words written there were venomous:

Thanks for the carriage, Count Otto, and the horses, and the young lady. If you wish to take me back as an associate, and to discuss that hundred million francs, I'll be at the Inn of the Last Virgin. So will your sister-in-law.

Mortlake.

An inarticulate cry broke from Grimm, dimly comprehending what it meant.

A groan silenced him, brought him around. To his amazement, Count Otto had risen and was standing with an expression of wild horror frozen in his eyes.

"Tricked me—she tricked me!" His voice was choked, agonized, hoarse. "I see it now—the she-devil has tricked me! She said one bottle was poisoned; she lied, she lied! They were both poisoned—both of them. She meant it for me—"

With another groan, Count Otto fell back into his chair, and death stood in his graying face.

CHAPTER XIII

LUTHER GRIMM wakened with a rush from that one frightful instant of realization and horror. He leaped to the nearest window, smashed it out, and his voice lifted.

"In here—help! Search the gardens. Bring in everyone you find. Arrest every person here—"

Then, desperately conscious of the glassful of Tokay he had swallowed, he was retching frantically, forcing himself to get that poison out of his stomach before it went into his system. Luckily, it was only a moment or two since he had drunk the wine. Count Otto had been far ahead of him there, and had also taken double the quantity.

Voices, booted feet, stormed through the house. Men scattered about the gardens; lanterns and torches flared, excited cries rose from everywhere. Grimm was conscious that one of his own men had

appeared and was assisting him. Then he felt pain taking hold of him in short sharp spasms.

His mind remained clear enough. So Mortlake had somehow taken Marie and fled for it—fled to the Inn of the Last Virgin! A sharp game of his own, that!

COUNT OTTO sat with his head sunken, his eyes closed. Spasmodic tremors passed through his body from moment to moment. Luther Grimm got on his feet and began to walk up and down rapidly, his agent assisting him. He was fighting off the pain. Thank heaven he had delayed drinking that wine!

Count Otto lifted his head slightly. His eyes opened and fastened on the American; a hopeless and terrible agony was in their depths. He tried to say something, and could not. Grimm halted and eyed him coldly.

"So you tried to poison me, eh? And fell into your own trap. Well, I hope you enjoy it! Think of St. Denis as you die."

Two of the police, at last comprehending the situation, had taken charge and were bringing order out of chaos. Now came a burst of voices, a rush of footsteps, and into the big room shoved a clump of figures. A harsh German voice cried out excitedly:

"Excellency! We found this fellow by the stables, with his hands bound—"

Grimm stared incredulously at the cloaked figure they pushed forward. His heart leaped. A cry broke from him.

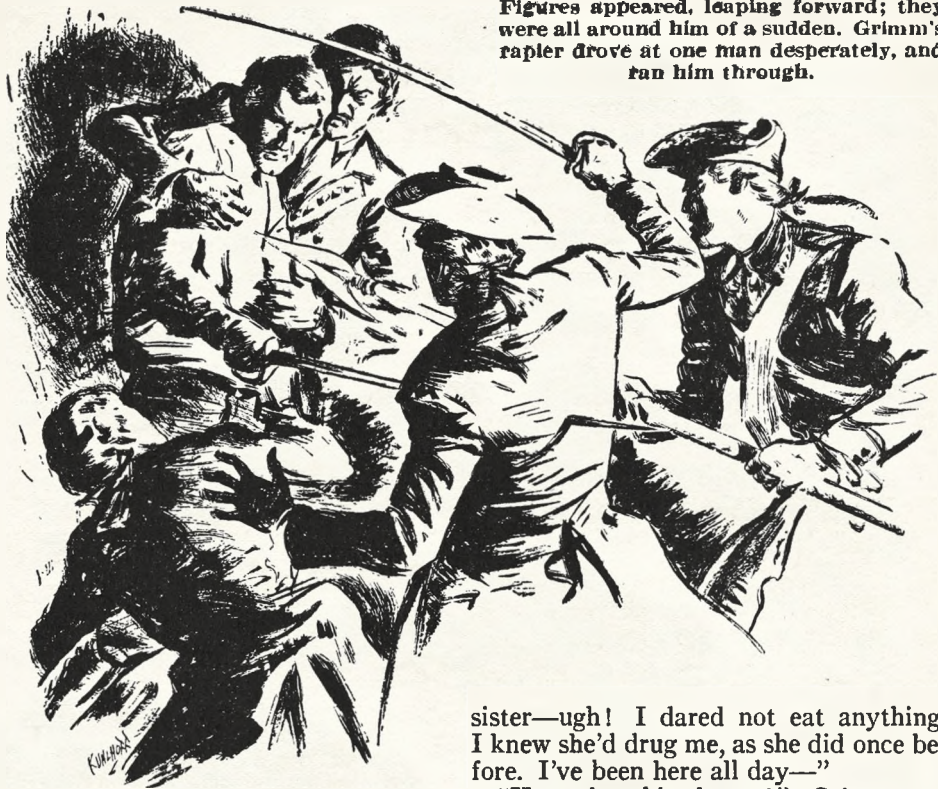
"Marie! You here!"

He flung himself at her, seized her hands, peered into her face. Yes, it was Marie in her man's attire, brows and hair blackened, a hat pulled over her head; she clung to him, uttering half-hysterical words, in fright, bewilderment and joy. Grimm caught and held her close.

"It's all right, my dear, all right! But where's Mortlake? How did you—"

She drew back, startled. "Mortlake? I haven't seen him." Her eyes fell on the group of servants being gathered in one corner. "There—those two men! They came and brought me out of the house. They said I was going away with my sister. But she was gone. There was no carriage waiting. Nothing but a sheet of paper on the ground—"

The two Russians were sharply, swiftly questioned. They blankly admitted everything, yet were obviously lost in astonishment. The Countess had been holding the horses when they left. When they returned with Marie, she was gone, the



Figures appeared, leaping forward; they were all around him of a sudden. Grimm's rapier drove at one man desperately, and ran him through.

horses were gone, the carriage was gone—only the lantern and that letter which one of them had brought in to the Count.

A sudden silence fell. Grimm's blood chilled. Upon the room lifted a laugh, so horrible and croaking that it seemed like laughter out of hell.

Count Otto had come to his feet. He stood swaying, clutching at the air, his face contorted in that ghastly burst of mirth. Words came from him, on the wings of death.

"So that's it—ho-ho! She was taking you away, leaving me to the poison—and Mortlake seized her—ho-ho-ho!" The spasm of eerie laughter shook him anew. "What a joke on her! Mortlake took her for you—didn't know you were dressed as a man—"

He coughed suddenly, lost balance, and collapsed. His outflung fingers clawed at the carpet, once, twice; then they relaxed and were motionless.

The chill of horror that seized on Grimm was loosened by comprehension. Those words explained everything. He led Marie to a seat across the room, away from the dead man, away from the police and the crowding domestics. She shivered and clutched his arm.

"What does it all mean? I thought you had sent for me. Instead, it was she—my

sister—ugh! I dared not eat anything. I knew she'd drug me, as she did once before. I've been here all day—"

"Here in this house?" Grimm exclaimed. "Impossible! The police were here, searching it."

"There's a secret chamber. But where is she? What did he mean?"

Luther Grimm explained in brief words, himself gaining fuller understanding as he spoke with her.

"But Jacques!" she exclaimed suddenly. "He was with me. What did she do with him? Find out, quickly! They took him away—"

Grimm interrogated the two Russian servants of Flora. They talked readily enough. The old servitor had been drugged and taken out into the country. They pointed out the groom who had done it, and presently that man was riding off between two of Grimm's agents.

In another ten minutes Luther Grimm, with the last of his slight pain gone and few ill effects left, was being driven into the city, with Marie beside him. He was silent as he drove. Where to, Luther Grimm? The question reëchoed in his brain. It recurred on the ride back, at the hotel, through the eager greetings of Madame Rufin, in Marie's room as the good widow served some supper for them.

Where to, Luther Grimm? He asked himself the question anew.

Marie met his gaze and smiled whimsically, tenderly.

"Where to now, Luther Grimm?"

He started. Strange that she should thus repeat his own mental query!

"Where to? That's it," he said. "First, the Inn of the Last Virgin, to even the score with this scoundrel Mortlake. After that—well, I don't know. I've finished my work for France; now America calls me. We've a hard fight there yet."

"But first, Paris," she said. "Why not together?"

Why not, indeed? His dark blue eyes kindled as they rested on her. She met the look, and her soft color mounted.

"Why not America?" he said, and his whimsical smile leaped out at her. "Paris first, then. But I've work to do on the way!" His jaw set hard and stubborn for a minute. "And it's no work for a woman," he added.

"Fair enough. Take a comrade, then; you may have use for one. And I'll keep this man's costume for a bit."

Grimm gave her a quick, sharp look.

"Done with you," he said. "We'll get away from here by tomorrow noon. Agreed?"

"Agreed. But,"—and her face became anxious—"how about my sister? I don't pretend to love her; but when I think of her in the hands of Mortlake—"

Grimm laughed harshly. "No, think, rather, of Mortlake in her hands! Never fear. By this time he's discovered his mistake. And remember, they'll think Count Otto dead, and me with him! They'll not be sure. They'll wait at the Last Virgin for word—and they'll get it. Good night to you!"

And rising, he was gone quickly to his own room.

EARLY in the morning, Grimm found that old Jacques had returned safely. He sent a note to the French ambassador, with certain requests. As the morning wore on, he had finished his preparations, had made what purchases he needed, and was scribbling a report to Dr. Franklin, to go by courier, when a lackey brought him a laconic note:

"Come quickly. —Evrecourt."

Grimm obeyed the summons instantly.

