BLUE BOOK

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News About Blue Book

A LARGER BLUE BOOK, printed on book-quality paper, bound in a novel cover—you have a real treat coming next month. For the stories, of course, will maintain or excel the high quality to which you have become accustomed; and the improved format and additional paper enable us to devote twenty-five per cent more space to stories and illustrations.

New equipment in the great McCall Corporation printing plant at Dayton, Ohio, enables us to do a better mechanical job in the production of your magazine, and permits us to give you more for your money even without the endowment of advertising. The book-quality paper is a delight to the touch and the eye. As for the cover—there's an element of novelty there that provides our artist with a wonderful opportunity and you with something very special. (No more silver trimming, however: defense necessities have absorbed all available aluminum, including that used for printing inks.)

Our office slogan, "*Stories of Adventure for Men, by Men —that's why so many women like them too,*" will of course continue to guide our selections. For the new enlarged September issue we have scheduled as the book-length novel "Arizona Feud," a modern Western murder mystery by Frank R. Adams, who wrote "Who Is Sylvia?" and "The Fathers of Madelon." Georges Surdez, famous for his Foreign Legion stories, contributes a vigorous novelette of North Africa today, "The Free Shall Live." An unforgettable sea story, "The Promised Land" by Jacland Marmur; a hair-raising drama of the transatlantic bomber-ferry by Arch Whitehouse—these and many others (including one of Clarence Herbert New's famous international spy stories reprinted by request from a 1909 issue!) will offer you, we believe, the best Blue Book ever. And that statement covers all the years and their improvements since we began publishing back in 1905.

Book Quality and Quantity—Magazine Price and Variety

A strange story of war-torn London.

From the Dark

By MICHAEL GALLISTER

HARRINGTON walked briskly along, with the unending glass crunching under his feet. His taxi had swung into that glass, down the street, with a *plop-plop* of tires. After that, Harrington walked.

He was far from anywhere he knew. The taxi had been taking him to a tea engagement in Berkeley Square, or what was left of it, but this street was strange to him. However, he sighted the figure of a policeman on ahead, and knew he would soon obtain directions.

For the past fifteen years George Harrington had been representing an American typewriter firm in London, and was more British than the British in everything but speech. He had never quite lost his Chicago briskness of diction, or his American independence of thought and action. He was past forty now, but

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, and special features, 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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Prize Offer

for

Real Experiences

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

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

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

Next Month!

"The Free Shall Live"

A short novel of the fantastic wars in North Africa today.

BY GEORGES SURDEZ

"I think we can get over quite safely now, sir, if you don't mind."

looked thirty, with his firm, well-knit, agile figure and his striking features—a high, thin nose, alert gray eyes under heavy brows, trim mustache, hard, competent mouth and chin.

He had his eyes on the policeman ahead; afterward, this moment seemed to have been an hour long. He thought of chucking the tea completely, and of starting back to his bachelor apartment in Maida Vale; the afternoon was getting on, and he did not want to be caught hereabouts when the nightly raids started. Then, like an echo of his thought, he was aware of the wild, shrill wail across the skies, and hammering through it came the thudding crash and *woof-woof* of the air barrage at work—prelude to the unearthly scream of a falling bomb, and a roaring detonation some blocks distant.

"This way, sir," the policeman was saying calmly, beckoning him, pointing to

the corner beyond. "They've started a bit early, eh? Just to the right, sir; you'll see the underground entrance."

Harrington cursed the Jerries as he walked on, not hurrying now although he wanted to badly enough; impossible to hurry, with that calm policeman's voice in his ears. Another bomb-roar and another, and the drone of bombers invisible far above, and the archies lifting in a mad barking chorus that shook the air-waves to chaos.

HE turned a corner and saw the tube entrance ahead. There was a cram of people there and at the gates; the hitherto deserted streets were flowing with people, chiefly women and children, since the workday was not yet ended. Policemen were directing the flow, there was no excitement, almost no hurry. Those who had no shelters at home were making for the underground, and Harrington merged with the flowing lines.

"The blighters might 'ave wyted till the usual time," was the indignant sentiment expressed on all sides. Fresh explosions shook the ground, the barrage was intensified; then, as he descended the steps, this melted away into a dull roar and a feeling of blessed relief enfolded him. Frightened? Yes; he was frightened, as was everyone around, but there was no showing it. He saw a sign:

Service Temporarily Discontinued

Damn! Now he was stuck here for the duration of the raid. No trains running. He picked his way amid the pandemonium. People with bundles, people settling down all about, people with blankets and quilts, people reserving places for family members to come later—people in hordes and masses, the air sticky with their smell and the smell of food. Harrington unbuttoned his burberry, took it off, folded it, found a place beside an iron pillar, and settled down to wait it out, resignedly.

All sorts and conditions of people had been caught napping by this daylight alarm. Shopkeepers in aprons, nurses with children, mothers with babies; a brace of legal gentry, top hats and all, numbers of elderly people. More than one spoke to Harrington in passing; he was of a certain type that was not rare.

Fear was gone from all; with the absence of terrifying noise, the evil itself had ceased to exist. Harrington sat and reflected, aware that the space around him had long since filled up to the point of discomfort. It did not matter. Time did not matter; he deliberately refused to glance at his watch, being well aware that a pot under inspection never boils.

An old man—Harrington mentally set him down as a rascally old *Scrooge*—was not far distant. The singing grew and grew; the shrill children's voices lifted all the familiar songs. Harrington joined in with the rest. It quieted, as somewhere a woman's voice rose pure and beautiful. She must be a professional singer, he thought; she went on and on to the applause.

Harrington caught sight of the old man again. To his astonishment, the graybeard was the center of a flock of children, holding one child in his arms, talking to them, winning them. It made Harrington's reflections take an inward drive. Damned useless life he was leading!

Always had been useless, these many years, he told himself. If Frances had married him, life would have been different; he was no good to himself or anyone else, outside of the office. A few friends, a good club—that was all.

"Damn it!" he muttered. "This would be the time to begin over again, if I only knew how! Too late now, though. What could I do that'd be of any value to others?"

FACES stood out here and there, as faces will in any crowd. One caught at his fancy—vaguely familiar, he did not know why. As a matter of fact, it was very like his own face, but he could not know this; one never does. The same high, thin nose and handsomely carved chin; the chap was in some sort of uniform, and the face was marred by a scar across the temple.

Time wore on. The bombing must be close, for now and again the platform shook and quivered. Again he was aware of the man's scarred face. It was closer now; the man looked at him, met his gaze and distinctly nodded, as though of old acquaintance. Perhaps someone he had met casually, thought Harrington, as he smiled and waved a hand in return. Then he realized that the man was approaching him, gradually picking a way among the massed people, as though of set purpose.

Night must have descended long ago, reflected Harrington; it would be dark outside, the Luftwaffe in full diabolic swing. Men had long ago come streaming in by twos and threes, men home from work; the reserved places were mostly filled now. The odors of food increased,

and Harrington was conscious of dinner missed.

Someone moved beside him and he looked up. The people around, many of them asleep and snoring, had not been disturbed, but the man with the scarred face was beside him, sitting down. He spoke.

"Hullo, there! A bit of a surprise, seeing you. What about going topside for a breath of air?"

"Thanks. I'll stick it out here."

HARRINGTON could not place the man at all, but did not say so. The other leaned over and spoke softly, intimately, almost urgently.

"See here! You could do something, if you would, that'd help me most frightfully."

A loan? No, not the type. Harrington smiled, conscious of the friendly face, recalling his own thoughts about being of use to someone.

"Anything I can do, of course," he rejoined.

"Good! I felt I could count on you," was the response. "You won't mind seeing it through, then?"

"Not a bit."

"But for God's sake don't give the game away!" said the other, and now there was a desperate urge in the low voice. "You know, I can't do it myself; there are reasons. But it means so terribly much to her . . . to both of them! Word of honor?"

Harrington, pardonably bewildered, suddenly leaped at the answer; some soldier who was a bit balmy, perhaps shell-shocked. An officer, but he could not make out the insignia.

"Oh, of course! Word of honor," he responded. "What's that corps insignia of yours?"

"R. A. F., you ass," came the response with a laugh. The other stood up. "Right. It's fine of you, you know; and a bit of good work you'll never regret. I'll send Beamish over, then. He won't suspect anything, bless him! Minnie will, of course, but that's your hurdle. Tell her the truth—why not? She's no fool. Give her my love, and a kiss from the dark."

With a nod, the unknown moved away.

Harrington glanced after him, wondering at how deftly he moved among the stretched-out masses of people, creating no disturbance. Some poor devil who was a bit off, no doubt of that. An odd curiosity pricked at him. He wanted to follow the man, wanted to get him some assistance, find an air-raid warden.

No, better not. He had given the chap some ease and comfort; let it rest there. He felt rather resentful, too. Odd, the way his heart had leaped at the prospect of doing someone a good turn—and now to find it was the hallucination of some shell-shocked fellow, to put it mildly.

"Air raids must be turning me into a regular boy scout!" Harrington scoffed at himself.

Yet the feeling persisted. It was all around him. On every side, people were doing something for other people, if only entertaining them. He stole a glance at old "Scrooge" and saw that the fellow was asleep, and the child in his arms was asleep, smiling happily. All the old British aloofness of these people had been blown into a cocked hat. One could not exist among these folk, where everyone was helping someone else, without catching the infection of it.

Time passed. The singing had started again, a wave of it that was caught up and echoed on thunderingly in the tunnel. A man with a big mouth-organ had started it. He was waving the glittering thing between snatches of music.

"Myde in Germany!" he shouted.

"Get on with it," rejoined someone. "Getting close to nine."

NINE, eh? Time was working along and no mistake. At nine, the noise would quiet down; that, by common assent, was the limit in these places. After that hour people would attempt to get some solid sleep.

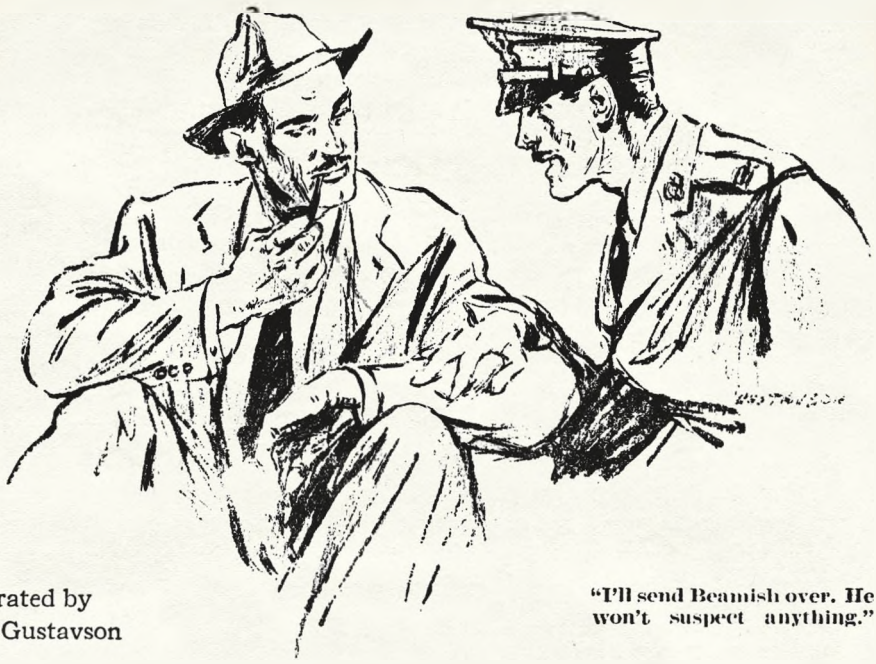
A breath of fresh air—Harrington was tempted. There was nothing to stop him. He could wander about the streets if he were fool enough to risk bombs and falling shrapnel. However, he relaxed and composed himself, listening to two women close behind him; they were arguing about the proper way to cook greens. Greens . . . blast it! Dinner would be waiting, out in Maida Vale.

This reminded him of the dinner he had enjoyed in Golders Green on Sunday night, with that American chap who had the agency for some patent-medicine jigger. A son who had joined up; had been over here for years uncounted. Fine fellow, too. . . .

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Eh?" Harrington twisted around and looked up. "Speaking to me?"

"Yes, sir. I was a bit delayed finding you, sir."



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"I'll send Beamish over. He won't suspect anything."

Harrington blinked. Speaking to him, undoubtedly; a heavy-set man, a butler —of all things, a butler!—wearing a bowler hat and an overcoat. The butler went on speaking:

"We have sandwiches in the shelter, Sir Charles, and a bottle of that dry Tokay you always fancied. I think we can get over quite safely now, sir, if you don't mind. If I may say so, sir, it does one good to see you again and looking so fit, too! I'm afraid His Lordship is in a very bad way."

Harrington half rose. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell the man that he had the wrong party; obviously, there was some mistake in identity. But he was stopped dead, his mouth open. There, at the very edge of the light, he saw the face of the unknown, the face with the scar across the temple; the man in uniform was nodding to him, was waving a hand. . . . Go on with it, evidently. Go on with what?

Then he remembered what the man had said about sending Beamish.

"I suppose you're Beamish?" said Harrington, not brightly.

"Thank you, sir," rejoined the butler. "Shall we get along, Sir Charles?"

Harrington pulled himself together and rose. Beamish stooped and picked up the burberry and shook it out. Looking again for the man in uniform, Harrington could see nothing more of him. Confused, bewildered, hesitating, the words recurred to him: "It means so terribly much to her—to both of them! Word of honor?"

All right, confound it! Whatever it was, whatever it meant, he would go through with it as he promised.

"Very well. Let's go," he said, slipping his arms into the overcoat. "That is, if you're quite sure it'll be all right."

"God bless you, sir!" said Beamish earnestly. "It's the happiest day of my life, so help me! Yes sir, I'll make a path ahead."

He went on, picking his way among the littered shapes. Harrington followed. Those words had been heartfelt, for some reason. . . . Well, no use trying to understand it. He gave up. If he could do somebody a good turn, why not? Apparently he had been taken at his word in this desire.

They came to the stairs at last and began the ascent. The night air invigorated Harrington at once; he pumped it into his lungs with keen relief. An air-raid warden stood on the upper turn and spoke to Beamish.

"They've been coming over a bit thick," he said. "Seems to be a lull just now; lucky you've not far to go. Better hop it!"

THEY went on; the dreadful night burst upon Harrington full force. The sky was red, flames flaring aloft somewhere down the street; the infernal racket of the guns was deafening. Two Auxiliary Ambulance Service cars went rocket-

"Charles, this is the finest thing I've ever known a man to do."

ing past; the faces of the women drivers were set and tense.

Harrington felt Beamish touch his arm, nodded in response, and followed. They passed a policeman who gave them a sharp glance and touched his helmet—a matter-of-fact man who seemed untouched by this hell. Distant explosions, *crump, crump,* faintly shook the air. At the corner, Beamish turned, waited, and put his lips close to Harrington's ear.

"We'd best go direct to the shelter," he shouted.

"Lead on," rejoined Harrington.

He was acutely frightened once more, and cared not who knew it. From the roofs all around came a rattle like rifle-fire, as falling shrapnel struck the slates. It struck the street and walk, too; to be abroad was sheer madness.