Upon reaching the embassy, he was taken at once to the study of the marquis. Evrecourt greeted him warmly, but with an oddly embarrassed hesitation.

"Well?" said Grimm cheerfully. "What makes you look so uneasy? Haven't you patched things up with the King?"

"Oh, that! Yes, yes. In fact I've just come from the palace." The am-

bassador regarded him with a wary eye, askance. "Here are the passports for Mademoiselle Marie and her servant. The carriage is ready, as you requested; you must have seen it as you entered. *Mon Dieu!* What a morning—what a rush and a scramble! The Austrian ambassador has been dismissed. Frederick is moving all troops instantly. He himself is leaving or has already gone, to take command of the army."

G RIMM glanced at the documents. "I don't see a passport here for me."

"No. Devil take it, Grimm, you must be patient about this! The King was in one of his furious, insane rages. He had just written an order for your arrest. By this time the police are probably seeking you—"

Grimm stared. "What? My arrest? Why, it's impossible! He himself promised me immunity!"

"I know. He spoke of his promise; he says he'll keep it later, but for the present you're too dangerous to be left at large. He merely wants to have you available. Now, for the love of heaven accept the matter gracefully!" pleaded Evrecourt in haste, seeing the look on Grimm's face. "He means you no harm; I believe he wants to offer you some employment. Things are ticklish for all of us. With war declared, every frontier post will be closed. You can't possibly hope to leave Berlin, and the King—"

"Be damned to him!" Grimm exploded hotly. "I should have remembered the ingratitude of princes! A promise is nothing to him, as against policy. Can't leave, eh? By heaven, I'll leave in spite of a dozen kings! Get one of your lackeys here—on the jump!"

The nervous ambassador obeyed.

Five minutes later, Luther Grimm was attiring himself in the livery of the astonished lackey. He clapped the curled wig on his head, crammed the tricorne hat over it, and snapped a curt demand.

"Have that carriage brought around, instantly! Take my letter for Franklin and send it by your next courier. Money? Thanks, I've plenty. This disguise will get me out of Berlin. I still have my old passport in the name of Jan Stern; it'll take me across the frontier."

"But, my dear fellow, I tell you—"

"Tell me nothing. Get that carriage around!"

In a gale of fury, Grimm left the embassy on the box of the carriage, and drove around to the Hôtel de Paris. As

he drew rein, Jacques appeared. He came quickly to Grimm's call, with dismay in his wrinkled features.

"Monsieur! The police are inside! They're asking for you—"

"Never mind. Get your mistress here, quickly. We're off."

They were off, indeed—the luggage loaded in, Marie and her servant inside the carriage, Grimm driving, while two agents of police looked placidly on. The livery of the French ambassador was well known.

Grimm applied the whip, and the horses leaped away. On through the city streets, now all in tumult with tokens of war—couriers and aides at the gallop, troops on the move, artillery rumbling and clanking along. On to the city gates,—but here Grimm's heart sank.

He came upon a traffic blockade. Squads of grenadiers were drawn up, officers were checking all who came or went. Somehow Grimm got his carriage through the press to the gates, only to find two soldiers coming to the heads of the horses, and an officer barking at him.

"Unload yourselves and go back! All horses are commandeered for army use."

"At your peril!" stormed Grimm furiously. "This is the carriage of the French ambassador. These are his horses!"

"Take that up with the lord marshal," the officer broke in arrogantly.

Grimm came to his feet. His whip lashed down, and again. With a yell and an oath the officer fell back. The horses jumped in frantic pain, the soldiers scattered. Down came the whip again. The carriage lurched forward; with the horses in a wild gallop, the gates were passed.

Shouts and tumult arose. A sudden crash of muskets rang out. Another volley, and balls were whistling around. Luther Grimm swayed uncertainly, regained balance, and clung to the reins. His hat flew off. His wig fell away and was gone on the rush of air. He sank back on his seat, with blood running down his head from a bullet-furrow.

But the carriage went on in mad career, outrunning any possible pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV

ONCE again the notary Jan Stern, stooped and black-clad, spectacles on his nose, traveled the highways unregarded and alone. He passed the Prussian frontier in a crowded diligence, and

if there were a bandaged head under his wig, it only served the better to disguise Luther Grimm of Philadelphia.

Marie of Courland had parted from him, had struck on ahead of him with important work to do. Having her own passport from the hand of Frederick, she was in no peril.

INTO Coblenz came the notary, still traveling by diligence. He had far outrun any news of Count Otto's death, and Osbrock's police were undoubtedly still searching for Luther Grimm, so he took no chances whatever.

He put up at the Fürstenhof once more, and found a note awaiting him from Marie:

I've seen Hoffman. All arranged. Cavaignac and the other men you want are with me. Will await you at Alken.

A long night's sleep, and Luther Grimm took the public diligence once more for Alken and Osbrock.

Of an evening, in time for early dinner, he alighted with the other passengers at the post tavern in Alken, the place where he had fought his way to freedom.

As he stood looking around, memories flooding back on him, he saw old Jacques approaching with a smile.

"Monsieur! I've been watching each arrival. Give me your bundle. We have rooms here. You're not far behind us."

Grimm followed him, to the presence of Marie; and the warmth of her greeting lifted Grimm to swift happiness. In joyous energy, he flung aside his disguise.

Ahead, only a few miles distant, lay the Inn of the Last Virgin.

"I see you're all right again—your head has barely a scar." Smiling as she regarded him, Marie poured wine. "We have had no trouble. Hoffman was splendid, and provided the men without question. They're here now. Shall I send for them?"

"If you will."

She dispatched Jacques; in a few moments six men came into the room.

Grimm knew Cavaignac, a bluff and hearty man, one of the best agents in the French employ. The other five were Cavaignac's men; all knew of Luther Grimm, eyed him curiously, greeted him with delighted respect.

"We should send to the Last Virgin," said Grimm. "We must learn how things are going there."

Marie laughed a little. "I sent Cavaignac there last night. He just re-



Mortlake, still gripping his bloody knife, dragged himself forward inch by inch, his dilated eye unwaveringly on the figure of Grimm.

hear whether Count Otto's dead or not, whether it's known she poisoned him."

"One thing more, monsieur," Cavaignac said. "On top of the inn is a cresset, a huge iron basket filled with combustibles. Once alight, it can be seen from the castle, smoke by day, fire by night. A signal."

Grimm nodded. "That cresset must not be lighted. By heaven, I'll give 'em



turned an hour ago. My sister has one of the best rooms at the inn; she's not stopping at the castle. Mortlake discovered his mistake, evidently."

"And Mortlake?" Grimm asked of Cavaignac. "The one-eyed man is there?"

"Yes, monsieur. Also two grooms, one hostler, eight horses in stalls. Three serving-women and a cook. The big man who runs the place, Master Rudolph, and his wife. Also, four soldiers from the castle, who live in the stables or the caverns behind the stables."

"A good report. Did they know you for a Frenchman?"

"Not at all, monsieur. I am a Silesian horse-dealer." And Cavaignac grinned. "The lady and the one-eyed man reached there two days ago. She has been ill; she had some sort of fit or fainting-spell."

Grimm flung Marie a glance, remembering that scene in the Dortstadt tavern.

"You saw this man Mortlake?"

"Certainly, monsieur. His orders are obeyed there."

Grimm looked at Marie, frowningly.

"They've some game afoot—you'll see! That devil Mortlake doesn't bide quiet for nothing. They're waiting to

a different sort of signal before I'm through! You have horses?"

"Everything."

"Sword and a brace of pistols for me, and a horse. Be ready in fifteen minutes. I'll give you orders on the way."

Cavaignac saluted and led out his men. Marie turned quickly to Grimm.

"You're not going there now, tonight?"

"We'll be off before dark." Grimm's harsh features were alight. "I can't sleep with that work so close and still undone."

"Then I'll go with you."

"You'll not," he said, and met her gaze. "Jacques will drive you over later. Follow in an hour, and I'll be through by then. No argument."

She attempted none. Those eyes were chill. Grimm's thoughts were reflected in his face—thoughts of St. Denis nabbed there, of the French groom who had been hanged, of this evil nest he had sworn to root out. And Mortlake waiting there.

"And Flora?" said Marie, after a little. "Remember, she's still my sister."

"I don't fight women." Grimm's laugh was curt and mirthless.

The meal came to an end. In the courtyard, the horses were ready, the men waiting. Grimm turned to Marie.

"Luck go with you!" she said simply. "We'll follow in an hour."

He looked into her eyes. Suddenly a quick, gay laugh came to his lips; he caught her to him, and swiftly kissed her.

"Good-by, my dear! Follow me in an hour—not before."

He was gone; and with him rode the memory of his kiss returned. . . .

Darkness was falling as they clattered out of Alken, Cavaignac beside Luther Grimm, the five men following. Grimm had sword at his hip, pistols at his saddle.

"Orders?" he replied to Cavaignac's question. "Tell off two of your men to collect the women at the inn and hold them under guard; two more to take care of the grooms and hostler. You and the fifth man, remain with me. We'll get there before midnight, if we ride fast."

"What do you intend?"

"To pay a debt," said Luther Grimm.

HE struck into a reckless, relentless pace in the darkness. There was no moon, and starlight was not enough for these roads. Cavaignac protested, but Grimm rode even faster. Something tugged at him, pricked him into speed.

"A horse has gone down," lifted the voice of Cavaignac.

Grimm spurred the harder. One man had dropped behind. Another fell out, as they came to a crossroads and a dark object against the stars. It was the gibbet of Osbrock. Almost there now!

The castle loomed dark, the hamlet below was dark. Midnight was nearing. They came within sight of the Last Virgin, and an oath broke from Grimm. Lights there, torches glimmering from the courtyard. Lights at this hour? Why? He checked his mad course.

"Rein in, Cavaignac! Let me go in first. You follow. Use your steel if they resist—and let no one reach that cresset, mind!"

The courtyard widened before him. Cavaignac and the three remaining men fell back. Luther Grimm rode on, and sent his horse into the courtyard, then drew rein.

Before him in the ruddy glare of torches stood a carriage; two grooms were putting horses in harness. They stared at him, slack-jawed. From the inn came forth a burly figure—Master Rudolph.

"A guest? You're late on the road, highness," he exclaimed, coming up to

Grimm. "Well, better late than never, as the saying goes—"

"True for you," said Grimm, and swung the heavy pistol he was holding by the barrel.

The blow was merciless. Master Rudolph groaned to the crushing weight of it, and collapsed in his tracks. Into the courtyard surged Cavaignac and his men; they dismounted, swords flashing. A yell broke from one of the grooms:

"The signal, Claus—quick, the signal!"

A figure was already flitting over the cobbles toward the stairs. Cavaignac met it with a sword-flash, and the hostler fell sprawling.

"Light it yourself! Look out for—"

The two grooms were leaping for the stairs. Grimm ran one of them down, caught up with him, and his sword brought the man down. The other, whipping out a knife, stabbed savagely, shouting the alarm until he died. From somewhere within rose shrieks and the voices of women.

"Two of you—in there!" snapped Cavaignac. "Silence those women. Lock 'em up. Next, captain?"

"Guard the stables. Take your pistols—look out for the men there!"

Grimm was already on the stairs. That carriage being harnessed showed how truly he had been guided to speed. Countess Flora, of course; she and Mortlake would be departing. As Grimm came to the head of those outside stairs, he looked down to see the last two of his party come into the courtyard. He called:

"That big fellow there—tie him up, bind him fast! Then help Cavaignac."

He himself wanted no help. Here were the inn rooms before him—and yet, as he advanced, the corridor ahead showed empty. A half-open door showed a glimmer of candle-light. He went to it and kicked it wide. The room was empty. Woman's garb was scattered about—it was the room of the Countess.

Grimm caught up the candle and went from room to room. No other guests were here; no one was here.

PRESENTLY Grimm descended the stairs into the courtyard. He glanced at the men last arrived. They stood over the bound and senseless Master Rudolph.

"Drag him over to the horse-trough and revive him," said Grimm.

Cavaignac approached; a brisk and efficient fellow, Cavaignac.

"The women accounted for and locked in," he reported briskly. "My three men

are guarding the stables. No one else about the place. No sign of the four soldiers who were here yesterday. The two grooms are dead, the hostler dying."

"Did you find any entrance from the stables to underground chambers?"

"Yes; a big double door's there, closed and locked. My men are watching it."

GRIMM walked over to where Master Rudolph, still bound, was gasping and spluttering. The two men hauled him to his feet. He looked at Luther Grimm, looked again—and shrank back in terrified recognition.

"Where's the Englishman, Mortlake?"

"I—I don't know, highness—"

"Speak up, Master Rudolph," said Luther Grimm deliberately. "Count Otto is dead, poisoned by his wife, who's here with Mortlake. I owe you something, but I'll forgive you the debt for information. Tell me where Mortlake is, or you'll be hanged within two minutes."

Master Rudolph gaped.

"Dead—poisoned? *Herr Gott!* You say the Countess did it?"

"She did," said Grimm with chill precision.

"They—in the caverns, highness. They went in together. They were about to leave here—"

"The caverns? What did they go in there for?"

"Money. The Englishman had an order from Count Otto to take charge of the money that's kept inside there. The Countess had witnessed it—*Gott!* You say she poisoned him? That woman—"

"Gag this man. Leave him bound," ordered Grimm.

And he watched it done. Money, eh? It all was clear in a flash. Treasure was kept there under the hillside. Greed was the driving urge of Mortlake. He and the Countess Flora, a forged order for that money—taking to flight? Fleeing outside Germany entirely, to separate!

"Come to the stables," ordered Grimm, and led the way, sword in hand. Cavaignac and the other two followed. Three men waited there.

One of the ruddy torches was brought. They were standing in the stables now; at the back of them, the smoky light showed the outlines of a huge double door, heavily bound with iron. Grimm's brain flashed back to all the rumors and wild tales he had heard about the Osbrock caverns at the back of this inn. But why were these doors closed? And they were fastened on this side.

"Odd," said Grimm, frowning. "They are getting out treasure of some kind. Then why close these doors?"

"There might be another entrance—"

"Right, right!" Grimm's face cleared. "Go ahead. Open up these doors; sweep this place clean. Take your pistols and four men—leave one here with me."

Cavaignac led his men at the doors. A bolt shot back, and they slowly swung open on creaking hinges. A stable lantern was lighted from the torch. Cavaignac took the lantern and the torch was thrust into a sconce and left there to furnish light for Grimm.

Cavaignac and his men started into a wide passage which pierced into the very heart of the hillside. To right and left were doors in the stone walls. All of these stood half ajar. Grimm, gazing after the party, saw Cavaignac halt and hold up his lantern.

The way was blocked by two doors—one to the right, one to the left. After a momentary hesitation, Cavaignac chose that to the left. It swung open. His light flickered on past it and was lost to sight. The echoing footsteps died away; the passage was in blackness.

"Keep watch," said Grimm to the one man left with him. "If the people we want are in there, they may break cover from some other entrance."

"Look!" exclaimed the man. "That fellow we bound—"

From where they stood, they had a clear view of a portion of the courtyard. Master Rudolph was flinging himself to right and left, frantically striving for freedom. Inarticulate noises came from his gagged jaws. Grimm, who had seen those ropes well tied, laughed shortly.

"He's safe enough. Go get the torch. We'd better look through the stables for other openings into the caverns."

The man went to get the torch from its holder, ten feet away.

IN the stalls, the horses were stirring uneasily, snorting, plunging. Grimm, his eyes straining at the obscurity, was conscious of queer faint sounds. He took alarm, and swung around.

"Quick with that torch—"

His voice failed. The man was reaching for the torch, reaching up toward it, but his extended hand was merely clawing, tearing at the stable wall in desperate agony. No sound whatever came from him. Clear in the torchlight, something stood out of his back. It was the haft of a long knife, a knife that trans-

fixed him, pinning him to the wooden partition. Suddenly his arm fell.

"All right," sounded a voice. "Take him!"

Figures appeared, leaping forward in the ruddy light. A shout broke from Grimm; useless! They were all around him of a sudden. One man darted in, and Grimm's rapier drove at him desperately and ran him through.

A choking cry escaped Luther Grimm. Something clutched at him and bore him backward, something else. He struck out vainly. These men had long pikes, eight-foot pikes; two of them held him pinned against the stable wall, the sharp prongs nipping him, the men far beyond his reach. The third pike slashed in, struck his sword, knocked it from his hand as he was held helpless, his coat torn off.

Then Mortlake appeared, laughing.

CHAPTER XV

LUTHER GRIMM stood firmly held, unable to move lest the pike-points rip into him; the ghastly consciousness of his frightful position was stupefying.

Mortlake moved forward, reached up past the dead man hanging on the knife, and took the torch from its socket. That knife, as Grimm now realized, must have been hurled with terrific force. Carrying the torch, Mortlake approached Grimm and held up the light, his one eye ablaze with triumph.

"Get a fresh torch, one of you," he ordered, and his voice was very calm. "This will be burned out soon."

Except in his flaming eye, he displayed no emotion, no exultation. He met the furious panting gaze of Luther Grimm with unmoved features. The third of his men dropped his pike and went running for another torch. These three, and the one whom Grimm had struck down, were soldiers from Osbrock's castle—the same four Cavaignac had seen here the preceding day.

Nothing moved here; yet in the silence Grimm heard a rustle and a quick, light step. The one eye of Mortlake shifted, followed some object across the courtyard—Grimm, unable to see, knew that this must be the Countess Flora. Then Mortlake looked at him again and spoke.

"You were looking for me, eh? Well, you've found me—and I've found you. Steady with those two pikes!"

Grimm said nothing. The steel points were into him, pricking him with firm

pressure; any movement, and they would thrust through him. He remembered the stamping restless horses. Mortlake and his men had emerged from the caverns by another entrance into the stables; it was very simple.

Now the man sent for a fresh torch came running back with it. Mortlake lit it from the first, which he then thrust back into its wall socket. Holding up the fresh light, he motioned to the man.

"While they hold him here, get rope. Tie his hands up to those harness hooks, and stretch them well out."

Turning, Mortlake held up his torch and moved rapidly into the wide opening of the passage. The gaze of Grimm followed him, as he went straight back to where those two doors blocked the passage. He closed the left-hand door, that through which Cavaignac and his men had gone, slid a massive bar across it, and returned.

Meantime, with a length of rope, the third man bound Grimm's left arm to one of the huge hooks along the partition, then his right arm. Grimm said nothing, attempted no resistance. Mortlake nodded as the two pikes were lowered.

"Lay aside the pikes," he said. "All's safe now. The others are caught inside there and we needn't worry about them."

Spots of blood came out on Grimm's shirt, but he was conscious of no pain.

Mortlake moved to the figure of the man hanging on the wall, took hold of the knife, and wrenched it free. The body slumped down. Mortlake wiped the knife, and put it out of sight. Then he came back to Grimm.

"To think of you being here—why, you must be the devil himself!" he exclaimed slowly, with a certain mild astonishment. He turned to the three men. "Where is the Countess? Where did she—"

They looked around. One of them uttered a sharp word. Another pointed. There was a stir in the courtyard; the carriage began to move. A whip lashed at the horses and they plunged forward. The carriage lurched and rattled out of the courtyard.