Beamish was not abroad very long, however; he turned suddenly in at a side gate, a tradesman's entrance. Harrington scarcely noticed the house, except that it was a large one, for at this moment the earth-shaking roar of a bomb came from so near at hand that what was left of the window-glass in the house burst forth in a coruscating spatter, and he ducked to follow the butler. The red glow in the sky was mounting higher.

The garden seemed a large one. Too large; it was one with the adjoining garden, and most of the dividing wall was replaced by a crater twenty feet across; evidently not of recent vintage, because the wall-bricks were neatly stacked here and there. A shelter-roof rose ahead, massed with sandbags. Again Beamish halted and shouted:

"I'll step ahead, sir, and prepare them. I have already set out the wine and the sandwiches, in the first drawing-room. Shall I say a word first to Lady Mary, sir?"

Harrington shook his head and let it go at that. The butler waved a hand at the sandbags.

"You did very well, sir, when you put these in! Wardens have congratulated us upon the work, more than once."

A bomb-scream ended this nonsense. Beamish dived for the shelter entrance and after him Harrington; light flickered on steps—an elaborate sort of affair, then.

Down and into a room, whose electric cluster showed white faces and huddled figures. Household servants, working with silver tea-things and a primus stove. They fluttered at sight of Harrington and curtseys were made. He went on, following the vanished Beamish, and came into a larger and very handsomely furnished room, with rugs on the floor and pictures on the walls. The "first drawing-room," evidently, for on the table were plates of sandwiches, wine decanters and glasses.

Beamish was no longer visible.

"Thank the Lord! At least I'm fairly safe here," reflected Harrington. "So I'm supposed to have built this blasted shelter, eh?"

Belgravia—rugs, pictures, furnishings, massive silver, all spelled it. He went to the table, attacked the sandwiches, and poured himself a glass of wine. It was superb Tokay, each drop a quintessence of the Hungarian grape. What was about to happen he had no idea, but hunger would lend it no sauce!

He had finished his fourth sandwich and was rolling the last of his Tokay on his tongue, when a door opened and closed. Into the room came an old man in evening dress—an old man with white mustache, savagely intolerant features, and erect frame, who advanced to him with hand outstretched.

"Charles!" he exclaimed, a catch in his voice. "My boy! Beamish told me you were here. Will you shake hands?"

Harrington smiled and met the hard, firm old hand in a long grip.

"That seems to be why I came," he responded.

Astonishment seized him. The savage features warmed, softened, weakened. He could have sworn that the piercing eyes beneath the bushy white brows held a glint of tears.

"God bless you for this!" said the other brokenly. "God bless you! What it means to me, to all of us—and did you know that she's here?"

"She?" Harrington's brows lifted. He had promised to see it through; now he began to feel inward alarm. These evidences of emotion . . . well, if it were a case of mistaken identity, it was getting deep.

"Your mother," came the response. "She had dropped in for tea when the alarm sounded. I know how bitter you've felt toward her, toward all of us. You'll see her?"

HARRINGTON swallowed hard. Then he steadied, squared his shoulders a trifle. Whatever it meant, whatever it was all about, he had promised to do the job and see it through and if he were a bit dazed, he must trust to luck.

Lady Mary—the butler had mentioned her. . . . Why, of course! She would be the "Minnie" of whom the man with the scar had spoken. Here in England, that was the diminutive for *Mary*. And this fierce, broken old chap must be "His Lordship." But the mother? That began to look serious.

"See her? Of course," he said.

The old man shook his hand again, then took his arm familiarly.

"She's in bad shape, Charles," he said. "Fearfully bad shape. It's preyed upon her. And I'll not deny it: upon me as well, upon all of us. I was damned bitter against you; I'll not shirk my blame. I hounded you from pillar to post. I've suffered for it, and I regret it. Will you forgive me? Can you forgive me? Lad, I swear I thought that it was for Minnie's best interest! My life's been bound up in her, you know; she's my only child."

A dim, vague realization of what it must be all about began to break upon Harrington. The real Sir Charles had, somehow, suffered dreadfully from these people, even from his own mother. This old chap must be the father-in-law, then.

Harrington leaned forward. He poured more wine into his own glass, poured into a second glass, then lifted and extended it. The old man took it. The glasses touched.

"To understanding, to an understanding heart," said Harrington, smiling, "which comprehends all forgiveness and all regret!"

THE old man's fingers shook, as he drained the glass and set it down.

"God bless you!" he said again, fervently. "Charles, that's a real prayer. God knows how I've longed in my heart for this moment! We've known you were on dangerous service; no matter what happens now, we can face the future with a better grace. Your mother's a hard woman, Charles; as you well know, she'd go to hell for what she regarded as her duty. Well, she's done it; but you can pull her back. Poor woman, her eyes are nearly gone. . . . I say, are you up on leave?"

"Of course," said Harrington. "In fact, I could only dash in for a few moments."

He was himself deeply moved. This old man's proud phlegmatic poise had been completely shattered, a fact more eloquent than words; now Harrington began to dread what lay ahead. The only hurdle would be Minnie . . . *tell her the truth!* That admonition recurred to him and braced him mentally. He was playing the part of Sir Charles: he must be Sir Charles.

Beamish came back into the room. The old man turned to him and rapped out a question:

"Where's Lady Mary?"

"She is not here, Your Lordship," replied the butler. "She went next door to telephone, just before the alarm; she is probably there now."

"Confound it! Their dashed shelter isn't worth its salt! I'll pop over and bring her back. . . . Is Her Ladyship ready for the visitor, Beamish?"

"Yes sir. She requests that Sir Charles will excuse the conditions. . . . Allow me to get your coat, sir."

"Keep your eye on His Lordship, Beamish," said Harrington, with a jauntiness he was far from feeling. "I'll find my own way, thanks."

He passed the butler, who closed a door behind him. Here was a short passage, with a curtain at the farther end. Harrington braced himself for the ordeal, stepped on, and drew the curtain aside.

Here was a smaller room. Upon a *chaise-longue* lay a white-haired woman, a frail and evidently feeble woman; His Lordship's wife, no doubt. Beside her in a chair, knitting, sat a woman not so old, a woman imperious, cold, haughty, who laid aside her needles, lifted a lorgnette and then dropped it again.

THE woman on the *chaise-longue* extended a hand. Harrington took it, bowed over it, touched the fingers with his lips; they gripped at his own fingers, hard.

Then he turned to the other woman, and for an instant his heart stopped. She was looking straight at him, and upon her inflexible cheeks he saw a glint of tears.

"Well, Charles?" she said.

It seemed impossible that she should be deceived; none the less, he must take the chance. He was conscious of the terrific emotion that filled these two women; it reached out and communicated itself to him, so that his own voice sounded strangely shaken.

"It has been a long time," he said. "It may be a longer time, who knows? And words are such feeble things."

He leaned over and kissed the woman on the cheek. She must be his mother; he must be her son. He knew perfectly well the strange and fearful risk that he was running.

The woman broke suddenly. A sob shook her; she caught him and drew his cheek against her breast. He knelt there, between the two; the woman on the couch had not spoken until now, but now she dabbed at her eyes and uttered thinly querulous words:

"Charles, we've been perfect beasts.... This is the finest thing I've ever known a man to do. God will bless you for it."

"Now, let's not go over the past," broke in Harrington, wondering if his voice would betray the imposture. Apparently it did not. "It's over and done with. It's forgotten. I've only a moment—must dash off at once. I've a lot to ask your forgiveness for, you know."

His mother, evidently the more dominant spirit here, quieted her emotion and spoke in an almost toneless voice:

"It's a moment greater than all the years—that you could find it in your heart is a splendid thing, my boy! Your father would be proud of you if he knew; and perhaps he does know. I hope he does."

"I hope he does," echoed Harrington. "And I hope he knows the great charity in your own heart—in all your hearts—toward me."

"You'll stay a little while, will you not?" she rejoined, a strange pleading in her toneless voice. "My dear, it's been so long—you'll stay just an hour?"

"I'm afraid that's impossible," said Harrington. He was breathing more easily now; amazing as it seemed, he was getting away with it. Not that this fact brought any exultation. Rather, it brought him a deep humility. He could dimly understand the situation by this time; he was aware that he was doing something which gave these people a joy and happiness beyond all measure.

"I've overstayed my leave as it is," he went on. "I'm frightfully sorry; I had to snatch at the chance of seeing you at all."

Abruptly, panic shook him. He heard voices—the clear, high voice of a younger woman. That would be Lady Mary, or "Minnie." He remembered the scar on the face of the man in the underground shelter. If that man had been the real Sir Charles, then the scar on the temple, so darkly prominent, would be known to some of these people—certainly to his wife.

The door opened.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed His Lordship. "The *All Clear* is sounding! Here we are, Minnie. In with you, lass!"

HARRINGTON stood up and turned. Coming past the old man, her head back, her eyes upon him, was a woman of such vibrant charm and beauty that the very sight of her left him stunned and helpless. He knew, in this very first moment, that she knew; he could feel it

in her eyes, in her face, in her mind, as she stopped short, her hands half extended.

He came to her, daring greatly. He took her hands and smiled into her eyes. Somehow, he felt that it was safe. He was doing a thing that had now taken hold of him completely; he had the feeling, somehow, that it was a sacred thing. Before either of them could speak, his mother's voice rang upon the room:

"Minnie! He can't stay at all. . . . Thank God you came! It was just for a moment; the most blessed moment of them all."

"Look here, Charles!" broke out the old man. "You're not pushing off like this, you know!"

"Sorry, sir," said Harrington, though he still looked into the eyes of the young woman. "Sorry; I must leave now, at once."

"But you're in mufti, you know! On leave and all that—"

"The leave's overstayed," he insisted. "Minnie, my dear—will you see me to the gate? Just a last moment together?"

SHE nodded assent, her eyes wide, and fastened upon him.

Harrington turned. He went to the woman in the chair, stooped and kissed her cheek again; her arms gripped at him for an instant, then dropped. He kissed the hand of the other woman, and again her fingers clung to his; he patted them, smiled at her, and straightened up.

"Good night, dear ones," he said quietly, as the real Sir Charles must have said it. "Good night, and God bless all of us! —Come, my dear."

He shook hands with the old man, took Lady Mary's hand, and she turned with him. In the next room Beamish had his things ready. He got into his coat, took his hat, clapped the butler on the shoulder, and then walked out of the shelter and up the steps into the night air, with Lady Mary beside him.

The infernal din had ceased, though the *All Clear* was still droning upon the lurid London sky. With the chill pure air in his lungs, reality returned to him. He heard Lady Mary say, quietly:

"I couldn't spoil it, of course; I don't know what it all means, or who you are. . . . But I know that you're not Charles —though you might be his double."

Harrington turned and faced her.

"What can I tell you?" he said, his voice deeply steady. "No more than he said to tell you, I fear. He said you would know, and that I was to tell you the exact truth."

"He? Who?" she questioned, catching her breath.

"I don't know. I never saw him before. I suppose he was the real Sir Charles. He said that he was prevented from coming and doing this; there were reasons, he said, and he asked me to come in his place. He said to give you his love, and a kiss from the dark."

She caught her breath again. Her hands gripped at his sleeve.

"He said that? Oh, that proves it! Where—where is he now?"

"I have no idea," said Harrington gravely.

She collapsed, suddenly and completely. He caught her; and, reverently, he touched his lips to her cold ones. Then he saw two figures coming—the old man, and Beamish, who uttered a startled word and hurried to his assistance.

"Take care of her," said Harrington. "Good night again!"

Then he was through the gate and gone, out into the street, striding rapidly and furiously away from there, like a man in a dream. Before he had calmed down into any sane frame of mind, he was a mile distant; only then did it occur to him to get the location of the house. Too late now. No taxis being available at night, he kept going. The whole amazing thing was closed, he reflected, and it had better stay forgotten.

BUT it was not entirely closed:

A week later Harrington happened to be in Hammersmith. He was passing a motorcar agency, when a flag-framed photograph in the window caught his eye. He halted, looked at the photograph, and it froze him; it was his unknown friend of the underground.

He turned in at the entrance and spoke to a salesman.

"Would you mind telling me whose photograph that is, in the window?"

"Not at all, sir. It is Sir Charles Courtney, son of the founder of the firm. He was killed in action only a week ago. On the fifth."

Harrington turned away. He swallowed hard; the fifth! Why, it was the evening of the fifth he had had that amazing experience. . . . But the photograph displayed in the window showed no trace of that darkly prominent scar across the man's temple.

Another story by Michael Gallister will appear in an early issue.

Action off Para

TONY Tromboni's place, at the foot of Commercial Street, puts on no airs and rates no carriage trade. A bracket light in a green globe glows feebly on worn basement steps of an ancient brownstone house close against Atlantic Basin wharves. There is no other sign: and either you know that place is there or you do not. The upper-story rooms are designed to make a merchant officer feel at home, for the funnels of deepwater ships, wisping steam, reach almost to the window ledge. You can see swinging cargo booms against Buttermilk Channel water. You can hear rumbling winches taking strain, a bosun's raw voice bellowing a greenhorn down, the thin music of the striking wheelhouse bells. And from the basement room below, you can hear the murmur of lusty voices speaking the idiom of their common craft. For in Tony Tromboni's you can find the man for any sort of voyage in any sort of ship to any outland port.

That room was crowded, thick with clouds of strong tobacco-smoke. It held captive acrid odors of steam, tarred rope, and drink. It flooded with the continuous rumble of seamen's strange talk, gusty laughter, fierce, flat judgment of men and harbors they had known. There was talk of the war there too, because war and the sea are intimate. A bluenose skipper was murmuring with irony to his squarehead mate that classic jingle about ten thousand Swedes who *didn't* come through the weeds to help the lone Norwegians, though there was plenty of *snooss* and lots of Copenhagen. Hearing that with his beer-mug halfway to his lips, Nils Passen, at the little corner table not far away, set it down without drinking. "I was born in Namsos, Johnny," he said, his blue eyes gloomy.

"You got to think with your head these days, Nils, instead of with your heart." Johnny Elderly stretched his long legs comfortably. "Been dull, lately." He sighed. "Been awful dull since we came back from China land. The *Nanshan* over there was a schooner for fun when we run the Japanese blockade. You remember how Pearl River looks?"

Nils grinned quickly, his square, homely face lighting up. "We have some times together, Johnny, you an' me!"

Johnny Elderly nodded, gray eyes with laughter-wrinkles at the corners bubbling in a youthful face weathered a sleek, mahogany brown. He rumpled

The able author of "The Iron Whirlwind" and "The Moon to Play With" gives us another colorful tale of the sea.

By JACLAND MARMUR

crisp, brown hair with lean fingers, pushing the watch cap back on his head. "Awful dull," he said again. "Get us a ship for Para, I guess. Remember Lolita, Nils?" Johnny's face got dreamy. "Café Chanteclèr," he murmured. "Never saw a high-breasted, black-haired spitfire girl like her nowhere before. Lord! Got to see her, Nils. It's time."

The grin broadened on Passen's weather-scarred face. "Thinking with your head; hey, Johnny? That too exciting a woman for me." He shook his big head morosely. "I got girl in Namsos. Peaceful. Comfortable. Plenty flesh on her Norwegian bones. But now . . . . I wonder—" His blue north-country eyes saddened. Then he stiffened suddenly. "Here's Deacon Bludlow, Johnny—just come in. What kind of game's he playing now?"

"We tangled with him down in Graham Land when he was poaching seal that year." Johnny tipped his head to look. "And the time he had the *Bolivar*—"

The two friends were not the only ones in Tony's place who saw heavy-jowled Captain Jessiah Bludlow with his cane hooked on his arm, his black bowler jaunty on his bald head above the fringe of sparse, pale hair. One grizzled bosun eyed him with a scowl, snorting. And over against the other wall a gray-haired mate with a scar along his cheek thrust a hairy finger across the tabletop. "How the Deacon keeps a ticket in a rack is more than I can know. I was out in Muscat on the Gulf of Oman coast not many years ago. Along he comes: pops up like that most anywhere. Had a crazy Arab dhow in charge, needing a mate for a fancy trade. Black gals along the Gates of Hell, from Somali an' Eritrea. Pilgrims, he called 'em. Get you two quid apiece, says he with his holy smile, just to smuggle 'em over to Araby across the hot Red Sea. Well, a man got to draw a line somewhere. Blackbirdin'? Not me! I shipped in a lateen pearl-shell

felucca up an' down the blisterin' Persian Gulf instead. He's poison!"

But Deacon Bludlow, if he knew the buzzing caused by his entrance, gave no sign. His smile remained bland and watery as he pushed through the crowded room, his fleshy paunch preceding him, at his side a tall man with a zealot's eyes, to whom that place seemed distasteful in the extreme. The next moment they stopped at Johnny's table, Jessiah Bludlow booming heartily: "Well, bless my soul! The very men I want. . . . Tony! Beer here for four! . . . This is Mr. Papenhof, my ship's agent, Johnny. Mr. Papenhof, this is Captain Elderly, master in sail and steam. *And* Mr. Passen." He said this all in a breath, drawing up two chairs and beaming sanctimoniously. "Johnny," he went on with gusto, "I hope you hold no grudges. Business is business. I need a chief mate and a second. Fine voyage. Just the thing for you. Off the beaten track. And extra pay. Mr. Papenhof is a liberal man. So I told him about you right away. Johnny Elderly, I said, can take a ship—"

"We can take a ship," Johnny interrupted with a stony smile, "almost anywhere. Except," he added dryly, gesturing downward swiftly with his thumb, "except where you took the *Bolivar.*"

"There you go, Johnny!" Captain Bludlow tossed up his hands in righteous horror. "Always misunderstanding me!" He rolled his watery eyes aloft. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they suspect no evil. I got a fine big three-mast barque, Johnny. American registry, so you don't need to worry at all. The *Ripana.* Refitted all the way through. Twin-screw Diesels just installed. Refrigeration, radio; everything first class. Bound for Punta Arenas down in Magellan Strait. Tricky passage, so we want reliable officers. What do you say?"

"The cargo?" Johnny idly asked.

"All loaded and stowed. No worry for the mates at all. She is anchored in Dynamite Row. Just bring your gear to Crosby's launch an' we sail tomorrow dawn. Sign you on, aboard: all legal an' proper as pie. Mr. Papenhof will pay—"

"My company is prepared to pay a bonus of one hundred dollars the month above the regular scale." The Deacon's agent said this in a dry voice that just slipped through compressed lips. He had remained standing, his eyes darting from one to the other in icy appraisal. "I think the offer liberal."

"Yes," Johnny agreed, smiling at that ruthless face, "It is. But—the cargo?"

"Everything in order," Deacon Bludlow put in hurriedly. "Export licenses an' all. I do things legal, Johnny. Diesel oil in drums on deck, paint, spars, a coupla hundred tons tinned food—"

"And?" Johnny insisted.

Mr. Papenhof's gaunt jaw went taut. Jessiah Bludlow's eyes kept smiling, but behind their watery paleness some cunning thing kept glowing. He shrugged, making a solemn gesture with his big paws and ponderously sighing. "Well, Johnny, if you must know, there's a few four-inch guns, all cased, and some rounds of ammunition. I imagine the consignees intend them for the Chilean government. That's on the quiet, of course. Sort of business speculation, maybe. Fortify Punta Arenas. Defend their neutrality. The war, you know." He dismissed the matter with a wave. "No concern of ours. Except the freight is high." He closed one heavy-lidded eye. "Well, what do you say?"

"I say no!" Nils Passen spat this out with emphasis, frowning intently. "More fishy business, that's what I say!"

THE Deacon shook his head lugubriously and stood up. Mr. Papenhof's thin lips twitched with impatience. But Johnny Elderly yawned. "Been dull, lately," he murmured. "Been awful dull. I think we'll go."

"Not me!" Nils exploded. "This time, Johnny, you go alone!"

Johnny grinned, knowing his friend quite thoroughly. "We'll be there," was all he said.

"Fine. Fine!" the Deacon boomed. "I'll look for you aboard."

They turned away at once, Mr. Papenhof with an air of being pleased to get out of that smelly sailor place, and Jessiah Bludlow beaming. But Nils continued to growl incoherent anger, watching them pass through the outer door. "This fishy business!" he insisted. "Why you want get mixed with him again?"

For a moment Johnny Elderly said nothing, his head tipped back. From somewhere on the darkening river's flood a liner's siren blared, like a faint signal holding some special significance. "Just curious, Nils," he breathed to the middle space. "Curious as hell!"

That trait in Johnny Elderly had got him into trouble before, in some odd corners of the earth. And there was ample reason for curiosity when the

barque *Ripana* sailed, in the following dawn. In spite of her twin-screw Diesels, she went through the Narrows in tow. But Johnny being mate and Nils being second, they didn't have much time for wonder on a sailing-day—not with the ragtail crowd the Deacon had scooped into the fo'c'stle from the South Street dives. It wasn't till the ship was tug- and pilot-free off Ambrose Light, departure bearings taken and the gear coiled down, that the stocky Norwegian had time to mop his furrowed brow.

"Not three real sailors in the whole damn' lot!" he snarled, wagging an angry finger under his tall friend's nose. "Bah! Look what you got us into now!"

Johnny grinned: he always grinned when the going seemed as if it meant to get rough. "Aint she a beauty, Nils?" he said admiringly.

Well, she was. Nils couldn't deny it, being a windbag man himself. She had hold of a fresh topgallant breeze out of north by west and all the gear was humming. That wind sent long Atlantic rollers creaming and tumbling in pursuit of her. She lifted gracefully, singing to the south and east beneath a blue sky hung with billows of pure white cloud while she flung her bow spray acres wide. Feeling her pulse by the mizzen shrouds, tall canvas taut aloft to make a range of shadow on the leaning deck and deep blue water all around, Johnny Elderly felt the vigorous thrill of sail again. And so did Nils. In spite of himself, his puckered eyes glowed with it. But he caught himself up the next moment.

"Ya!" he spat out. "A beauty: that's just what I don't like! I feel better if she a drunken, rotten hulk. You think me crazy, Johnny? Look! She well found. She got big fo'c'stle. Room for forty hands—an' we got only ten. She got brand-new gear, three spare suits of canvas down below, deck capstans for the heavy spars. For Deacon Bludlow? Bah! What owner crazy enough to give a fine smart ship like this to him? Who?" he demanded fiercely. "If—"

Johnny jabbed an elbow into Passen's ribs to abruptly silence him. For Jessiah Bludlow was coming across his poop, the rest of the strange afterguard shuffling behind. One of these was an emaciated pole of a man with glittering little eyes, dressed in a boiler suit; the other was a wizened gnome with a cigarette dangling from loose lips. Jessiah Bludlow allowed himself a broad and very hearty

Captain Bludlow took to wearing striped pajamas, wheezing gustily as he took his observations.

smile. "Well done, gentlemen!" he boomed. "I'm sure we'll all be happy in this fine ship."

But Nils Passen wasn't sure at all. "We got fine twin-screw Diesels," he grumbled, "but still we come out in tow! Now what use is—"

"Now, now," the Deacon soothed. "My owners are particular about the gang below. We won't use the Diesels till we pick up a selected crowd in the River

Plate. All I got now is a chief engineer. That's Mr. Spalpy here. Good man." Mr. Spalpy nodded a cadaverous head. "And this," the Deacon went on, "is my radio-man, Mr. Gratson. We eat in the saloon together."

By way of acknowledging this, Mr. Gratson just rolled his cigarette deftly to the opposite corner of his mouth where it dangled, smoldering. Mr. Spalpy did better, in a high, thin voice: "I'll look to the donkey in the 'midship house at once. Fine little boiler. More than enough steam for the auxiliary generator. Keep our refrigerator machine, radio and lights going, and still leave enough for working your deck gear. And your bilge pumps, too."

"Of course!" Captain Jessiah Bludlow agreed cheerily. "Call me if the wind should shift."

He led the way below. Presently they could hear the tinkling of glassware through the cabin skylight. Nils looked at Johnny. His voice was gravely quiet: "We got Diesels, Johnny, but we can't use them. Still, the fuel tanks are full. I tell you something else we got, Johnny. In Norwegian ships where I serve, a second mate got to be wireless-man a little, too. So I know. I look into that Gratson feller's place. He got the best modern tube set, an' auxiliary batteries besides."

"Yes, Nils; I know."

"He also got short-wave transmitter. Now what for a cargo windship like this—"

"Notice those oil-drums lashed on deck?" Johnny interrupted gently, still looking off to the brilliant horizon line. "Four nests. One on each quarter, one each side just abaft the fo'c'stle break." He hesitated, blinking. "There's steel plating under those drums, Nils. Nowhere else: just those four spots. I call that a right curious thing." He looked down suddenly, grinning. "I think we'll have some trouble soon."

Nils Passen let the anger drain out of him. A slow smile deepened the wrinkles of his homely face instead. "We always have some trouble, Johnny—whenever you get curious."

That way the strange voyage of the barque *Ripana* went. Holding a strong quartering wind, she shouldered the gulfweed aside till they shook royals loose and she went racing down the long Atlantic swells with leaning pyramids of white towering aloft. With warmer weather, Captain Jessiah Bludlow took to wearing striped pajamas and rope-soled canvas slippers, wheezing gustily as he took his observations, sextant at his eye. Other than that he left the handling of the ship alone, except that Johnny wondered why he gave her so much southing instead of making a fine, wide offing to the east to weather Cape St. Roque. But Deacon Bludlow wasn't a bit perturbed as the barque sliced down the latitudes. Mr. Spalpy, in charge of twin Diesels that had no engine crew, wandered the ship like a forlorn ghost in soiled white duck. Gratson, the wireless-man, slept all day. But at night the three of them held forth under the open cabin skylight to the tinkling sounds of bottle and glass. Then Jessiah Bludlow came weaving aloft in his striped pajamas for a bleary look around before padding below, chuckling in his throat contentedly as if he knew a luscious joke that wasn't just yet ripe.

SO the tall-sparred *Ripana* raced down to the limit of the northeast trade. She should have been to windward at least as far as thirty east; but she wasn't. Squally doldrum weather found her well west of forty, the land dead south and the St. Roque Cape to weather yet. She was swinging deeply in a sunset calm, freeing ports clanging, dark thunderheads pouring toward her split now and then by jagged tropic lightning, when Nils Passen gave his judgment to his friend.

"Johnny," he growled, "we don't go to Magellan Strait, I bet."

"Maybe the Deacon knows how I feel about Lolita, Nils, in the Café Chantecler." Johnny grinned. "Para is just a skip and half a jump from here."

"Stand by t'gallant halyards!" Nils had his eye on a white line advancing across the ocean floor. "I sound two foot of water in the wells tonight. We put the pump on, Johnny, hey? . . . Helm up, there!"

The squall struck with a savage hiss and the loud torrential threshing of the deep sea rain. It wasn't till it passed, the ship running free with both her royals set, glistening freshly in starlit night, that they found Jessiah Bludlow on the poop. "Mr. Passen says there's two foot of water in the wells, sir," Johnny Elderly told him.

"Water?" The Deacon seemed quite shocked, scratching his belly under the pajama cord. "Can't be important. Fine tight ship like this! Worked open a seam or two. Clear up in no time at all."

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

He yawned prodigiously, turning for the scuttle. "G'night."

Johnny looked down at Nils, and Nils looked back, squinting that funny way he had when things got puzzlesome. But it didn't seem much to really worry about. Long before the middle watch, the deck pumps were sucking dry, the fo'c'stle gang jubilant that the donkey boiler steam relieved them of that traditional back-breaking labor of the sailing-ship. Everything first class in the fine big barque *Ripana!* Still, in the morning watch, the white-chalked sounding rod lifted wet murk once more: the pumps again started their clanging chorus. This time — alarmingly! — she barely held her own for hours, with the foremast hands casting frightened looks toward the empty ocean now and then. It wasn't till dusk the ship was dry.

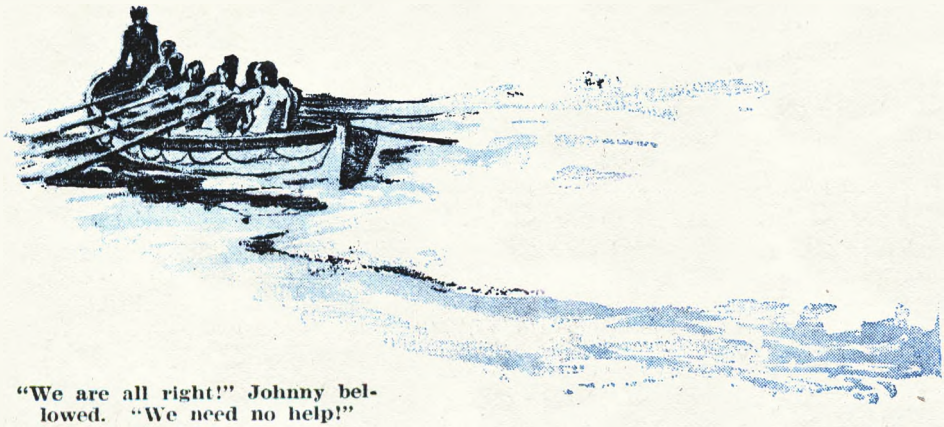
"I can't understand it," said Captain Jessiah Bludlow, his fleshy face and his bulbous nose an anxious red. "Bless my soul! I can't."

"Ya!" Nils Passen softly growled. "It's funny how the ship stay dry all night and leak like hell all day!"

"Not funny at all!" The Deacon dismissed it grandly. "You press her too much in daylight. She'll be all right."

Johnny Elderly began to wonder. So did the second mate. Nils gave up a watch below while the two of them prowled the ship with an electric torch, trying to hunt that trouble out while Jessiah Bludlow serenely snored in his cabin under the poop. But they learned exactly nothing. Except that Gratson, the radio-man, was working some one industriously with his fine, modern wireless-tubes—which didn't seem too unnatural. Still, early the following day, the ship ghosting with all sail set across a gently heaving, empty purple sea, she was taking water once again. The Deacon remained serene, except he finally hauled the ship to the east after poring over the chart. It took the pumps all the steam the donkey boiler gave to fight the water down this time. The fo'c'stle was jumpy by now: the ship was a blasted sieve, they were snarling to each other. And it didn't stop with dark. The pumps kept clanging all that night.

Somewhere the sea kept pouring in. The pumps couldn't hold it any more. Captain Jessiah Bludlow took on a long and solemn look. Mr. Spalpy cried loudly on the poop where every hand could hear that the ocean was over his floor plates, and what could he do about a thing like that! Johnny took most of the canvas off her, hoping her lessened way would give the pumps a fighting chance against wide-open seams. It was no good. Under a blazing sun the *Ripana* began to roll soggily, pumps clattering and banging, all hands in frightened clusters. All day she settled slowly, opposing a lifeless, sodden lurch to each long



"We are all right!" Johnny bellowed. "We need no help!"

swell, all her gear aloft banging and rattling.