A LOW laugh came from Mortlake. "So she's gone, eh?" His calm seemed inflexible. "Well, so much the better. You men, wait here until I come back. Watch this man sharply; if he tries to talk, kill him. Remember that, Grimm! If you want to die, talk to

these men, bribe them, use your tongue. You men, kill him at the first word!"

He swung around and started back into the passage. Grimm watched him go.

Obviously, Cavaignac and his men were securely captured. They had come back to the the closed left-hand door and were attacking it. Faint sounds were heard, echoes of a futile assault, the muffled reports of pistols. Mortlake, his torch up, examined that massive iron-bound oak, then turned to the door on the right side. This he swung open, and vanished into the cavern depths beyond.

The three soldiers glowered, muttered together, watched Grimm with hot angry eyes. One of them snarled at him.

"Speak up, you French dog! Give us an excuse to slit your damned throat!"

Grimm looked at them in silence; words were still beyond his power. The torch here was guttering out. One of the men brought a lantern, lit it, and hung it on a hook.

Now the light of Mortlake reappeared. He left the right-hand door wide open behind him as he came, and breathing heavily, emerged from the opening. With a grunt of approval he placed his torch in the sconce, and took down the lantern. He was flushed and sweating from exertion, yet spoke with his eternal calmness.

"Get out horses for us all, and saddle them," he ordered. "I see Master Rudolph tied up yonder. Let him loose; tell him to get everybody out of the inn, and to go himself to the castle. You three, await orders from me."

He gave Luther Grimm one steady look, then turned and strode into the passage again. Near the open right-hand door, he hung his lantern on a hook, and himself passed on into the darkness out of sight.

THE authority of Mortlake was evidently established and unquestioned. The three men started away and disappeared from Grimm's range of vision. After a time the bellowing voice of Master Rudolph briefly lifted, indicating that the gag, at least, was removed.

Mortlake came into sight again. Now he held in his arms a small keg, from which he let fall a black trail along the passage floor, on past the lantern to the doorway, where he set down the trail. He carried out a double handful of the black contents to where the torch burned, and trailed it along the floor, evidently to test. Grimm realized with sudden frantic wakening that it was powder.

Mortlake reached up for the torch and held it to his test train. The black grains spluttered and gushed up in smoke; the fire ate along the trail, instead of flaring up. The acrid odor, the smoke, died out, and Mortlake put the torch back in its socket.

"Aye," he said, with a satisfied nod. "It's a bit damp. So much the better."

RETURNING to the keg, he laid a heavy trail of the powder out from the entrance of the cavern; the keg empty, he put it aside, took out his knife, and approached Luther Grimm. That glittering eye of his bored into Grimm.

"You've lived long enough, and you'll not die too quick either," he said, and the intensity of his hatred brought a little quiver into his voice.

"You and your men to hell together, you dog," he went on, with a deliberate cold fury. "I'd like to sink this knife into you, but that's too quick an end to suit me. You can hang there and think about it. I'll put the knife into you, aye, and I'll do it here and now—but not to kill you, understand? You'll hang there and bleed, and when I leave you'll watch the fire take the powder. A whole room full of powder in there, understand? And this time I make sure of you—"

He turned his head, listening. Muffled hammering sounds came from that left-hand door at the end of the passage, where Cavaignac was trying vainly to get out. Mortlake snarled mirthlessly.

"Pound away! Hear them, Grimm? Those doors are built to withstand anything. They'll hold. Your run of luck is through. Now to prick you, so you'll die slow but certain—"

He thumbed the knife-point and stepped forward, his face aflame suddenly with venom and hatred. Suddenly he checked himself and glanced around. Master Rudolph was coming, and behind him the three soldiers who had set him free. His voice burst out with a bellow of fury, that fetched the astonished Mortlake quickly around.

"Mortlake! You damned Englishman, you liar!" cried the innkeeper. "You lied to us! Why didn't you tell us Count Otto was poisoned, was dead? You and she both lied to us!"

Mortlake growled like a dog disturbed at meat.

"Off about your business—clear out!" he snapped viciously. "I had nothing to do with it. She did it. She told me later. If he's dead—"

"So it's true!" An overwhelming rage caught up Master Rudolph, and he shook in the grip of it. As he glared, he caught sight of the keg and the powder train.

"What's that—*Herr Gott!*" he roared furiously. "Why, you accursed English whelp, you're laying a powder train—"

Without warning, he flung himself forward in blind fury.

Mortlake shouted at him, screamed at him, plunged with the knife; but the huge Rudolph had him, seized him in those enormous hands, lifted, shook him like a rat. The knife flashed, dripped red, flashed again—then Mortlake was hurled bodily against the wall with a crash that fairly shook the old structure.

But Master Rudolph, blood pouring from his body, choked and fell, lifeless.

One instant of wild terrorized silence; then the three staring soldiers found voice, erupted in oaths and wild cries.

"Out of here!" yelled one of them frantically. "Get out—to the castle, to the castle!"

They turned and ran for it. Luther Grimm shouted after them, but in vain. Frantic flight and nothing else held them from frenzied. They ran to the horses Cavaignac had left standing, mounted, and went clattering madly out of the courtyard.

Now everything fell silent again, except for the dim muffled sounds from inside the caverns where Cavaignac was blocked. Grimm twisted at the cords holding his wrists, writhed, put his weight on them until blood flecked his torn skin; but they held strong and fast.

Grimm shouted again, hoping to reach some of the women locked in the inn.

MORTLAKE, still gripping his bloody knife, was roused by that voice. He moved, he came to one elbow. His head dragged up, and his one eye fastened on Grimm with a baleful glare. He had been badly hurt by that terrific crash. He tried to gain his feet, but could not rise; a trickle of blood came from one corner of his mouth as he gasped.

He dragged himself forward, his dilated eye unwavering on the figure of Grimm. Inch by inch, foot by foot, he drew himself on. He was so close that Grimm could see how his facial muscles quivered to every effort. Slowly he came to one knee, hand gripping knite. A supreme exertion shook him as he poised there—and suddenly Grimm's foot shot out.

The kick caught Mortlake under the chin. It lifted him backward and sent

him sliding. His arms were outflung; he lay quiet, senseless.

Grimm tore at his bonds again, only to relax and groan with the hurt of his bleeding wrists. Abruptly, his head lifted. A new sound reached him.

Horses clattering, wheels rolling and squeaking—a carriage coming into the courtyard, where the torches were now at their last gasp. He could not see from where he stood, but he could hear his name being called—the voice of Marie!

Hoarsely, he found tongue.

OLD Jacques was the first to reach the spot, guided by Grimm's voice. He caught up the knife of Mortlake and cut Grimm free; as he sheared away the bloodstained cords, Marie appeared.

"Oh, comrade—I should have gone with you!" She caught hold of Grimm, clung to him, held him off and looked at him. "You're hurt, hurt—"

"I'm not hurt; all's well now. You're just in time—you don't know how just in time!" Grimm laughed shakily. "Here, wait."

He caught the lantern from its hook. One glance at the prostrate Mortlake showed there was nothing to fear from him now. Grimm ran into the cavern passage and came to the doors at the end. Next moment he had heaved away the massive bar, and the left-hand door swung open.

Cavaignac and his men poured forth, hoarse, wearied, stammering with chagrin. Grimm led them outside, took Marie's arm, and urged her away from that shambles into the courtyard. He halted, deaf to the excited questions of the girl.

"Do as I say and talk later; we must act, before Osbrock's men get here from the castle. Back into your carriage! Jacques, drive out of the courtyard, around to the side, and wait there in the road. I'll come soon. Don't talk—do it!"

His driving force compelled them; Jacques scrambled for the carriage seat, Marie followed. Grimm turned to Cavaignac. He and his men had seen the body of their comrade, slain by Mortlake's knife, and were cursing hotly.

"One of you, go turn those women out of the place. Take a torch with you and set it to the curtains, the walls, anything! Fire the place. The other three, clear out all the horses here except fresh animals for us; get these saddled and waiting. Drive all the rest out of the courtyard. Cavaignac! Come along."

The men scattered hastily. The carriage was moving. Grimm faced back toward that cavern entrance. The torch there was burning low in its socket, but would last for a time.

"It was hell in there." Cavaignac was speaking. "We found the other entrance; it curves around and comes out farther down the stables, but it was barred. Those doors must be a foot thick; our pistol balls had no effect on the locks. The smoke damned near choked us. We found two bodies, chained in rooms—one man, one woman. Both dead, and not long dead either—"

"They'll be soon buried," said Grimm curtly.

"Monsieur!" a shout came from the man who had gone to free the women. "They broke out a window and are gone, all of them! Shall I fire the place?"

"Do it quickly," rejoined Grimm.

What to do with Mortlake, lying there helpless? He frowned, undecided, as he led Cavaignac toward the stables. Abruptly, he came to a halt; there was a scrape of feet from the darkness, then the blast of a pistol. Cavaignac staggered back. Another pistol jetted red; Grimm felt the hot wind of the ball on his cheek.

"Damn you!" It was Mortlake, cursing like a fiend. "You damned American, I'll see you hanged yet for the rebel you are—by heaven, I'll have you and that woman halted and thrown into—"

His voice died out, with another scuff of feet. Grimm darted forward and his lantern sent a feeble light into the passage. He saw the figure of Mortlake just vanishing from sight through the door by which Cavaignac had formerly passed.

GRIMM halted. Behind him was coming Cavaignac, one hand pressed against a bleeding shoulder.

"Well, captain, you've got him!" Cavaignac laughed. "As I know to my cost, he can't get out of that hell-hole."

Grimm put down his lantern. He went to the left-hand door and leaned his weight against it. Slowly it moved, and clanged shut. Picking up the heavy bar, Grimm set it in the sockets. He turned to Cavaignac.

"You're hurt?"

"I can ride."

"Come on out of here."

They passed out again, by the bodies of Rudolph and the others, to the courtyard. Hooves clattered; the new-saddled

horses were ready, the others were being driven out. The man sent to fire the inn came running.

"It's done," he panted. "Fired in two places."

"Help Cavaignac," said Grimm. "Leave one horse for me. Mount and ride; join the carriage, ride on a hundred yards, and wait for me."

"But, monsieur—"

"Do as you're told."

Cavaignac was assisted into a saddle. The others rode away with him. One horse remained, saddled and waiting. Grimm took the reins and led the horse behind him, back to where the torch smoked in its sconce.

ALL were gone. The courtyard was silent; but from the Inn of the Last Virgin lifted a red glow, a subdued crackle of flames taking hold. Grimm, with a thin smile, looked into the passage opening.

"Aye. He's in his own trap; let him take the consequences."

He reached up to the stub of the torch and took it down. The horse plunged, startled by the flame so close; stooping, Grimm thrust the torch into the powder-trail at his feet. The damp powder was slow to catch. Suddenly it flared up, and fire began to run along the black trail.

With one leap, Grimm was in the saddle, turning the horse, riding hard. He came out across the courtyard, passed the gates, swung into the road. From the inn, as he passed outside, came a roaring crescendo of crackling flame. Ahead showed the carriage and horses.

"Go!" shouted Grimm. "Quickly!"

Carriage and horses moved and gathered speed. Grimm caught up with them, and then slowed pace beside the carriage. Sudden fear caught at him; time interminable had passed, nothing had happened. Perhaps the damp powder had failed.

"Where to, now?" demanded Jacques. "Where to, monsieur?"

Almost with the words, the earth shook and thundered. From the inn behind, a spout of flame leaped skyward. From Luther Grimm broke a harsh laugh. Marie was reaching up from the carriage; he leaned over in the saddle and caught her hand, and laughed again, but not harshly this time.

"Where to?" repeated Luther Grimm.

"To America—eh, Marie?"

The pressure of her fingers replied.

REAL EXPERIENCES

The truth that is sometimes as strange as fiction makes the stories contributed by our readers in this department specially noteworthy. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) Of particular interest is the story which immediately follows: a noted explorer's record of adventure in the desert—as told to Burt McConnell



By

COUNT BYRON DE PROROK

Sahara Sepulcher

TO the explorer, the Sahara is a fascinating place—a land that has known ancient and mighty civilizations, where golden cities lie buried under the sands. Deep in the heart of this desolate waste are glorious palaces where cultured queens held court. There are ancient temples of worship that dazzle the eye. At El Djem one can see the ruins of a great amphitheater that once seated eighty thousand people. To the eastward are the ruins of the summer palace of Cleopatra. To the southward are caravan trails over which the Carthaginians brought their ivory, gold, gems, and slaves from Central Africa. To this spot came the men of Carthage to trap their war elephants. Here the Romans obtained the wild beasts for their gladiatorial contests. Alexander the Great crossed these burning sands to be proclaimed a god in a far-off oasis temple. Over the trail which we followed in our motor-cars, Hannibal marched with his invincible war elephants. Far to the southward are forgotten gold mines, lost oases, buried cities, tombs filled with gold ornaments and jewels, and the lost emerald mines of the Garamantians. A land of gold, of sand—and of ruins. . . .

The Sahara first intrigued me some sixteen years ago. There was, for example, the story of the semi-legendary Queen Tin Hinan, who lived at the time when the Tuareg empire reached from the west coast of Africa to the Nile—a distance of three thousand miles. All we knew was that the Queen led her people

down from the north, across the Sahara, thousands of years ago. There she established a kingdom. There the white-skinned Tuaregs, remnants of the once mighty Libyan people, live to this day.

My first glimpse of Tuareg tribesmen was just that—a glimpse. Night was just coming on when a caravan of gigantic veiled figures, mounted on their great white mehari camels, appeared suddenly out of the sand, and passed us as silently as so many ghosts.

OUR expedition into their country really began in Paris, where our three huge desert motorcars, looking not unlike great tanks and carrying American and French flags, proceeded in triumph down the Champs Elysées. We shipped them to Algeria, and assembled our party at Constantine. Ahead of us lay a 1,500-mile dash through the Sahara. At Touggourt, the last outpost of modern civilization, the mechanics filled the tanks with gasoline and oil, and mounted a machine-gun on one of the cars; we were taking no chances in the country of the Tuaregs. The Sahara has its military outposts, its wireless, and its airplanes and military automobiles, but it is the same unconquerable desert, where disaster swiftly overtakes the unwary.

Our cars carried drinking-water, oil and gasoline for a five-hundred-mile trip. They weighed four tons apiece, and were loaded with guns, motion-picture films, cameras, camping equipment, provisions, spare tires.

Traveling by motorcar in the Sahara isn't as easy as it sounds. We had to make trail in several places, in order to get the cars across deep gullies. In one deep valley we worked for hours in the blazing heat, removing rocks that were too hot to touch with the bare hands, and filling endless holes with them. At Tesnou, where we had shipped gasoline in advance, we found that seventy per cent of the fuel had been lost through leakage and evaporation. Our heavy tires were punctured again and again by the sharp spikes of a desert plant. These also penetrated our leather shoes, and caused our feet to swell. Camels had trampled sand into a water-hole—or had the Tuaregs filled it in to discourage us from proceeding further?

On some of the rocks were beautiful carvings, made by artists in prehistoric times; we saw drawings of elephants in a land where they no longer exist. At a certain spot one can hear that strange phenomenon of the Sahara: Rocks, heated by the intense heat of the sun during the day and cooled by the sudden drop in temperature at night, break apart with a sound like a rifle-shot. The bleached bones of thousands of beasts of burden that were unable to survive a journey across the Sahara lined the route.

Eventually we reached the encampment of Akhamouk, in the Hoggar Mountains. Slowly we gained the confidence and friendship of this Tuareg ruler. Through Chapuis, our interpreter, we learned of their legends. A judicious distribution of mirrors and other presents made it possible for us to film the interesting phases of their lives, and make a study of their strange customs.

During this visit we learned of the probable location of the sepulcher of the semi-legendary Queen Tin Hinan. Our discovery and excavation of this tomb is generally considered among archeologists to be a major achievement. But it was not the result of an accident; nor was it accomplished without months of research, ethnological inquiry and careful organization and planning.

IT was only after two weeks of continuous travel that we sighted the sepulcher, on a hill near the Abalessa River. In the distance could be seen the summits of the Hoggar Mountains—which the Tuareg call the Ahaggar. The edifice, at first sight, appeared to be as grand as one of the smaller pyramids. The outside wall was of splendid workman-

ship, and resembled in design the tomb of Cleopatra. Many of the stones were covered with thousands of inscriptions, ancient and modern. The possibility that we might find, under this mass of rock, the crypt of the Tuareg goddess, be-decked in jewels of earliest antiquity, fairly took our breath away.

We pitched our tents immediately, then rounded up the Caïd of a village near by and demanded that he supply us with fifty workmen. He managed to get twenty-five, and these began to remove the great slabs of stone, from three to four feet in length. The work proceeded slowly, for the negro slaves were not at all enthusiastic about their task, and the Caïd frankly distrusted us. Why were we digging into the most sacred of all Tuareg tombs? Our interpreter smoothed things over by telling him that, in reality, the structure had been built by the French, who always built their houses of stone!

On the third day, after excavating six feet of rock and sand, we came upon the remains of the storeroom. Here we found date-pits, millet and other food, provided for the Queen's journey to the spirit land. Surrounding the great structure were a dozen tombs, which presumably contained the bodies of the Queen's most faithful followers.

On the sixth day, with our food supplies almost exhausted, we sent out a guide to look for our caravan, then several days overdue. Meanwhile, Chapuis and I removed rocks by the hour, and sifted innumerable trays of sand. We spent four days in cleaning out another room in the center of the monument, and came at last to a large leather covering, beautifully fringed and bearing strange designs. It stretched from one side of the room to the other. We removed the dirt and other accumulations—and in the sifting process, I found a cornelian bead.

That doesn't mean much to the average reader, but to us it was a definite link with the past. The bead was identical with those made in the third or fourth Century, B.C., and found by us in excavating the Temple of Tanit, at Carthage.

We removed the leather covering, and came upon a huge burial stone. To uncover this stone, required hours of labor. The flies, the stifling heat, the dust, and the overpowering body odor of the negro slaves made the situation well nigh intolerable. But one of us kept digging and sifting, and eventually we were sur-

prised to find ourselves in a room hewn out of solid rock!

Early in the morning of October 18, 1927, Chapuis and I, alone in the tomb, uncovered a crystal vase. Then we came upon the remains of the Queen, wrapped in painted leather, with traces of gold leaf. Scattered about the rock chamber, covered by the dust of centuries, were beautifully worked golden beads, emeralds, cornelians and amethysts.

Our first task was to prevent the Caïd and his workmen from learning of the extent of our discovery. We posted a guard at the entrance of the tomb, and while this kept out all intruders, it also served to increase the suspicion of the natives. At one time, while removing a golden bracelet from the arm of the Queen, I looked up, and was startled at seeing several pairs of dark eyes watching me through the opening at the top of the sepulcher. As time went on, we became firmly convinced that the Tuareg people had been told of the desecration of the tomb of their ancestress, and were secretly gathering in the neighborhood of the tomb. This was rather disturbing, as there were only four of us, and it would be a simple matter for these desert tribesmen to surround our camp, encircled as it was with tall Sudan grass and bamboos. Perhaps, though, they knew we kept our revolvers handy, and that one of us always stood guard at night.