In the first dogwatch the hands came aft, anxious eyes uplifted to the poop. The foundering ship was down a little by the stern, wallowing like a tide rock, deep below her marks, lipping in a wash of ocean through her maindeck freeing ports. Deacon Bludlow joined his officers at the break of the poop. For once his striped pajama suit was gone, loose white duck hanging from his obese frame instead. In the evening stillness the whisper of wind, the close wash of sea, the frightened mutter of the men seemed extraordinarily loud. Jessiah Bludlow wagged a sorrowful head. "This," he boomed, "is a terrible thing for a master." He raised sad eyes to heaven to bear him witness to his grief. "As chief officer, Mr. Elderly, is there anything else a seaman can do to save her?"

Johnny, peering overside at the ocean's ominous level, straightened and turned. "We could pray," he said dryly. "Or else we could abandon."

THE Deacon raised both hands from his sides, palms up, and let them fall again. "We will do both. Meantime, check the quarterboat gear and see it's properly provisioned. I must gather the ship's papers together. Mr. Gratson, you better send an S.O.S. I'll bring the position along."

Mr. Gratson just nodded, the cigarette bobbling at the corner of his lips as he ducked below, Mr. Spalpy nervously after him. Jessiah Bludlow waddled hurriedly down the companion, while on the maindeck the hands, who had clearly heard all that, were already rigging the boatfalls. Nils Passen went slowly, wagging his head and growling to himself. It left Johnny Elderly standing by the open cabin skylight, silent. Looking down, he was in time to see Bludlow duck into his room off the main saloon. The ship lurched drunkenly, loudly slatting her gear. It swung the door of the master's cabin open: and for that moment Johnny saw the Deacon's bulging shoulder and part of a fleshy arm before an open locker door. Johnny frowned, seeing that arm move circularly. Odd! Then the door slapped shut and Nils came charging up the ladder, his face red with anger and outraged excitement.

"Johnny!" he exploded softly, out of earshot of the helm. "That Gratson feller, he don't send no S.O.S.! And he don't make no sign! He just sending out position with some other stuff I don't understand. Like code, maybe! I know, Johnny! I read it through the bulkhead off the kick of his key relay. I tell you we got to—"

"We got to shut up, Nils! Lend a hand to get the boat away."

"But I tell you—"

"Don't be a fool, Nils! What can you prove? All legal and proper as pie, as the Deacon himself would remind you. . . . That will do the wheel, there! Swing out!" he cried, starting for the maindeck.

The boat took the water smoothly. The sea was quiet in a twilight calm, just ponderously heaving. They pulled off a way and lay on their oars, Jessiah Bludlow a massive blob of sorrowful flesh in the sternsheets. The fine barque *Ripana* loomed very black, low in the water, sluggishly lifting with the forlorn look of a sinking ship. Johnny kept peering at her, the intense frown deeper on his lean brown face as darkness crawled rapidly across the ocean floor. Nils, looking at him in puzzled wonder, thought he saw the faint suspicion of a smile.

"Captain Bludlow," Johnny was murmuring, "a ship stops her pay when a master orders her abandoned, if I re-

member right. You'd know about such legal things. In that case, articles wouldn't hold no more?"

"Well, yes. But I wouldn't worry, any of you," the Deacon reassured all of them heartily. "My owner's agent, Mr. Papenhof, is a very liberal man. He will see us all safe home and amply reimbursed." He tugged at the tiller ropes. "No use to stay and watch her go. Too sad. We'll—"

Johnny Elderly half rose from the thwart. "Nils," he murmured, "some things I'm curious about. You coming?"

INSTANTLY and with startling suddenness, he dived. The boat rocked with the thrust of his legs. Spalpy shrieked thinly: "Bludlow! Stop him!" In the darkness Nils could just make out Jessiah's face, livid and blue-veined, a fat paw reaching to the pocket of his white drill coat. Something that glittered blue came out. That much Nils understood clearly. Instinctively he sprang as that arm came up, his fist smashing to the Deacon's armpit. The gun clattered to the bottom boards before he leaped overside. Johnny was always doing crazy things Nils couldn't understand. That's what he thought, striking out promptly toward the looming shape of the *Ripana*. Behind him three explosions stabbed the night. Then he heard Johnny's voice, across the water. The firing stopped. Nils swam desperately. There was the chief mate, hanging to the main chains of the deserted barque, howling lustily.

"Help! Sharks! Help! I'm—" He put his mouth half in the sea to let out an expiring, gurgling call. "Holler, Nils!" he whispered fiercely. "Holler you're dying—or I guarantee you will be!"

So Nils Passen screamed, though he thought his friend quite mad. Then, hanging there in grim silence, they heard the click of oarlocks, the slap of water against the open boat, and saw the thin, blue finger of an electric torch searching the sea. They dived under; when they came up they could hear Jessiah Bludlow's solemn voice: "Serves 'em right. Nothing short of insubordination. I call you all to witness at the inquiry. Now they're both gone.... Horrible! —Give way, men."

The thumping oars receded into silence before Johnny and Nils dragged themselves back aboard the *Ripana*. She was dark, ghostly. Mr. Spalpy had drawn the donkey fires: the pumps were still. There was a loud wash of water, a clattering of gear aloft, the soughing of the wind. Johnny headed straight for the lamp locker, fumbling for dry matches. The

slush lamp threw a weird, pale light that set gigantic shadows dancing. The *Ripana* gave a quick lunge, righting herself with slow labor.

"Johnny, you crazy man!" Nils growled. "This ship don't got long to live! What for you—"

"She'll live, Nils." Johnny was already halfway down the passage to the main saloon. "I'm betting on it!"

"That silly talk, Johnny. This plain as the nose on my face! The Deacon sink this ship for the underwriters' cash! Just like the *Bolivar*. Now what we—"

"I don't believe it!" Johnny kicked open the door of the master's room, holding his lamp aloft, searching the bulkheads while he went on talking swiftly. "He had everything under too perfect control. Water came into her when he wanted, and when he didn't the pumps sucked dry. The three of them played it to look natural. They got the hands excited till they had the ship right in the lonely spot they wanted. Then the Deacon was ready. He tipped it off when he came on deck without his pajama suit. And I had my eye on the water-line. At the rate she was taking water before we abandoned, she should have rolled her belly over. But her draft never changed after that! Why? Because he stopped the leak *before* he skipped. She—" Johnny stopped abruptly, tearing open the locker door at which he had seen the Deacon's arm moving in that peculiar circular fashion. "Here it is, by God!" He peered down. The locker opened a narrow, enclosed shaft leading deep to the vessel's bottom, a valve wheel in easy reach. "Nils, when they rebuilt her and put Diesels and fuel bottoms in her, they put that new seacock in her, controlled from up here. Bludlow opened it when he wanted. Now it's shut—tight! She'll pump out dry in a watch or two, with the donkey steam!"

"But, Johnny, that don't make sense!" Nils expostulated. "What for he—"

"Gratson sent no S.O.S. But he sent a position. Well, he sent it to some one who knew! He—"

"Johnny!" Nils spun round excitedly. "He abandon this fine, big ship for a wreck where some one else come along an' pick her up for a salvage! Then they split! By God, that—"

"You're adding it up, Nils." There was an odd hard glint behind the smile in Johnny's eyes. "Moonrise in another hour—and we'll have visitors, I bet. Get the ensign and run it to the mizzen peak."

Well, Johnny Elderly wasn't wrong. When the ragged part of a waning moon glowed copper red above the dark horizon, the *Ripana's* open boat wasn't anywhere in sight. But presently from east of south a shape loomed darkly to block the rim of black sea and velvet, starry sky. That grim shadow, running without lights, shaped rapidly into a large cargo vessel wisping smoke from her funnel lip. Suddenly her searchlight shot a blinding bar of purple across dark water.

"Keep down, Nils!"

THE brilliant band found the *Ripana*, fingered her half-foundered hull, illuminated the ensign at the gaff. There it held for a moment, as if in surprise. Then it went out abruptly, leaving the ocean in pallid moonlight. The *Ripana's* gear rattled aloft: her headsails slapped. Johnny came erect, Nils at his side in the waist, watching. Over there engine telegraphs clanged. The threshing of twin screws ceased. Muffled orders drifted across. Three boats dropped together, took the water smartly, started with oars moving in perfect, seamanlike precision.

"Navy style!" Johnny idled at the bulwark, but he wasn't smiling now. "Get over by that donkey boiler, Nils. Have that big maul handy! —Ahoy, the boats!" he bellowed suddenly. "We are all right! We need no help."

The effect of his hail was startling. A low, terse order cracked from the sternsheets of the leading boat. They swung close aboard, the boats crowded with men, oars skillfully aback. Johnny could plainly see the gaunt face, the burning eyes of the tall officer in charge. "What meaning has this, Captain Bludlow?" that man shouted up in thick English. "Your instructions were—"

"Captain Bludlow followed instructions. But Nils and me, we got curious. So we came back."

There was an instant of dumfounded silence; a quick mutter. Then: "If you were left to strike a better bargain—"

"No go! This is our own idea."

"Name your price, then!"

"There is no price. Stand clear of this ship. She's ours!"

"Fool!" The officer's eyes were ablaze; his voice was icy. "You are two. Here I have eighty armed men who could—"

"I thought of that," Johnny put in deliberately. "No argument. You can

kill the two of us—neatly. But I call your attention to the American ensign aft. Also to the fact this ship wants lots of pumping before she'll move very fast—even if you take her in tow! And you'll have to do it by hand. Because the first move you make to board her—my partner smashes the donkey boiler to hell and runs aft to open the sea-valve again!" Johnny grinned a taut, quick grin that just flicked his lips and instantly disappeared. "She'll founder if we live long enough. And even if we're dead, before you can move her far enough this place is gonna be pretty unhealthy. There's a neutrality patrol destroyer humming this way and I think she makes better than forty knots all out. There's even liable to be a few British battlecraft that picked up our radio call explaining what happened here. So you see—"

"You sent nothing!" the officer down there blazed. "You think we don't listen? You—"

"You listen. But not on the proper frequency. The naval confidential wave length is altered quite often, you know. Or don't you? You better call it all a bad mistake, go pick up the Deacon's boat, and put him somewhere safe so you can try again some time. Your superiors wouldn't like an international incident like this to get around right now. Would they? Maybe a declaration of war and all?" Johnny Elderly's voice went harsh. "Shove off! This ship's still ours!"

The officer stared up in bitter silence, considering. The boat rocked under him. His eyes burned at Johnny. His mouth opened, clamped shut, spat an oath and a guttural order. The three boats swung, oars dripping in moonlight. Nils and Johnny watched them move away. Elderly held his breath while they bobbed at the big ship's side, muffled voices snapping and growling back and forth. Till they hooked on the falls and lifted the boats aboard that unlighted ship across the narrow space of darkly heaving water. Telegraphs jangled and twin screws started pounding the sea as she swung heavy bows. Only then did Johnny Elderly let the wind come slowly out of his lungs.

Nils was frowning in bewilderment. "I don't send nothing, Johnny."

"You could, though: couldn't you?"

"Sure! With the batteries. But I don't know no secret wave-length."

"Neither do I." Johnny grinned. "But it seemed a good idea."

Nils was silent for a moment. The moon rode higher above the wallowing barque, that big cargo-ship dwindling swiftly eastward. "That feller," he breathed at last, "was German officer. What game the Deacon play with him? It don't make sense, Johnny; not to me."

"Oh, it makes sense, all right! This barque's well found and rebuilt special, Diesels included. Why? She's got steel plating under four nests of drums on deck. And four naval four-inchers that would just fit as cargo with plenty shells. A secret agent in a legitimate business acts as Chilean consignee: and that's where the *Ripana's* bound. But Deacon Bludlow, all legal and proper as pie, deserts her for a wreck in a prearranged spot. Meantime that German cargo-ship sneaks out of a neutral port as if she's gonna try her luck for home. But instead she picks the *Ripana* up. Deserted, she's a salvage. Sinking. But she don't sink. Except that Captain Bludlow reports she did. So the *Ripana* disappears. These fellahs put an expert crew aboard, pump her dry, and run their naval flag up in her. How long would it take 'em to assemble and mount that battery? So right here in the middle of the Atlantic they got a powerful merchant raider! Don't have to get her out from Germany at all through the naval blockade. She's here—all sealed, signed, and delivered! And no one even knows it, or who she is—after they alter her rig and her paintwork. Slick, Nils! It's slick as silk." He sighed. "Better get to the radio, Nils. We'll pump her dry, borrow some help from the nearest ship, and work her in."

Nils Passen considered that in silence. "Where we take her, Johnny?"

"WELL," Mr. Elderly mused, "Para's a likely place. Especially with Lolita in the Café Chantecler."

"I remember that Papenhof. I don't like him." Nils kept frowning at the moonlit sky aloft. "And I remember I once got fine Norwegian girl in Namsos, Johnny." He blinked. "They got Norwegian consul in Para; I think I go join navy."

Johnny looked sharply at his friend. "Aye, Nils. Man can't think so good with just his head, sometimes." A strange smile touched his eyes. "It's gonna get dull without you, Nils. It's gonna get awful dull. I'll ask Lolita what she thinks. Maybe," he murmured, "maybe I'll see the consul there myself."

High Lights of

THE idea of writing this book was first given to me one sunny afternoon in August, 1940, as I sat in an English garden. Heavy with the scent of roses and pleasantly suggestive of peace and security, it lay serenely in the shelter of its centuries-old stone walls. A few miles away the barrage guns barked at the German bombers who were trying to carry death and destruction to this rolling English countryside, but the tea-cups continued their musical clatter. Conversation went on. Round the table were the younger generations of our war-scarred family and their friends: three young R.A.F. pilots, an air gunner, a Naval officer, and a ridiculously youthful Army captain. . . .

My mind flew back. Twenty-three years ago, as a gloriously happy youth of seventeen, I had walked into that garden to have tea with my mother. I was wearing the Wings of an R.F.C. pilot for the first time. Now, history was sadly repeating itself. Listening to these kids in uniform, I realized that we oldsters were more concerned for their safety than were they, who seemed as thoughtless as we had been in our generation. Their interests ran to riding, boating, football, movies, and girls. The R.A.F. teased the Navy for getting sunk, the Navy told the R.A.F. that it would be sunk without its parachutes.

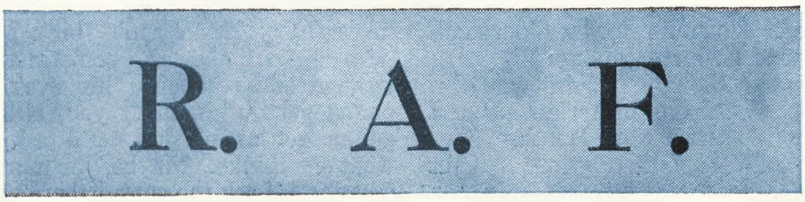
I heard afterwards that the young Naval officer had been on a ship that had been torpedoed the week before, but he had not troubled to mention it to his father, although he did tell his mother later. One of the R.A.F. boys had been shot down in flames, the Army captain had been through the epic of Dunkirk, and a lovely young girl, fresh and flower-like in a tennis frock, who was in an Auxiliary service, had been buried alive for two entire days.

None of these things did they talk about.

The mother of one of the boys said to me: "You should write a book about these kids. But write it now. I'll help you. I wish I could explain how I feel about Peter. I am proud of him, but I am afraid, because I think he knows I am frightened. In his letters he's always at pains to make me feel he is safe, that there is no danger. He's magnificent."

The idea grew in my mind as the Battle of Britain intensified. My work threw me into constantly closer contact with the R.A.F. And so I set to work. . . .

In this book I have tried to give the reader an idea of the actual day-by-day life of these fighter pilots, a life that is now being shared by many Americans. To convey that picture along with the facts about the R.A.F. itself, I have put the book into the form of a journal kept by a pilot named "Ken." His name and character, and those of the other people in the pages which follow (except for famous public figures) are necessarily fictitious, and should any of the names I have used be those of actual persons, that resemblance is purely accidental and unintentional. But in any important respect, there is nothing fictitious about the pages of this book. Ken himself is a composite portrait, but he is all the more representative because of that fact. The picture of the R.A.F. which the book presents is, to the best of my ability, a true picture. Every air fight described is based on an actual episode as recorded in a real pilot's combat report. Even the radio telephone conversations are ones which actually pass between young officer and sergeant pilots. There is no invention here except in the interests of anonymity and of presenting the fullest possible picture of the R.A.F.



the New Books

Chapter One

Dog Fight

THINGS happen pretty swiftly, these days in the summer of 1940. One minute you're sitting at a game of bridge, and the next you're blasting hell out of some poor Hun who hasn't had the luck to do the same to you.

This morning, for instance. We had a show just after 5:30. We got off pretty quick. It was one of those wonderfully clear June mornings, with a sky like pale opal such as you usually see only when you come out of a night club at dawn. The Hun was coming from the southeast toward Dover at about 25,000. When we were at the same height, with the Channel almost underneath, I thought we'd missed him; he just wasn't anywhere. There were no clouds—just a fine soft mist that couldn't hide anything. But Jerry was still about, for the spotters told us so.

When you're intercepting, there's always one thing uppermost in your mind: if you miss the Hun, he'll get through and kill someone, perhaps your own family. You may get him going back, but that's not so good. Another thing: if you can break him up over the sea he doesn't have the heart to go through.

I was just getting into a gloomy mood. I suppose that you wouldn't call it a mood if you were on the ground, but when you're flying a Spitfire and doing things fairly fast, a single split-second thought becomes a mood. I must think about this later. Doing everything so quickly is going to give us a bit of a problem when this is all over; it's going to make normal life awfully slow. Dad used to tell me he had the same feeling flying S.E.5's in the last war. When he came back to civil life he was always getting pinched for driving his car too fast. I wonder what *we* shall do, seeing that we're flying about four times as fast, faster than they ever dreamed of. . . .

To get back to this morning: The only clouds were over the French coast and standing up like a great chunk of smoke. We were miles above them and they looked a bit unreal, as if they had been cut with a knife. We had been up for half an hour, and nothing had happened. I was just beginning to wonder if anything ever would; perhaps we would never see a Hun again, except some old reconnaissance machine. . . . Then suddenly information came through on the R.T.—*"Enemy aircraft approaching, about 100 of them, 20,000 feet altitude. Bombers with strong escort. Intercept."*

Presently—that's 30 seconds later—Marston (who incidentally just got a bar to his D.F.C.) spotted them. Marston gives his orders in the kind of voice that he would use in telling a girl a story at a cocktail party—intimate, but it makes you feel that he's an authority. *"Dead below at 18,000. B Section take the rear. Mind your backs. Attack in line. Here goes."*

Below was a sight I shall never forget. It was the first time I had ever struck a mass raid. A great black speckled wedge of German planes stretched across the sky line like a flight of ducks. They were right underneath us, and they hadn't seen us. The fighters were on top, the bombers in the middle, and well down beneath us and ahead was a double line of fighters going round and round like a chain of circus horses.

Marston gave us the attack plan and we broke up and went in. I opened up to the throttle and stuck her nose down. I couldn't get there fast enough, either; sheer over-anxiety to do something. The Germans kept on, too, the whole proces-

The story of a British Fighter Pilot as told to Keith Ayling

sion not budging an inch. That made me angry—the saucy devils—unless they really hadn't seen us.

The Skipper took the leading M.E.109.† The German either hadn't seen him or couldn't get out of the way in time; they say the M.E.'s are nose-heavy. The Skipper got this fellow in the middle with a deflection burst just as the pilot started to climb—and he went off into a crazy roll as his tail broke off and the fuselage belched out smoke. That started it. This fellow had been on the top layer of the sandwich in front, and as he went down he fouled the nose of a big Dornier* bomber. It squashed in as if it had been hit by a hammer, and they both went down all mixed up together, dripping parachutes, it seemed. Then I got another M.E.109 in my gun sights and let him have it—one burst.

Nothing happened.

It's a sad moment in your life when you know that you've squirted in the right place and nothing happens. That is often the case, particularly with a bomber: I remember that the first one I ever hit took all I had; he was a sitter, too. It seemed as if I had thrown an egg at a brick wall. I was right on top of him, and I gave him the works square in the cockpit. But he didn't show a sign of anything; there wasn't a splinter, not even a scratch, and his gun was pooping up at me as I went by. I "pulled the plug" (which is giving the old Merlin everything by cutting out the boost control) and I came over again, and then—just as I got on the tail and squeezed the teat for the last few dribbles of ammunition—Jerry went to pieces just as if the moths had got at him. And I was thinking that I'd missed him!

THE same thing happened this morning. Now a fighter shows its wounds much quicker than a bomber. My stuff had got this one, I was sure, but I came round again and got ready to give him another dose. Then another German got right behind me on my tail. His stuff was going by—these tracer shells look like ruddy oranges as they sail past. He had been blazing off at me from a hell of a range before I noticed, and was coming in at a terrific lick. I gave the engine all the throttle, went up in a half-loop, and pulled out right on top of him. I was excited, and I shouldn't have been; I've learned to be wary. But I was so furious that I was ready to give him anything. When in doubt as to where to hit a Jerry, go for the personnel, we say. As I barged in—doing well over 500, I suppose, and not feeling it a bit—I thought I was going to crash into him. . . . . I gave him a burst so short that I hardly knew I'd done it. It got him smack in the cockpit.

How queer. . . . He just seemed to stand still—right in my way, as if he were suspended by a bit of wire. I was all out and I couldn't see how I could avoid hitting him head on. It looked like the end. And then the miracle happened: I missed him—perhaps by two inches, perhaps by a foot, but I could have sworn I tore something off him. Right above ahead to starboard was a Junkers‡ with the Eagle painted on her side. I let her have it right under her belly as I went past. I saw the bombs dribble out as my fire cut out a rack, or else the pilot did some quick thinking. Bill Bradley, my formation mate, was ahead with a pair of M.E.110's on his tail. I called to him to look out. I thought I could help him when I saw they were hitting him in the greenhouse.§ All at once as I came up and over, his machine turned over and began to smoke. He went down looking like an oil rag in flames. . . .

When I heard bullets socking into me somewhere, I tried to get at one of the M.E.110's. Something must have hit my cooling system. The cockpit filled up with the most awful stink. I got a mouthful that tasted like hell and smelt worse. There was smoke all over the place. I jabbed back the greenhouse to get some air. The engine was still giving revs, but I couldn't see enough to be useful any more. One of the bandits was giving me something—too much. I was wondering whether I would have to jump. A bullet cracked the greenhouse window to starboard and split the mirror. I wiped it, but I wasn't a hell of a lot of good after that, so I put her nose down.

I had a look round. There were only three M.E.'s on my tail, with two of our

† M.E.'s—Messerschmitts, German fighter monoplanes with single or twin engines.

* Dornier—a name covering several types of German 'planes, of which the one most used in war is a multi-engined bomber.

‡ Junkers—trade name of a German plane; the "Stuka" is a Junkers.

§ Greenhouse—the transparent hood that covers the pilot's cockpit, rendering it wind-proof and weather-tight.

chaps after them. Underneath were about a dozen parachutes. The bomber formation didn't seem to be anywhere. I had a little ammunition left, but not enough to start all over again. But I hadn't got rid of one of the M.E.'s; he was coming down too. Another appeared ahead right underneath me. He did a half-loop—the stupidest thing he could do; I knew he was trying to get on my tail. I couldn't see him properly, as my goggles were smeared with the oil. But I gave him what I'd got left, and he dived away right into the middle of a Hurricane Squadron that must have just arrived. When the guns went dead I dove down to 10,000 feet. My engine was popping badly, and as I came over Dover Castle it dried, coughed, and stopped. I got down all right in a field—and here I am.

Writing all this makes it seem a hell of a long time, but I doubt if the whole affair lasted two minutes. We had a good bag, though none of mine count, as they can't be confirmed. It looks as if the old Squadron had shot down twenty for sure, with about thirteen unaccounted for; which is not so bad. We lost Bill Bradley, and Marshall bailed out—fell in the ditch and was picked up by a Navy motor boat. One of the Huns, a Dornier, blazing like hell and flying homewards, tried to bomb that motor boat—a waste of bombs, though they probably wanted to get rid of their eggs to be ready for landing on the French coast. It seems they were rehearsing; the Intelligence bloke says they're planning something very big, and that this was a try-out, to get the Messerschmitt pilots used to doing escort work. They'll need some more practice. We heard later that two of the Hurry-box†† Squadrons carved a useful lump out of them, too.

It is strange to reflect that I am writing all this—it happened only this morning—as if it had really been nothing, when actually it was a pretty big scramble. You get like that, yet it is what I have been waiting for all these months. For a long time I had to hold myself in check, not daring to grow excited over the idea of getting at the enemy; and now that I know what it is like, I am not excited any more. If anyone asked me to be frank about myself today, I would say that I am wary and cunning. I must be, to do this job. I have to look after myself and the other fellows. So I don't take risks.

†† R.A.F. slang for Hurricane.

When I first came to the Squadron, one thing kept gnawing at me: I was wondering how the other fellows felt when a man was lost. I often wanted to ask when I was kicking my heels and watching the service squadrons coming back. But I didn't dare. Now I know, for I am one of those other fellows. You are sorry when a man is shot down because he is one of the Squadron, and he is usually a good fellow. They all are. But at the back of your mind you are critical. He must have made a mistake, you argue, and you like to add that he always was careless. You must not be careless. That's how it works on you.

Marston, the C.O., put it to me this way: "If you get shot down, it will probably be your own fault. If you use your nut, nothing much can happen to you."

I can see what he means, and I agree with him. If I get shot down it will be my own fault. That's what the other fellows will think, so it's up to me.

WAR starts in man's mind. Expect it and you get it. We've expected it long enough, and it came swooping at us out of the sky. I was scared when it came. At least, I had a funny feeling in my stomach, and I'm still scared—not for myself, for I don't matter very much, but scared for humanity because it all seems so unintelligent. I still don't quite believe it. You wouldn't, either, if you were here lying on your stomach in a clover field and writing to your mother, trying to assure her that you don't go out without wrapping up. Mother's one anxiety seems to be that I may catch cold. If she could only see us haring to our planes like giant pandas with enough clothes on to make an Eskimo go on strike. . . . But it's better to have her worrying about that than about something else.

It's I who ought to be worrying about Mother, and I have good reason to do: living in London, she is always in danger. That's the worst aspect of this war, now that it has come over England. You can never be sure whether your home is standing or not, or which of your friends have got it in the neck. I don't like the idea of Mother's being exposed to bombs, any more than she likes to think of my being exposed to bullets and the other inconveniences of air warfare; but really I am better placed than she is, for I can do something about it. She just has to go to a shelter and wait for the "all clear." . . .

Old Brown, in A Section, had some bad news last week. They blew his home at Croydon to smithereens and killed his father and his spaniel. He is grieving like hell, of course, especially about the dog. That seems strange, but it is very English. Brown is sad about his father, but he's angry about the dog. I think he feels that his father ought to have gone into shelter when the alarm went, but the dog couldn't do anything about it.

The war has been a pleasant experience for Brown up to now. He's one of the huntin'-shootin'-fishin' type, and a warmonger in his own quiet way. His dad was a full-time soldier and his grandfather a general. Brown went to live near Croydon because he was crazy on flying, and ever since I've known him he's been talking about war. He was transferred from a cavalry regiment and we met at the Operational Training Unit.

It wasn't long before I realized that Brown looked on the war as some kind of sport. But he's different now that it's hit him personally. At the moment he's dangerous to Huns, but the C.O. got on to that pretty quickly. He overheard something Brown said at lunch, so he called him in on the mat and tore a strip off the lad. Brown told me afterwards what had happened. The C.O. told him flat that if he felt that way, or behaved as he said he would, he was "out" for six months. A pilot who loses his temper is as dangerous as a runaway pony at a horse fair—and about as intelligent. Poor old Brown, he was so scared at the thought of being stood off out of this show that he promised on his honour he'd forget all this business and toe the line. I think he'll be specially wary anyhow, because the Old Man—Marston—has an eagle eye, and if Brown shows signs of any funny business he'll get sent on an instructor's course or something. A fighter squadron has no use for tired or angry pilots. As soon as a fellow shows any signs of being off colour he's sent back on other duties. That's the worst thing that can happen to us. . . .

WE certainly get contrast in this job. Funny how these impressions bang themselves into your mind. I'm sleeping at The King's Arms these days, as far away from the airfield as is convenient. I set the alarm for 4:00 A.M., which is getting-up time. This morning I was putting my socks on and cursing a bit at having to get up so early to go to work. I found myself jibbing at that go-to-work idea. I wasn't going to work, I told myself; I wasn't going to work, because I was in the R.A.F. I dawdled round a bit with one sock on and one off trying to reason it all out, and I finally decided I was going to work just as much as if I was a clerk in an office, and what's more, I mustn't be late. But it seems distinctly odd, sleeping in a country pub and then riding to work on a bicycle, especially when that work is going on a defensive patrol in a Spitfire with more than 1,000 h.p. of Rolls-Royce Merlin and sixteen seconds of sudden death in eight Browning guns. . . .

I've got a grand feather bed, one of the kind you can lose yourself in and sink to the bottom and still not feel it; and the landlord's wife always puts lavender in the pillows, so that the place always has a topping restful atmosphere when you get back at night. The pictures are a bit quaint. Over the bed is an old print—of a nun looking through a window at a mother with a baby in her arms—and it is called "More Heavens Than One." The artist must have been a bit of a cynic, I should think, way back in 1898. As I wake up, the first thing my eyes fall on is an embroidered sampler that reads *God Sees Everything.* Next to it is a coloured print of the Duke of Wellington; the painter certainly did more than his duty by the Iron Duke's nose. There was a vile print of a bunch of roses, too, but I put that in the cupboard and hung a picture of Mother on its nail. And the billeting officer had to add his touch, just to remind me I'm in the service: a propaganda poster in red and black, reading, *You Know More Than Anyone Else—so keep it dark;* just in case I feel like talking.

Then there's a wash-stand with a pink bowl and jug, and an old table that I have put under the window so that I can write. There is no electric light in my room, so I have an oil lamp; it warms the place up a bit, but I'll be glad of that in the winter. Some nights you would never realize there is a war on at all. All you can hear is the screeching of the owls who haunt the elms in the churchyard. They kick up a hell of a row; still, you soon get used to them, and they're rather a pleasant change after the sirens. . . .