FOR ten days we were on short rations, and for two days entirely without food, due to non-arrival of our caravan. Finally, when we could stand the strain no longer, I went out into the desert and succeeded in killing a young gazelle. A few steaks renewed our strength, and the work at the tomb went on. Near the Queen's head we found the vase already mentioned, and also a statuette of a prehistoric woman, similar to those found in the prehistoric caves of southern France. This was made of white limestone, which does not exist in the Sahara. It must have been one of the Queen's most prized possessions, else it would not have been buried with her.

It soon became apparent that the Queen had worn a diadem of precious stones, and that these had fallen from a leather band that crossed her forehead. We also found the stones of earrings, the mountings of which had disintegrated, leaving only the emeralds. Around her neck she had worn an amazing array of precious and semi-precious stones. On

the right arm we found nine huge solid gold bracelets, and on the left eight solid silver bracelets of similar design. At night, when we used our electric torches, the room fairly scintillated with light from these priceless gems. Strangely enough, there were no rings on the Queen's fingers, but near her head we found a sculptured wooden bowl containing coins which later gave us the date of the tomb.

The body, we found, had been laid on an elaborately carved bed of a wood not known in the Sahara. There was also a magnificent necklace made of a number of golden stars, to which hung a perfect example of a Greek column in solid gold. What was that strange civilization that could bury works of art in the center of the world's greatest wilderness?

It was difficult for us to sleep at night, so great was our eagerness to finish the job before the Tuaregs should sweep down upon us. On the night that the magnificent gold bracelets were brought to light, Chapuis saw a figure crawling on hands and knees toward the encampment. He fired at the skulker, and this awakened the rest of us. We shall never know whether we wounded the intruder; but no one slept after the disturbance.

One day we thought the worst had come when we heard firing and yelling outside the tomb. Hastily clambering to the top we saw, not a horde of dark-skinned enemies, but our long-looked-for camel caravan. Four days later the cars arrived, together with the Resident governor and a noted archeologist.

As soon as the Governor realized the extent of our discovery, he sent a special messenger to the nearest town to inform the Governor-General of Algeria, and to offer the treasure to the National Museum at Algeria. That night we had a celebration. In the days that followed we catalogued and packed for shipment forty-eight cases of treasure, and the bones of the Queen, cleaned out the interior of the tomb, and put the great stone cover in place.

On arriving at Salah, the French fortress, we were escorted to the walled city in triumph, and the commander staged a spectacular review in our honor. Today the remains of Queen Tin Hinan and all her precious possessions lie in the National Museum at Algiers. And the explorers, thank heaven, are out of that buffeted, sun-tortured, blistering, wind-blasted, dusty, fly-infested, thirst-provoking, God-forsaken waste—the Sahara.

Off the Record

FOR several hectic years I had been scrambling from one uniform and army to another. I had seen the World War from the beginning, first with the Canadian regiment, the Princess Pats, then the 97th Battalion (the original American Legion) and then in the Royal Naval Air Service.

I learned to fly, went through all the courses required to make a combat pilot. As "that damned Yank" I had a lot of fun hedge-hopping around over most of France, Belgium and the edges of Germany, and was doing rather well for myself until I tackled a flight of six giant Gotha bombing planes on their way to raid London. My Camel could hop around right lively, but those Gothas opened up on me with more guns than I had ever seen in the air before at one time.

Too late I realized what I was up against, and found myself trying to lengthen my glide to get as close as possible to a destroyer I could see in mid-channel, hoping and praying that my bullet-riddled plane would hold together long enough to reach the water. I punctured the tube of compressed air which inflated my life-belt, and hoped for the best.

I didn't make it by a long way; but I was picked up, clinging to the tail of my plane, five hours later. They did their best for me, but it was a French destroyer, and I was not able to transfer to a British boat until the next day. And the cold water of the North Sea had done things to me, so they shipped me off to the Royal Naval Hospital at Chatham.

That was a fine hospital; but the Germans bombed it five nights running, and I was ready to forswear hospitals for the duration. I found the Admiral in charge of the hospital to be an old acquaintance from the days of the American occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, where I had been doing intelligence work. His surprise at seeing me in the British Naval uniform sort of crystallized an idea that I had been entertaining for some time: to get into the uniform of my own country.

Thirty days later I was in Washington, where I received my repatriation papers and again became an American citizen. It would make a story in itself,

the trouble I had to find a place in the American service.

Finally I went to France as liaison officer and found myself taking a flying course at Issoudun. I had fun at that school—and walked squarely into a tragedy. I went into a hangar just in time to see a mechanic step into a whirling propeller. He was killed instantly. Accidental, it was recorded; but an officer told me that he had been caught red-handed in an act of sabotage. "It was better than the firing-squad, and more certain," was the way he put it.

NEXT I was ordered to go to St. Jean to take charge of the school of aerial gunnery. A nice camp, fine personnel, the usual complement of cavalry officers, the "forgotten men" of the World War. Things went very smoothly at St. Jean. We were a little isolated world.

Then accidents began to happen. Things went wrong with motors or planes—we could never tell, which for the planes always burned, leaving nothing to examine. A new engineer came down from Issoudun and took charge of the shops. He was hard-boiled and smart. He checked and investigated, but still the planes burned, and young pilots died. I knew something was rotten in camp, but could not get anyone higher up interested.

The first order I posted at St. Jean was: "*No Sunday flying.*" But one Sunday a commission of high French officials came to our school on a tour of inspection. They wanted to see some American flying, so I decided to take a little British Camel combat plane which I kept for my own use, and put on a show for them. We wheeled the machine out of the hangar, and I checked it with great care. No one ever flew this bus but myself; it was my pet, and I kept it in first-class shape.

A young lieutenant who had just checked in the day before came up and saluted: "Captain, you have another Camel here; let me take it up, and we will put on a combat show for them."

This was impossible, for two reasons. The second Camel was not in shape to fly, and it was a rule of the post that pilots who were flying the French Nieuports could not fly Camels. The Camel

A strange episode of wartime training.

By **TRACY RICHARDSON**

was so delicate to handle that a Nieuport pilot invariably over-controlled, with grave results. I explained both reasons to him.

"But Captain," he protested, "I've never flown a Nieuport. I received my training in England, and have flown nothing but Camels. I do want to take this ship up; I may never get a chance to fly another Camel."

The upshot of it was that the lieutenant talked me into letting him take my ship for the hop. My only instructions were no stunting under two thousand feet, and to come down if he saw the smoke signal. He fastened his belt and took off in a graceful climb that proved he was a Camel pilot, all right. He handled the ship like a master.

Up he climbed in a spiral, higher and higher, until I estimated his height to be over three thousand. Then we could see him throwing the ship around gently, getting the feel of the controls, for in those days every ship had her own peculiar form of cussedness—due, most of it, to the difference in the technique of the various mechanics.

He put the nose down and put her over in as clean a loop as anyone could make. He climbed until it was almost to the stalling-point, then whipped it over—what we called a wing-over, or whip stall. But instead of going over and coming down nose-first in a power dive, it slid back on its tail, then turned and plunged down. He brought it out of the dive and started to climb again. I had a hunch. I shouted so everyone present thought I must have gone crazy.

"Light the smudge, call him down. Quick!" I called to the sergeant standing along the smudge-pot. The smudge was waste, soaked in oil and gasoline. The dense smoke shot upward in black clouds as I watched the plane with the glasses glued to my eyes. Maybe he saw the signal; anyway, he did not climb to the stalling-point, but again threw the ship over.

Again the plane slipped off to one side, slowly at first; it nosed down and went into a spin, gaining speed as it came down. Through the glasses I could see the pilot working the controls. The ailerons were moving up and down, but the



tail-unit never moved. Twice I thought he was going to bring the little ship out of it. He jockeyed the motor, and did everything a pilot could do to right it, but lower and lower he spun. When only a few hundred feet from the ground, he gave the motor full gun, and I thought he had made it. I knew that if he could get straightened out into a glide, he could land in some shape; that boy was good enough to pull a crash landing and get away with it. The spurt carried him away from the airdrome and out over the ocean; then he spun again; and while we raced for the beach, he spun into the water and sank from sight.

WE kept a special speed-boat on the beach for just such accidents, and in less than five minutes we were at the spot where the tail stuck up like a marker.

We threw a rope around the tail, and one of the boat's crew, who were chosen for their ability to swim as well as handle a boat, went overboard and down. In a few seconds he was up again, blowing like a porpoise. "No use, Captain. He's dead and jammed in like a bird in a cage. It will take a torch to get him out."

Carefully we towed the wrecked plane to the beach. They held the boat in shallow water while I waded ashore. Twenty minutes later the plane, with its cargo of death, was carried ashore on the shoulders of flyers. No enlisted men or non-flyers were permitted near the wreck. It was placed on a truck, corpse and all, and hauled into the erection and repair hangar.

This was the first plane that had fallen out of control and had not burned. I wanted to know what had caused it to fall. Not a wire was moved to release the

body until it had been examined by the chief engineer. The body was finally released and carried to the hospital, while we prepared to go over every inch of the plane.

"Here you are!" called an excited young engineering officer. "Here's something, sir."

He had been working to remove the control-wires from the tangled mess. He drew them out, and we could see where they had broken off sharp. Carefully every control-wire was removed from the plane and laid out on the concrete floor for examination. When they were wiped clean and free from grease, the engineer took hold of the broken end, examined it closely; then between his thumb and finger he broke it, as cleanly as though it were a piece of glass. We knew what had happened, but for the life of me I could not see how.