Every night at dusk when there's no danger of a show coming off, we all go home on our bicycles like day boys at school. . . .

Chapter Fourteen

ONE BY ONE, THEY GO. . . .

COULDN'T eat my breakfast this morning. The first time I've had no appetite after coming back. I was hungry enough, but I was in such a flap. Seems as if the rough stuff of the war really has begun for me. This killing business has left me cold up till now. Now I'm cold in another way: I'm sick and angry; I'm livid. Yet there's really no reason. I ought to be made to sit down and write out Kipling's *If* ten times without stopping. Must pull myself together. Can't even read a newspaper. Just had the rottenest job of my life. Packing up a fellow's kit has been just a chore ordinarily, but this time it was pretty bloody. O'Dowd's. Blast them!

It seems now as if nothing will ever be the same again, although I know it will be. Feeling really pipped. When I got back from this morning's show I had no idea anything had happened to O'Dowd. I missed him coming back, of course, but that is nothing to worry about. Then The Barber burst in and told me. He was in a mess with three M.E.110's, and it looked like just another bail-out for him, when O'Dowd dove in, shot one down, and broke up the rest. The Barber had used all his ammunition and was heading for home when he heard O'Dowd say, "Bye-bye, pal," over the R.T. Then he saw O'Dowd's machine going down at a hell of a lick in a nose-dive.

There was no smoke or anything.

I still couldn't believe it. It wasn't like O'Dowd not to turn up. We waited till lunch time, and I felt like hell. Willson brought us the bad news late in the afternoon. They had found O'Dowd's machine in a tree near Ashford—he'd been hit in the stomach. Just sheer bad luck.

It's awful. Somehow I always felt safe with O'Dowd on the right. How will I feel now with a new fellow? Shows that you can't really make plans in this war. I had got the idea firmly fixed in my mind that our Section was invulnerable. It didn't seem possible that any of us could go—and they had to get O'Dowd. *Now* what am I going to say to Rosalie? What the hell—I simply *can't*. I'll get Willson to write; no, I'd better do it myself. But it'll seem brutal—there are no words to break news like that. It's going to be an awful shock. This war certainly has hit her below the belt. But she'll take it like a Briton. That's one of the advantages of being a nation like this: we can take it! Women don't cry—they carry on, although no one thinks it worth mentioning. I read that an American newspaper fellow said that the English were dying on their feet rather than live on their knees, and he was pretty near right. But what this war is doing to the women worries me. They're losing so much. . . .

I remember how we used to say, "Well, the Poles are doing all right. They'll stop him. It will never last." And someone else exclaimed, "Poor devils!" But we thought that there would be a way out. War over England just didn't seem possible then. Now, it's all here. I hate to see women go through it. I remember on our night out at the Dorchester there was a topping girl quite stinko. The waiter told us why: she had just been married and her husband was killed two days afterwards, and she didn't dare sober up in case she might go to pieces. She looked like a death mask that could only weep. When she smiled, it was just a grin that was nearly idiotic. I couldn't look at her.

THE net result of Sunday's show—apart from the fact that the R.A.F. got about 160 planes, and possibly a darned sight more—is that I've been gonged for the D.F.C. The fellows are pulling my leg, but I'm glad of it for the Squadron's sake. We're living up to the record of the Squadron started in 1917 when it went over and shot the Fokker right out of Flanders just when the Hun had real mastery of the air. He's never got near to that this war; although he can put about four times the number of fighters in the air that we can, he really doesn't have a hope.

Mother will be awfully bucked. Dad got an M.C. and a Croix de Guerre out of the last war, but I would rather O'Dowd had mine and was here to take it. We'd been together so long that we worked like a perfect team.

The Barber did a grand job in Sunday's show, and can that fellow fly! When he's in a Spit he's rather like a Centaur, for he's really half-airplane and half-man. I suppose it's because he used to be in the crack Polish cavalry regiment; anyhow he's avenging his family all right and doing it a decent way. He got the fellow who got O'Dowd, and he's pretty happy about that. So am I.

O'Dowd's funeral hurt. No relatives,

all uniforms, just a section of the aircraftsmen, and a few of the lads. Willson, who is used to this kind of thing, looked as blue-nose as I felt inside. Even the weather seemed in mourning. No sun, just black-grey cumulus clouds and very grey visibility, as if it would rain any moment. It's only October, but today was a foretaste of winter. . . . The Union Jack on the coffin, contrasting so strikingly with the freshly dug earth and the gloom of the day, moved me in a strange way that I cannot define. I felt as if it were not real at all. I could hear O'Dowd saying in that cheery, fruity way of his, "Ken, she's a peach, a real darlin'." But it wasn't O'Dowd—it was only the Padre mumbling the funeral service.

The thing had just gone down into the grave when the dog Adolf arrived. The poor brute seemed to know that there was something going on. He stopped and cocked his head knowingly. Then he went up to the grave very cautiously and sniffed. No one moved, but someone "sh-ed." Adolf sat down and let out a mournful howl that was as significant as any funeral march. Then he padded over and stood by me. Presently he licked my hand, but there was no exuberance in him.

I took my hand away, and he lay down, watching. When they sounded the Last Post, it ripped the silence like an unexpected train running through a sleepy town.

The firing volley shook Adolf a bit. He scrambled up and beat it in a panic. But presently he came back, and waited for me to go back to the aerodrome. I was feeling like hell. On the way The Barber said, "Kenneth, zat is another goot man. We smack the Boche hard, yes? Kick his damn backside, yes!"

I agreed.

I WROTE to Mary Waters in the hospital just to tell her what had happened to O'Dowd. The letter came back with one from the Matron. The poor kid's gone too. They had to operate again and something went wrong. So I don't want to think about it. I know she's only one of thousands of girls who've been slaughtered by this blasted bombing, but it's hellish just the same. It's barbarous, it's the Dark Ages all over again, it's the damndest thing that ever was.

Episodes from another recent book of special interest will appear in our forthcoming September issue.

Toughy

A brief and moving drama by the able author of the Tiny David stories.

By ROBERT S. MILL

OLD PARSONS began his round of the south cell-block. Here, outwardly, things looked much the same as they had every night during the thirty years he had served as a guard. The same locked cells, with the same gray-clad, gray-faced men inside them. The rasping snores, an infrequent oath, an occasional moan. The infrequent and flickering lights throwing fantastic patterns.

Old Parsons chuckled to himself. Tomorrow he was "going out"—retiring on a pension, the size of which was dependent on the fact that he had completed his years of service without a serious blot on his record.

The guard squared his shoulders with pride. For thirty years he had steered a safe course through this narrow little world in which hate, envy and intrigue were intensified by the surroundings. He had it licked. He was going out.

It hadn't been easy, old Parsons mused. There had been a host of problems and pitfalls. High among them was the Principal Keeper.

He was hard-boiled, that "P. K." He believed in the rule of the clenched fist and the club. Square, yes; but tough, with no favors granted, and no favors asked. It had been inevitable that they would tangle. To the Principal Keeper, all convicts looked alike, while old Parsons liked to carry on his work with due regard to what he called the human equation.

So it had been open war between the two men, and they hated each other with the intense hate possible only in a prison. That hatred, shared by them both, would

Gets Even

Illustrated by
Arthur Jameson

"Went sour on you, didn't he? Your bread sure came back to you, Mr. Reformer!"

continue until old Parsons had walked through the outer gate for the last time, and perhaps even longer than that. The tragedy of it was that neither man realized that it was an impersonal thing, and that two systems, not two men, were warring with each other.

Old Parsons came to a halt before the cell that housed Toughy Bates. Once, Toughy had been the "bad man" of the prison. Then old Parsons had thought he had seen something buried down deep beneath the surface, and had asked that the convict—he was little more than a boy—be transferred from "isolation" to his company.

The Principal Keeper had been properly sarcastic:

"Just a reformer, eh? Casting your bread on the waters? It will come back to you, all right. Probably in the form of a knife in the back."

The "P. K." hadn't even bothered to lower his voice, and Toughy had heard him. Perhaps the desire to disappoint the Principal Keeper governed him. It may have been that the first act of kindness ever shown him, and that from a hated "screw," affected him. Nobody ever knew, least of all old Parsons. But from that time on, Toughy Bates ceased to be a problem; and the Principal Keeper's hatred for the guard, and his desire to get something on him, "something legitimate," increased threefold.

But all that, old Parsons mused, as he paused before the cell, soon would be a matter of the past. He pushed his flashlight through the bars, and the finger of light played over the man on the bunk.

TOUGHY BATES stirred, rubbed his eyes and sat up.

"Hello, screw!"

"Hello, Toughy," said Parsons. He paused. "I am going out tomorrow."

"Yeah! So what? Do you want that I should bake you a cake?"

Old Parsons sighed as he resumed his rounds. He should have known better than that. Screws were screws, and cons were cons. But it would have been kind of nice if—

He came to the end of the cell-block. There was an iron railing, about waist high, with a wall close behind it. Made a handy place for a fellow to snatch a minute of rest if his feet were hurting

him. They always did hurt, pounding over these stone floors. Tonight they hurt more than ever. He had about walked his legs off that afternoon looking for a house, the right kind of a house, and one that came within the limits of the pension he would receive. It had been good to find it.

OLD PARSONS leaned down and untied the lacings of his shoes. Yes, that was better. It eased his throbbing feet a bit.

Toughy Bates quit his bunk, and stood at the door of his cell, watching the retreating form of the guard. He wasn't a bad guy, that screw. Hated to see him check out. But no use telling him that, not with a bunch of cons around to get a load of it. Better to wait until his last round, when the guys would be asleep.

Old Parsons sat down. He was visible from Toughy's cell, but hidden from the view of anybody who entered from the other wing, the entrance to which was at the far end. Toughy watched while the guard untied his shoes, folded his hands across his stomach and relaxed.

The convict grinned. Grabbing himself a little shut-eye! Well, you couldn't hate him for that.

The muted clang of steel at the far end of the cell-block attracted Toughy's attention. The Principal Keeper entered the block, and quietly closed the door behind him. He tiptoed his way down the passageway, moving toward the place that would permit him a view of the far end, where old Parsons was napping.

"The dirty louse!" Toughy muttered. "Trying to knock off the old boy on his last night, and crab his pension."

The "P. K." was advancing, slowly but surely. Old Parsons, still hidden from his sight, had not moved.

Toughy thought fast. He fought back his first impulse to shout a warning. That would tip the louse off that something was wrong. No dice, there. Then, in a split-second, he sensed the solution.

Toughy Bates smiled grimly.

"Hello, cooler; good-by, earned time!" he muttered.

Then he seized the iron bars of his cell door, shook them, and kicked savagely at them.

"That's right, you lousy screw!" he roared. "Flash the light in my eyes, and wake me up! You're all alike! God, how I hate screws!"

Old Parsons awoke with a start. Blind habit caused him to rush toward the disturbance, his flashlight in one hand, his club in the other. The Principal Keeper met him before Toughy's cell. Almost at once, the emergency patrol arrived from the guard-room.

The "P. K." took charge.

"Take him to the cooler," he ordered. "He's long overdue."

THEY marched Toughy away. He looked back over his shoulder. Old Parsons was staring after him. The look on his face made Toughy forget what was waiting ahead.

The Principal Keeper was smiling. It hadn't turned out the way he had hoped, but half a loaf was better than none.

"Went sour on you, didn't he?" he gloated. "And on your last night! Just in time to teach you that all cons are alike." He chuckled with glee. "Your bread sure came back to you, Mr. Reformer!"

Old Parsons stood staring at the door through which Toughy had been led. He spoke slowly:

"Yes, P. K." He stifled the desire to explain just what had happened. Toughy would hate that. "Yes, P. K.," he repeated. "My bread sure came back."

A Tiny David story by Robert Mill has just come in and will appear in our next —the September issue.

An unusual story by a writer new to our pages.

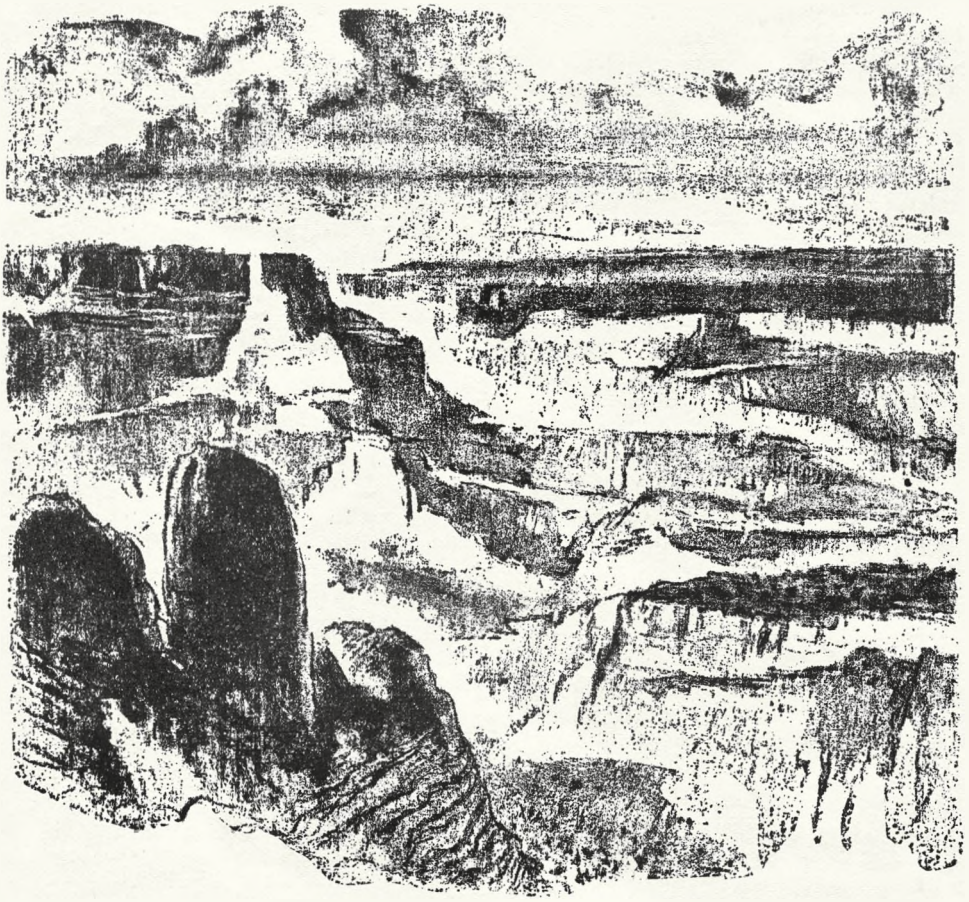
By JOHN UPTON TERRELL

The Horses Came at Night

IF there was life on that heaving red earth five thousand feet below, Waltman Shaw could discern no sign of it. Beyond one of the silver plane's wings, he saw a blue range of peaks fused in tortured contours with a hazy sky. He withdrew his gaze from the desolation and glanced at the boy.

The boy was kneeling on the short divan, his nose pressed into a round knob against a window-glass. Shaw reflected with faint amusement that Timmy had been away from that window little during the time they were in the air, on the flight from New York. Because they were going to the West, Timmy had begun to watch for Indians while the plane was still riding above the timbered ridges of the Eastern mountains.

Over the Western plains, the cattle herds Timmy saw became in his wide brown eyes herds of buffalo trailing down



to white creeks threaded through the sun-browned sea of grass. He talked of his cowboy book. The book was temporarily lost in the multitude of things packed and shipped West from Wyckham House. He was not yet aware that he would not romp through the wide rooms of that house again, that strangers would live there, knowing nothing of the boy whose imaginative battles and horse-shows were held in the play-room overlooking the blue Connecticut Sound.

Waltman Shaw had sought futilely to compete with the visions which the cowboy book had created in his grandson's thoughts. But he promised himself he would supplant those visions with something which had nothing to do with horses or horsemen, once the boy was settled in San Saba and had come to think of the ranch as his home.

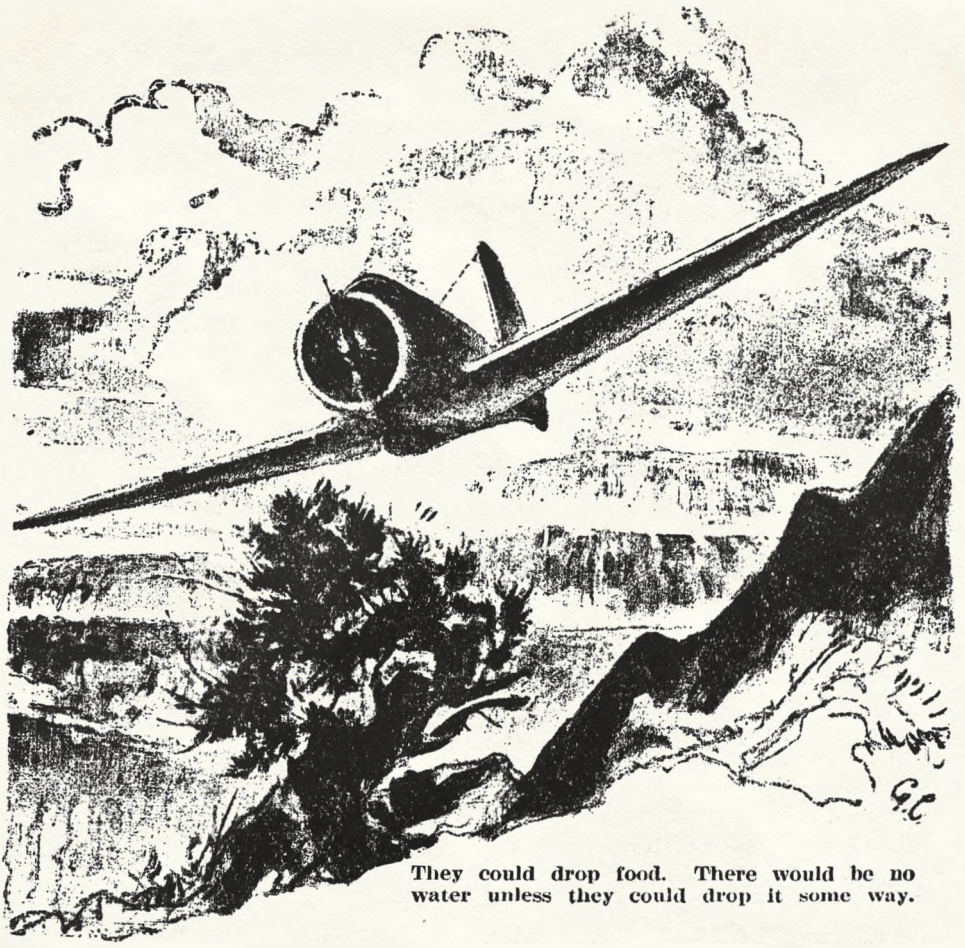
Shaw shared no part of Timmy's fascination for the flight. At sixty-three, he wished never to go East again. There was, he told himself, nothing left there for him. His son's death had removed the last vestige of the chain that had linked him to events at Wyckham House. He glanced at his watch and consoled himself with the thought that in five hours more, the green hills of San Saba, thrusting rocky promontories against the white Pacific surf, would spread beneath them.

Timmy, twisted halfway about on the divan, was saying, "I think I saw some horses down there, Grandfather."

Shaw looked as if he were listening to the sound of the big motor that seeped into the cabin in a muffled drone. "I suppose so."

The boy scrutinized him soberly. "You haven't told me yet whether I can have a horse at San Saba."

The elderly man's eyes moved under gray brows. "We'll talk about that when we get there," he said. But in his own mind he reiterated a decision: the boy would never have another horse, if he could prevent it. There would be no horses at San Saba now. By this time, the instructions he had telephoned from New York would be carried out. The horses would be taken away to be sold, the ranch stable cleared of all reminders



They could drop food. There would be no water unless they could drop it some way.

of them. He told himself he should have disposed of them long before. They were a poison that got into men's hearts and ruined lives. Now anything that couldn't be done at San Saba without a horse, wouldn't be done. Today motors had supplanted horses, and Shaw felt it would be a benefit to mankind if horses were extinct.

"You said," Timmy persisted, "you would tell me."

"Yes, we'll see," Shaw answered evasively. The altimeter over the cabin desk hovered close to eleven thousand feet. He looked down again through the rare atmosphere at the scarred southwestern desert, and wondered if the river he saw tracing a pale course through the maze of cañons and broken mesa lands was the Alvarado. If it was the Alvarado, they were over the remote Lost Desert Country, and Shaw remembered that thirty years before, he had packed in there with a geologist friend, on an outing. Few white men had seen that country then. Probably few had seen it now —except from the air.

Now Shaw surmised they must be nearing Concho City. There they would pick up the southwest radio beam. It would guide them almost directly into San Saba.

Timmy had become pensive. "I'll tell you something I would rather have than a new horse at San Saba, Grandfather."

"Yes, son. What?"

"I would rather bring Poke-along from Wyckham. He could come on a train, because the airplane wouldn't be big enough. Poke-along couldn't get in the cabin."

"No," said Shaw, "he couldn't."

"Daddy said Poke-along stood nine hands. Is this plane that high?"

"It would be too small."

"Well," the boy said quietly, "he'll wonder where I have gone if I don't bring him out to me."

Shaw nodded a little wearily. Poke-along, he thought, might wonder where his young master had gone. But Poke-along wasn't in the Wyckham House paddock now. The little horse had gone with the rest of the stable, with the polo ponies and the harness and saddle stock, and

the long-legged gelding that George Shaw was teaching to jump when—when *that* happened.

Waltman Shaw had already begun to think of the death of his son in such a way—*that*—as if there was nothing else in the past which might be used to gauge time. It was going to be difficult to tell Timmy he would never see his father again. A wave of bitterness swept through Shaw. He sent a curse down on Poke-along. Horses had brought all this about, and Timmy thought little of anything else.

There had been few things in his son's life as important as the Fandale Hampshire Hunt, the Marble Valley Steeplechase, the Laurel American polo series. And Marion had stayed out of a saddle only long enough to bring Timmy into the world. It hadn't been long enough. She had ridden in the Hartbridge Annual too soon after the boy's birth. But she had felt fine and strong, and there was the new chestnut to be entered. The chestnut took the blue ribbon in its class, and Marion went to bed, and did not get up again.

That memory had always blinded Waltman Shaw. Whenever it returned, a dangerous anger darkened his face. Now that hatred of horses, which had begun after the death of Timmy's mother, welled up in furious flame as he thought of the manner in which his only son had died.

SHAW'S eyes jerked from the boy's face as the window suddenly darkened. He stiffened as he saw the oil on the glass whip to a thin brown film under the fury of the driven air. The plane wavered, as if the stick were being handled carelessly. Shaw's arm went around the boy; he took him up, dropped him into a chair and clasped a safety-belt about Timmy's waist.

"Stay there! Hold tight!"

He gripped the chair-back as the ship teetered. Shaw had flown sufficiently to know that rough air did not cause that motion. He lurched toward the door of the pilot cabin. "March!" he said almost before he had got the door open.

March Griffin did not turn his head. Bent forward over the instrument panel, he kept one hand on the radio dial. "Go back," he said steadily.

Shaw gripped the side of the door. "What's wrong? The oil—"

The engine's rhythmic cracking broke. Shaw knew where to look on the crowded board for oil-pressure. He saw it falling. The plane settled, and he felt it drag, as if the wheels were down. Looking under Griffin's left leg, he saw that the landing-gear had not been dropped. He tried to keep from shouting. "Are we near a field?"

Griffin settled back heavily in the pilot's seat. The motor suddenly caught, as if gunned, and the propeller bit teeth into the thin air.

"No," March Griffin said. "I've told Concho City. We're seventy miles north of the beam, at least."

Shaw felt his face grow damp. He fought to keep his voice even. "What is it, March—a crash?"

The pilot's eyes flickered up to the elderly man's face, but fell again immediately to the telltale gauges before him. "We've got to sit down some place."

A VISION of that parched, seamed world below, swimming off into hazy horizons, flashed before Shaw's eyes. He whispered, "Sit down!" and heard the radio whine. The air-speed needle came before his stare. It went from 120 to 100 as he watched. "Told them where we are?"

"As near as I know." March Griffin's voice held very closely to its normal quiet tone. "Go back and strap yourself and the boy in."

The motor's beat was fitful. Shaw's voice rose. "You can't land—" He stopped abruptly as Griffin banked sharply left. And then he said almost inaudibly: "What's down there?"

But once more the fourteen cylinders revived, as if with a sudden injection that March Griffin had given them. The ship staggered forward once more, and the blades took hold.

Griffin looked up. His eyes threatened. "Get back there, or I'll put you back. Get in the straps."

Shaw turned partly around. The ship's motion was unsteady, as if they were riding through potholes. Shaw felt cold. He moved a hand across his face in a meaningless gesture, but the words which reached his lips held a fathomless significance.

He said: "It's to end like this."

Suddenly he was strangely calm within himself. He moved with a white face back to the chair in which the boy had obediently remained. He took Timmy in his arms and sat down. His fingers were only slightly stiffened as they found the safety-belt and clasped it in place.

He squeezed Timmy down beside him, keeping one arm about the boy.

"Grandfather—"

"Hold tight," he said. "Hold to my hand, and don't let go, no matter what happens."

"Are we going to land?"

Shaw did not answer. He was obliged to force himself to turn his eyes to the window beside the chair. There was no oil on that side of the plane. He heard Timmy speak, but the words had no meaning. The words came from far off, and were faint and indistinguishable. His eyes, staring out that window, found the distant blue peaks again. The peaks stood in a jagged fence against the northern sky.

The motor was gone. Still Shaw's calmness prevailed. He had wondered before, when on those long transcontinental flights, how he would act if facing death. Now he knew.

They were going down. Griffin was circling. Shaw saw a white cliff pass. But it came back again, closer than before—a gigantic creased wall that was an abutment for a spotted mesa, tilted against the sun. The ship banked sharply left and then leveled off.

Before Waltman Shaw's eyes, the window blurred. . . . Yet he thought he saw clearly. There before him was a young man on a red gelding, dashing toward a brush jump. The horse swerved, stumbled and pitched forward. It rolled over. The young man lay with arms outspread in the meadow grass as the horse got up, and with bridle reins hanging, moved away a few yards. The red horse cropped the meadow grass while the young man lay there.

BEFORE Shaw was the winged white house of San Saba. His eyes swept back across the continent. He saw a young woman laughing happily in front of the grandstand at Hartbridge. A man in a derby hat was pinning a blue ribbon on the bridle of her horse, a ribbon of death.

He turned his face and held his lips against the boy's cheek.

Timmy squirmed.

"God, have mercy!" Shaw said. Tears blinded him.

The boy felt them drop hotly against his neck.

"Why, Grandfather!" he exclaimed.

The roaring came first from the tail. The ship swung sharply, then struck full on the cabin bottom and bounded into the air. It struck again at an angle and with a terrific impact. Shaw felt the safety-belt cut sharply. He clung to the boy, biting into his own lip. The plane was thrown upward, crashed down, tilted dizzily, wrenched forward, tore at the earth and rocks it had struck, and stopped.

Shaw was unable to move, even when he saw the broad shoulders and brown face of March Griffin above him. He let Timmy slide down from his arms.

"You're all right, son," Griffin said. "Come on, Mr. Shaw. I guess my wrist is broken. You'll have to get us out of here. The door is jammed."

Shaw nodded. He felt weakly for the safety-belt clasp.

"You can get out that overhead hatch ahead." Griffin sank into a chair.

"Timmy." Shaw's voice broke. "We're all right. We're down." He saw the brushes of piñon trees against the windows.

Beyond the towering vermilion ridge that cut against the sky east of them were only other ridges running together as if melted under the fierce glare of the afternoon sun. Shaw had trudged up there to look about the country. What he saw left him crestfallen.

HE looked down from the rocky ridge on the yellow plateau Griffin had selected for the landing. The sharp silver wings of the ship, enmeshed in the dark green piñons, caught the gleam of the sun. Those wings would not rise again.

He was not certain in his mind what had happened since he had climbed out of that plane and had felt the earth under his feet. He had pulled Timmy up through the hatch and then given Griffin a helping hand. The pilot could use only his left arm.

March Griffin had said nothing about what he himself had done. "Get the medical kit out," he had told Shaw, "and make a sling or something for my wrist." His face had whitened as Shaw adjusted a splint, which had been constructed from the stiff back of a book. Shaw bandaged the wrist clumsily, and pinned the arm tightly to Griffin's shirt.

"Get the whisky," the pilot said, and Shaw went back in the plane. When he came out with a pint, Griffin took a drink and dropped down in the shade of a piñon. "Isn't there a quart bottle of something in there?"

"Yes," said Shaw, "but—"

"Get it and dump the liquor out. Fill the bottle with that gas that's dripping."

The pilot threw the bottle of gasoline into the embers.

Griffin fumbled with a handkerchief, wiping his forehead.

Timmy's eyes had pain in them. "I'm sorry, March."

March Griffin smiled with only his lips. "Thanks, son. It's not so bad."

Shaw went to get the quart bottle. He climbed out of the plane again as quickly as possible, feeling that his own self-control depended upon his continued absence from that cabin. In it he felt as he did when he was obliged to listen to Timmy dream audibly of Poke-along, of having a horse at San Saba.

But outside, the realization that he had to find a way out of that desert, that Griffin's wrist was broken, that they would need food and water, shelter, dominated his mind. The ridge was the highest point visible, and he had set off to climb it.

Timmy had been working under March Griffin's directions during Shaw's absence. The boy had clambered in and out of the plane for blankets and a water-jug and several maps. When he saw Shaw approaching, he ran toward him.

"Grandfather, did you see any Indians?"

Shaw wiped his face. "There aren't any Indians around here." He told the pilot: "I don't think there's anybody or anything for a long way."

"No sign of a trail?"

Shaw shook his head and stared at the water-jug. "How much have we got?"

"That's a gallon jug," Griffin told him. "It's not half full. There's a quart of milk for the boy."

"Nothing else?"

"The box lunches I got in Kansas City."

"I didn't know you got them," Shaw said.

"I always carry something." The pain in his wrist made Griffin's lips pull down. "The best thing we can do is get plenty of wood for a fire."

Shaw asked quietly: "You got to them all right?"

"I got to them."

"But it can't be more than a hundred miles away."