THE chief engineer knew more about metals. "The metals of the controls have been crystallized," he explained. "They have been treated with some chemical—just what I am not prepared to say. They will stand straight flying, but the first time you give the controls a hard kick, as you would in stunting, the crystallized wires snap, and down you come, out of control; then the fire, and all evidence is obliterated. This ship falling in the water prevented the fire. Captain, you are the luckiest man I know. No one ever flew this plane but yourself, so it was you they were after this time."

We started a quiet unofficial investigation. Trusted men were stationed in hangars, armed with shotguns. Every man's record was checked, but we uncovered nothing. The accidents ceased, however.

Then the influenza epidemic struck the camp, and they died like flies. For a while there was very little flying. Then came the Armistice, and the need for killing was no more.

We never discovered a single clue to point to the person responsible for the deaths of several pilots in damaged planes. Perhaps he met his fate in the epidemic. War has a strange way of hardening the mind and changing the point of view.

I have come mighty close to slipping my string many times, but that was the only time I ever had anyone insist on taking my place—and then coming a cropper.

A Wanderer

From Page 5 we continue these vivid high-lights from the autobiography of a famous writer:

STRANGE folk passed our farm, it being on the Great Southern Road between Sydney and Melbourne. I recall a day when a shabby fellow came along leading an "old man" kangaroo. That kangaroo was the original boxing kangaroo. The fellow gave an exhibition in our cow-yard, the 'roo lashing out with lefts and rights, and covering up when the fellow that owned him made straight stabs at his nose. The owner wished my father to buy an interest in the animal. I think he offered a half share for five pounds, but my father thought it too much of a gamble.

Later the 'roo had a big success, and if I am not mistaken, the same kangaroo came to England and appeared in the music halls.

One hot day a tramp came by with an inverted kerosene can on his head. He had holes pierced in the tin for his eyes and mouth. My father questioned him, and he said he was driven crazy by the flies and had adopted the inverted kerosene can for protection.

The flies were rather bad. Most tramps had short strings with bits of cork on them hanging from the rims of their felt hats, the constant movement of the bits of cork giving them a little relief. Blowflies were the devil, attacking even live sheep and lambs. . . .

In drought-time nobs of lean cattle moving in search of food and water, bellowing as they went by in clouds of dust. A tough country, Australia! Last month at Laghouat in Algeria I stopped to speak to the boss of an artesian well-boring outfit employed by the government of Algeria to dig artesian wells in places where there is a shortage of water. He was an American, but he had been to Australia tearing holes "Out Back," to get at the precious water.

He looked around at the gray sandy wastes in which he was putting down his drill. "This is something like it," he said musingly. "Something like the country out by Bourke."

I quoted him from my favorite poet, Ogilvie:

from Out Back

By JAMES
FRANCIS DWYER

"That's where the shambling camel-train

Crosses the Western ridge and plain,
Loading the Paroo clips again

Out at the Back o' Bourke."

Now with the camel so much in the landscape there is a great resemblance between parts of North Africa and Australia. And the gum-tree has come to Algeria and Morocco while the snarling bad-tempered camel has gone to the Land of the Kangaroo.

A friend of mine had a tame kangaroo that developed a taste for rum, drinking out of a pannikin and preferring it neat.

When it got a good helping, it became absolutely fearless. A greyhound that it feared when it was sober became a joke when it had a drink of rum. It would look at the dog with its head on one side, then make a sudden spring over his back. When a new demijohn of rum arrived at our camp, the "roo" would sit down near it till it was uncorked. Of course the S.P.C.A. might assert that the kangaroo had been led astray, but there are lots of matters connected with animals that the S.P.C.A. know nothing of. The only camel I ever saw tackle his load without screaming complaints about the weight of it was a fellow who got a pint of palm-wine before setting out on a journey. All his screaming was for the wine.

I recall a boar that my father bought when I was a youngster. The purchase was made three miles away from our home, and we started through the bush at the close of night. The boar was a contrary brute. We found after going a mile that we were losing ground. We would drive him five yards, and he would rush back six. My father conceived the bright idea of driving him *toward* his late residence; and craftily playing on his stubborn piglike nature, we got him home after four hours of driving.

That boar was so mad at being tricked that he sulked. He lay on his right side for three months, only rising to eat.

Pigs are not as silly as they look. A German living near our farm was troubled by a big boar that raided his

crops. With Teutonic cunning he dug a nine-foot hole at a point where the raiding pig broke through his fence, covering the pit neatly with branches. The pig was the property of a large and vigorous Irishwoman who had disregarded all the German's complaints about the damage done to his crops by her animal. It was her callousness that prompted him to set the trap.

At dusk on the first day that the trap was in working order, the German crept up to see how it had acted. He saw immediately that the covering of branches had been broken through, and he felt certain that the boar was in the hole. A little fearful of the consequences of his act, he seized a shovel and started to toss sand into the pit, but he halted when an Irish war-whoop came up from it.

It appeared that the boar, not returning at the usual hour, the lady had set out to search for him, and she had stepped into the hole. The pig had been delayed in his return home because, sensing the trap, he had to walk half a mile farther to find another passage into the German's property. . . .

It was rather wild country where I lived. We walked a couple of miles to school along a bush road, and we were warned to watch out for tramps and mad cattle. One day, coming home from school, a tramp started to run toward us, clawing at his throat as he ran.

We left the road and started helter-skelter cross-country. Looking back, we saw the tramp fall, pick himself up, then fall again and remain on the ground, kicking wildly.

As there were lots of queer folks walking the bush roads, we went on without taking any further notice. Next morning a neighbor discovered the tramp dead. He had been choked by a piece of meat that had stuck in his throat, and he had raced after us with the idea of getting us to assist him to dislodge it!

AUSTRALIANS have a crude sense of humor. There lived near our place a lean, unsmiling bachelor named Hassel who worked a farm that was as lean and as unsmiling as its owner. Hassel was great fun when an insurance canvasser came to the district. Every person solicited would chorus: "Go right across to Mr. Hassel at Wattle Creek Farm; he's plumb crazy on insurance."

Hassel's procedure was always the same: He would invite the insurance man to step into the front room, and he

would take a chair between the visitor and the door. Solemnly he would inform the insurance man that he wished to take out a policy on his wife.

Delighted, the canvasser would get out his papers. "What age will your wife be next birthday?" he would ask.

"She won't have a birthday," Hassel would reply. "You see, she's dead."

The sweating insurance man would stammeringly explain how impossible it was to insure a dead person, and then Hassel would make his big play. "No one but you and I know that she is dead," he would say. "I killed her last night with this ax. I've got her here wrapped up in sacking."

At this point he would stoop and pull a sack stuffed with kapok from beneath the sofa, two or three large blood-stains on the outside making it a convincing exhibit. Usually the canvasser jumped for the door at this point and raced hot-foot down the road. One or two fat canvassers didn't stop running till they reached the police station, and babbled to a grinning trooper the story that Hassel had killed his wife. . . .

The Australian has an inborn hatred of authority of all kind, and in a large percentage of the country districts the police are his natural enemies. I was at a small town in Victoria when a boy came running up and informed a group at the local pub that a policeman, who had been combing the district in the belief that a still was in operation, had fallen into a disused well.

An old soak, sitting on a bench in the bar, cocked up his ears as he heard the gasped-out story: "Some one—some one run quick, an' put the ruddy cover on the well!" he cried.

The man who ran that pub had a farm near by. His two plow-horses seemed weary and dejected each morning when he harnessed them up.

He set a watch and found that a neighbor, who had no team, used the horses to do a spot of plowing during the night, fixing a lamp at each end of the furrow!

A HORSE coper presented my father with a dog that had been bred from a collie and a dingo. He looked like a dingo, and he acted like one. The first week he was with us he arrived one morning at the house dragging half a dressed sheep that he had stolen from some neighbor of ours.

He was quite surprised when my father, instead of praising him for the mutton which he proudly laid down at the door, gave him a thrashing. For three days he lay out in the fields refusing to come near the house, his poor old dingo brain trying to reason out why he got punished.

One day we found him dead. Also scalped. There was a Government reward of a pound a scalp for dingo scalps; and the ears and scalp of our dog were close enough to those of his dingo ancestors to pass muster.

THE other day I visited a cattle show at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, a little town in the south of France, close to the Spanish frontier. I was surprised at the tameness of the bulls that were exhibited there. A dozen of them were brought forward to be judged, and they made not the slightest attempt to mix it with each other. They were as quiet as lambs.

When I was a kid, we had a Devon bull that had a feud with an Alderney bull that lived at a farm a mile away. There were other bulls in the district, but that Alderney was the special nightmare of our Devon. Whenever our bull got loose, he made full speed for the home of the other, and when we'd arrive, the two would be pushing each other around the paddock and trying to gore each other's stomach out.

When we got our bull home and locked up, he would complain for hours, telling in bull language what he could have done to the other if we hadn't interfered.

My father had a bad-tempered ram that delighted in butting anyone he caught in his paddock. One day my father and I were crossing the field, and the ram started toward us. My father had an injured ankle and couldn't run. He dropped on one knee and swung a twelve-pound sledge-hammer with which we had been driving stakes.

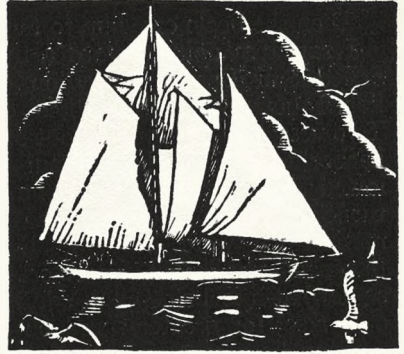
The ram came trotting up, took his stance for the charge, then, head down, started at a gallop for my father. Within a yard of striking, he got a wallop with the sledge that threw him on his haunches. Nothing daunted, he picked himself up, backed away for some twenty yards, then charged again.

Twelve times my father landed with that hammer before the ram broke off the battle. A ram's head is so constructed that he can stand wallops that would give a headache to the Sphinx.

More of these interesting and amusing anecdotes will appear in an early issue.

Black Sea Pirates

A battle with the storm, and another with Turkish buccaneers.



By VADIM ALEXIUS CHERN

I WAS mess-boy on a small schooner sailing out of Constantinople to ports near by, carrying whatever cargoes came to hand. On April 21st, 1920, we set sail for a village situated on the river Adramiti, which empties into the Black Sea about eighty miles distant and not far from the cape called Kara-Burnou. We were to bring back a load of lumber; and the Italian who chartered the schooner was taking the trip with us.

We made a good run through the Bosphorus, passing into the Black Sea at about three in the afternoon. Around five o'clock a black murk appeared on the horizon; fifteen minutes later the sky was overcast, the wind began to rise, and in a half-hour's time we had taken in all but a full-reefed foresail and jib. A heavy fog accompanied the wind; and the waves were running high.

A shift of wind began to drive us straight to the Cape, and we took in the foresail, shook out the main and began clawing offshore. Suddenly a Turkish vessel loomed out of the fog, cutting close across our stern. No one was at the wheel; her entire crew knelt on deck, praying for deliverance, their faces turned toward Mecca. We saw them for but an instant, then they disappeared in the fog, driving rapidly toward the rocks.

When the fog raised, the entrance of the Adramiti River was in sight, but we could not enter because of shoal water.

To the crew, however, frantic with fear, it meant safety; and when the Captain gave orders to turn back, they mutinied, refusing flatly to obey. Finally the Italian who had chartered the schooner volunteered to take the dinghy with a companion and row in, taking soundings along the way. To this the Captain agreed, and we ran in as close as possible and after a little difficulty,

the dinghy got away. We watched them eagerly, but soon saw that no soundings were being taken; and instead of returning to the ship with the necessary information, the men rowed ashore and left us to shift for ourselves.

We tacked back and forth in the space between the river entrance and the shoals, while the Captain reasoned with the crew; but they persisted in their mutiny. At last he lost patience, and ordered me to take the wheel while he and a couple of loyal seamen handled the sails. To the west the channel was almost blocked by fishing-nets, but it was our only chance for safety, and we made the passage without much trouble. A short distance down the coast a large shoal quite close to the surface gave shelter from the heavy seas; we steered the schooner between it and the rocks, and there we anchored and were safe.

THAT doesn't mean that our troubles were over. We had only been provisioned for three days, and the storm lasted for five. By the night of the third day even our water was gone, and with no dinghy there was no way of getting ashore. I'll never forget the next two days—nothing to eat nor drink; and not a drop of rain fell. Finally a fisherman came out to examine his nets, and we managed to attract his attention. We told him our trouble, and were provided with fish and water. That man was kindness itself, even if we had broken some of his nets. The next day he brought us our dinghy, and reported that the men who had left it ashore had started overland for Constantinople.

At last the storm abated, and we started on our return voyage. A good breeze fair on our starboard quarter bowled us along nicely.

Then the bos'n came up to the captain.

I saw him point toward a little town called Sali Bazaar, away on our starboard bow, while he talked excitedly. Two vessels were standing out of the tiny harbor toward us, but as our eyes followed his pointing finger, one of them turned down the coast in the same direction we were headed. Both were feluccas—small, fast, native craft, rigged somewhat like a sloop, but equipped with oars also, for greater speed on occasion.

"You keep your eye on them, bos'n," the captain said quietly after a moment's keen inspection of the boats. "They look to me as though they mean trouble. I'll break out the rifles."

I was younger then, and I was almost atiptoe with delighted anticipation. Pirate ships! I was to see a real battle with pirates! Only a few weeks before, a schooner had been attacked by them and sunk. She had flown the same flag we did, the Imperial Russian. Our captain had been an officer in the Imperial Navy before the downfall of the Czar; and when that happened, he had purchased this little schooner and was making his living carrying cargoes. But now there was no navy to back up the flag floating from our masthead.

I stayed on deck watching the feluccas until the captain returned, and I saw instantly that something was wrong. He reported that the closet where ammunition was kept had been broken open and robbed. There were but two cartridges left for the high-power rifles, though besides these there were nearly five hundred cartridges for the little .22 hunting rifle. The captain had his pistol and the five rounds it was loaded with. My delight vanished: how were we to stand off those pirates?

I HELPED bring everything on deck; the rifles were given to the sailors, for they would look dangerous, the captain remarked, even if they weren't.

The felucca that had been sailing along the coast, turned with the evident intention of cutting across our bow. The other was rapidly overhauling us from astern. Both had oars out, and were so close we could see that they were full of men. There was no doubt regarding their purpose, and all hands took a reef in their belts; even the cook discarded his apron and came out of the galley with a big cleaver in his hand.

"Keep clear, or we'll sink you!" The captain had made a megaphone of his

hands, and broke the tense silence so abruptly that I jumped. I knew the crew was wondering why he did not fire, for the one boat was so near even the little rifle could reach its crew.

A SHOUT of jeering laughter was the response, while the sun flashed on suddenly uplifted swords and knives. The captain swung the little rifle to his shoulder. It spat, and I saw the pirate helmsman stagger and half fall across the huge steering-sweep, then slip to the deck as though the bones had been removed from his legs. The bos'n, standing just behind me, fired, and the short *bong* made my ears ring. One pirate spun round as though some one had seized him by the shoulders and whirled him about. Another directly behind him caught at his throat, dropped out of sight. Their oars dragged in the water and tangled with others on that side. My ears cleared to hear the captain eject another shell. A ball from the felucca struck a bit of iron-work and shrieked away over the water.

"Get down behind the cabin before you stop one of those." The captain spoke calmly and fired again. I moved back a step and watched the new helmsman go down. The felucca began to fall away. The other craft was swinging around preparatory to coming alongside. It had lost headway in the maneuver and was nearly broadside on to us.

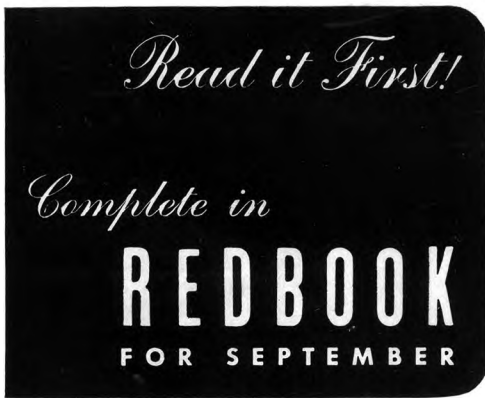
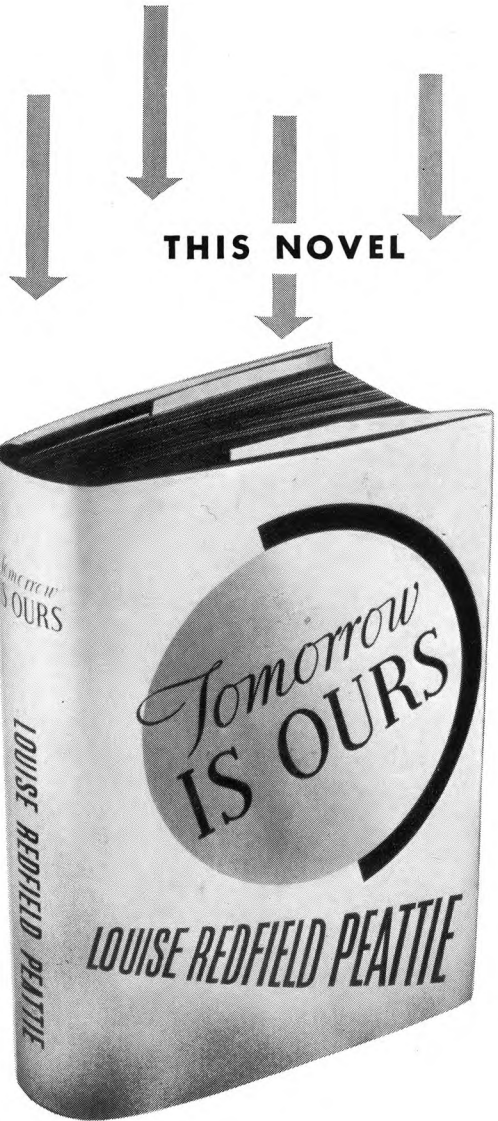
"The wheel," the captain snapped sharply. "Hard down!"

The wind was in our favor; we turned almost in our own length and were on top of the pirates before they realized our purpose. I was handed the little rifle and ordered to, "Keep 'em busy astern," and I did it joyfully.

"All hands forward to repel boarders!" came the next order, and everyone except me and the helmsman sprang forward, captain in the lead. We struck the felucca amidships with a crash that threw me on deck and nearly brought the topmasts down. We smashed through her hull, heeling her far over, and many of her crew were flung into the sea. Our bow climbed over her, forcing her under water and to the side. We hung a moment, slipped off and went booming on our course.

The last we saw of the pirates, the uninjured craft was picking up the survivors of the sunken vessel. Our head rig was badly strained, but otherwise we suffered no damage; and we reached Constantinople that evening.

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