WITH effort Griffin spread a map on with ground. Both men bent over it. The pilot's thick forefinger traced a line. "That's Concho, and we must be somewhere in here."

"North of the Alvarado, then." Shaw drew his knees up and leaned on them. "Not much in this country, is there?"

"No," said Griffin, "not on the map—nothing."

Shaw took a small drink, and placed the jug against the base of a piñon. "I'll get wood, March. You rest. Timmy will help me."

"I'll help," the boy said. "Daddy and I made a campfire once at Wyckham and played cowboy. Then Miss Hewitt came when it got dark, but Daddy wouldn't let her take me away. We roasted potatoes. Have we got any potatoes in the plane, Grandfather?"

"No," said Shaw.

Griffin walked unsteadily. "We better have the fire over here in this clear place, far enough away from the plane."

"Are we going to sleep by the fire?" Timmy asked hopefully.

"Cowboy style," said March.

"No, like camping out in Maine," Shaw told the boy. "You remember when you went on that yacht trip." He moved close to Griffin. "Forget the cowboys and Indians," he whispered quickly. "He doesn't think of anything else, Lord knows, I wish he would."

Timmy was frowning. "Cowboys have horses, and we don't. We can't be cowboys, or Indians, either."

"Well, we'll have to sleep by the fire," March Griffin said. "There's too much oil and gas around that plane. A spark—" He paused, as if he thought it unnecessary to say more. "We'll want to keep the fire going big. Somebody might fly out from Concho tonight."

"I doubt it," said Shaw. "They'd be here by this time."

A long purple shadow lay under the ridge, growing deeper at the base as the sun went down. There was no wind, and the smoke from the fire stood up straight above them in a thin column that lost itself in the similar shade of the deepening sky.

Shaw got the three box lunches from the cabin. In each there was an apple and two sandwiches, complemented with a thin slice of pickle.

Timmy drained his glass of milk. "What I want to know," he said deliberately, "is how we are going to get out of here."

Griffin smiled. "That's a fair question."

"We'll get out," Shaw assured the boy. "Tomorrow morning I'll start out to find a trail. There must be one some place about."

Timmy's eyes searched his grandfather's face. "It would be better if you had a horse to ride."

"Whoever comes for us will bring horses," said Griffin.

Shaw's voice sounded weak. "No, maybe not. We might not need horses. We might be able to walk out."

The pilot's eyes half closed as he observed the elderly man. "Walk more than a hundred miles?" He stopped abruptly and looked away at the ridge, now almost lost in the fading light.

THE chill of the high desert came with the darkness. Shaw inquired about a flashlight, and Griffin told him where to find one in the pilot-room.

"Don't strike a match in there."

In the plane, Shaw fumbled about the panel instruments. Nothing in that cockpit was alive, nor could life be returned. How March Griffin lived through that destruction, Shaw could not surmise.

He found the flashlight. Turning it on, he took up Griffin's leather jacket. He found his own light overcoat and a small suitcase of Timmy's clothes on the floor of a locker near the tail.

The boy's voice came in faintly through the hatch.

"March wants you to get his gun, Grandfather. Indians might come tonight."

Shaw went forward and looked out. Even at that distance, the boy's tow head

caught the firelight. "Who said Indians might come?"

"Nobody."

"Well, they won't."

"I thought maybe they would—or bears."

"Go back by the fire," Shaw told him with forced gentleness. "There aren't any bears here. There's nothing in this country."

Timmy's voice contained a note of disappointment. He abandoned his idea reluctantly. "Well, it would be good if some cowboys would come riding here and take us away on their horses. Then if there were Indians—"

"Timmy!" Shaw's patience snapped.

The boy turned back slowly. Shaw watched him with increasing guilt. He reproached himself for losing his temper, at the same time listening to the warning that was sounded in his thoughts. He had reached the point where the word "horse" was a dangerous bait.

Shaw kept the two coats for himself. He overrode March Griffin's objection to taking one of the blankets.

"You can't handle a coat with that arm. You can't cover yourself properly."

The pilot was drowsy. Shaw suspected he had taken several drinks of whisky, but said nothing. The man was suffering.

HE put a sweater coat on Timmy. The boy was wide awake, and sat half-covered in his blanket, staring with fascination into the fire.

The world was intensely still. A multitude of pale stars foamed up over the ridge. Shaw thanked God it wasn't winter.

Timmy's voice brought Shaw's head about. The boy's round face was soft and flushed in the glow of the fire.

"I saw an Indian once, Grandfather."

Shaw sucked in his breath.

"No—no, you didn't. You've never seen an Indian."

"Yes, I saw one. He was on a white horse and there were some cowboys after him. They rode right through the paddock at Wyckham and across the hay field. Daddy saw them too. Do you know what happened?"

Shaw thought dismally: "Go on, go on. It's got to end some time. That young mind must be capable of something else."

"Do you know?"

"No," said Shaw, and closed a fist.

"The Indian shot one of the cowboys, but he didn't kill him. He just hurt him a little. Then Daddy came out and gave me a gun and I shot the Indian and all the cowboys were glad. Miss Hewitt told them to come in for supper and we had chocolate cake."

Wearily Shaw knelt down beside the boy. "Lie down on the blanket now."

Timmy put an arm about Shaw's neck. "Grandfather, I love you very much."

When he had got the boy covered, Shaw walked away from the fire and stood looking up at the dim outline of the immense ridge, carved out of starlight.

STRANGELY, hearing that sound, he thought of a bee. It was a faint sound, a soft humming that came out of the night. But suddenly he gave a start. He ran back to the fire and threw wood on it furiously.

"March!"

He heard the sound again. He heard it grow stronger and then die away.

In the darkness, March Griffin muttered: "Plane."

Timmy was sitting up in the blanket. "What is it, Grandfather?"

Shaw almost shouted: "They're looking for us!"

"Be quiet," Griffin told him. He gazed upward. "Listen."

Through that clear, crisp air of the high desert the humming came down to them uninterruptedly. It grew into the fine rich tune of a motor whirling in the perfection of its body. It swelled until it was a roar, and then it diminished and almost died away.

But again it came back, and with their faces upward they followed the course of the singing, until they could make out the tiny lights, green on the right, red on the left. Shaw waved his hat frantically in a signal he knew was useless.

"He must see the fire!" he cried.

Griffin was stumbling about in the rocky darkness of the ground. He came toward the fire, into the circle of light, bent forward to ease the pain of his tortured arm.

"Look out! Get the boy back!" And the pilot threw the quart bottle of gasoline into the embers.

The sudden roar drowned out the sound of the plane, and the flames that shot up above the piñons blinded the two men and the boy. Griffin moved in his awkward way back to his blanket and fell down upon it.

Shaw thought he heard the motor in the sky again. The crackling of the fire

was loud. Perhaps he didn't hear it. By the time the fire had died down, the plane was gone. . . .

Shaw both heard and felt the horses that night.

He thought he felt the thudding before his ears found it.

It came from the south end of the plateau, where the ridge wall curved over toward a broken mesa.

Nothing but horses could make that noise. He heard it grow louder and die away. It did not come back.

For a time he wondered if he too were going to become a victim of horses. Perhaps he was. But not Timmy. Timmy was his now, and there would never be another horse in the boy's life. He had sworn that before. He swore it again.

But another thought haunted Waltman Shaw. He tried to discard it, but the reality of their situation kept it before him.

The thought was: Where there are horses, there is water.

Shaw slept little. For a time he dozed, leaning over his knees. Several times he got up to throw wood on the fire. At last he stretched out as best he could under the two coats. When he opened his eyes again, the first rays of the sun were on the crest of the ridge, capping it with a soft yellow glow.

He saw March Griffin sitting against a fallen tree trunk, the blanket about him. There were shadows under the pilot's staring eyes.

Shaw took the top of the water-jug, filled it and set it on some coals. "A little hot water may help you," he said.

Griffin did not answer. Shaw knew the pain was drawing heavily on the man's reserve.

"I'm going to look for a trail." Shaw bit into the dry sandwich.

"You better look for water," Griffin said huskily. "That will only last today. The heat—"

Shaw thought of the horses running in the night. "I will."

TIMMY sat up, his eyes heavy with sleep. "Are you going to leave us, Grandfather?"

"I'm just going to look about."

"Don't get lost," said Griffin. "Watch for horse tracks. Somebody may have ridden through here."

"An Indian, maybe." Timmy's voice was excited. "Take the gun, Grandfather. Then you won't be afraid."

Shaw said nothing. He had the gun in his pocket. He turned away and started toward the high wall of the ridge, which was still shaded purple under its face. Within a few yards he was out of sight of the fire.

Silence held him. It was a silence he had never known before. He listened and heard nothing. Not even a breath of air stirred in the thick piñons. The sheer face of a red cliff stood up above him, holding its shelf in the sky. In the shadow of that cliff it was cool, and the air had a slight dampness, yet Shaw perspired as he walked. Rocks cut into his oxfords.

He listened for a bird song and heard none. Once he saw a speck moving against the sky, and its pivoting in that azure emptiness made him think of a plane circling. But he knew the speck was an eagle or a buzzard, watching him.

GOING on, he changed his course more to the right, away from the barrier of the ridge. He had taken only a few steps when he heard the plane. It was flying low, and it roared directly over him, a great winged chariot, brilliantly blue against the gleaming sunlight. Shaw waved a handkerchief and his hat. A noise came from his throat. After the ship had passed from sight, he stood there, staring upward until the sound of the motor was lost and the silence of the desert cañon once more engulfed him.

He went on. He had to go on. They could drop food. He wondered about water. Water. There would be no water tomorrow morning, unless they could drop it some way, unless he found water.

Now he was climbing again, pushing on across barren open places, through the narrow aisles of the dark green piñons, between great boulders that shouldered each other in confusion. He was obliged to stop every few yards for breath. Once he picked up a pebble and put it in his mouth. Somewhere he had heard of that trick: The pebble, it was said, would draw moisture. It helped little.

The slope he was ascending steepened, but a glimpse of open sky beyond a serrated crest spurred him on. He tore a leg of his trousers on a prickly bush, and once he slipped and fell, brushing against Spanish bayonet that stung painfully. His shirt clung wet and cold against his hot back.

From that crest he reached he saw a world. It was a world without life. Nothing moved under the glare of the sun, except a thin column of smoke that

Horses would lead the way to water.

stood up in the north to lose itself in the unmarred canopy of the sky. The smoke came from the fire by the fallen plane.

Then something did move. A short way below him, his eyes caught a glimpse of moving yellow, a patch that appeared to hold sunlight, weaving through scraggly piñons.

When he saw the horses, he told himself he was suffering from an illusion. But they were there, three bays, and two grays, the buckskin he had seen first, a paint and two blacks and four palominos. They were grazing on that rough slope, spotted among the desert growth in odd splotches of color.

He put a hand over his eyes. "In all this forgotten country, I can find only wild horses."

The thought was maddening. Suddenly he reached into his pocket and drew out the automatic pistol. He didn't aim. He only pulled the trigger.

The shattering of the silence jerked up the heads of the horses. Almost at once the buckskin began to run. It circled, and as Shaw fired again, it started off along the slope at an angle. The other horses followed.

Shaw emptied the gun, and then he dropped down on a rock. He sat there on that sun-swept height, a gray man who for the first time seemed to feel that he was old, a man wet with perspiration and caked with desert dust, with burning eyes and cracking lips, watching those horses running away across the tilted plateau.

There was beauty in the flash of gray and yellow manes. Swift, sharp hoofs carried those thin hardened bodies through the desert growth as if they were a strange sort of deer.

They were horses. They were wild horses. Shaw told himself they feared him the same way he feared them. But he had hate too, and remorse, and bitterness, and they had only those instincts which told them to run.

He knew he was looking back through the corridors of time. He knew also that he was standing in defiance against a

universal attitude. Mankind worshiped horses. Horses had carried the invading armies that swept east and west through Asia, through Europe, to transpose race and creed and word. The crusaders rode horses. Napoleon rode a horse. Horses brought civilization west. There was that little band of Arabians that Cortez landed through the surf of the Mexican coast, and these wild mares and studs sweeping away before him were descendants of those horses. Horses brought the cattle up the Texas Trail to the new railroad in Kansas, and horses carried Custer to death on the Little Big Horn. In any thought he might have held of America, horses had to be in it.

He asked himself, "Who am I that I may denounce them, hate them and wish their destruction, call them no friend of man?"

He added, "But I shall. I shall stand against them. They have hurt me. They will always hurt me."

Dust floated up where the horses were running. He could no longer see them, but the vision of that mad race would remain with him always. He understood that. He moved his eyes hopelessly over the endless intricate web of angular mesas and colored walls.

His seared throat and the realization of what he had done combined to confuse him. He thought of the water in the jug, knowing that when he returned he could allow himself no more than a small cupful. Unless the plane had succeeded in dropping water—

In his madness he had destroyed the only opportunity he had for discovering water. He might have followed those horses. He might have crept after them, like an Indian stalking game, until they led him to water. He had betrayed Timmy and March Griffin. He was a madman, a fool.

He was not much calmer as he started back down the ridge. Occasionally he saw his own footprints, but he made no attempt to follow them, and soon he drifted away from them. He followed a course of least resistance that led him farther toward the upper end of the cañon than he had been before.

THE hoof-prints didn't look like a horse's at first. They were small and misshapen, and in places no more than peculiar markings in the powdery earth. But they led away, winding through the piñons and cactus and sparse grass, in a narrow beaten path.

Shaw became excited. He had a vision of running water. He thought he could hear it, roaring in a cataract over the rocks. He kept his scorched eyes on the promising path, fear still gripping him.

The horse trail clung to the slope, turning upward or downward for short distances at intervals. Almost always Shaw had a view of the cañon below, and he saw that the cañon floor was rising to the path. The opposite wall was closing in against the slope.

The spring lay under a billowing uplift of cold gray rock. The path ended at a small clear place that was like a roofless room whose walls and floor were of that impregnable gray stone. The only way in or out was on that tiny beaten trail which sharp hoofs had made in countless peregrinations.

Lying there, his lips to the water, Shaw did not think of horses. He was oblivious to the hoof marks at the edge of the spring, the small bunches of hair that clung to the undergrowth about the opening, the strong odor. He thought only that he had found water which would save them, water that would relieve Griffin and keep Timmy from suffering.

BUT later he did think of horses. He thought of them as he trudged along the path, watching the hoof-tracks. He thought of the thudding that came in the night, and he trembled inwardly.

The path led him back down into the cañon. He understood that it ran close to the route he had taken when he started out, for he saw a crag that had impressed itself upon his memory.

A glint of silver in the trees ahead brought him to a sudden stop. The path to the spring passed within a hundred yards of the plane!

When he saw that, he understood the thudding. The horses which had come in the night were going to the spring when they saw the fire, perhaps caught the man scent and the mysterious smells of oil and gasoline, and stampeded.

He hurried on toward the camp, and he saw Timmy playing with some rocks near the fire. Griffin lay on the blanket beneath the piñon.

Shaw called out one word: "Water!"

The boy leaped up. "Grandfather, the plane came and dropped things. March and I had a whole can of peaches."

Griffin lifted himself. "They don't quench thirst—much."

Shaw took the boy in his arms. He saw the two white sacks.

"They dropped them over there." Timmy pointed toward the ridge. "We went and got them. I carried one myself."

Griffin said slowly. "The one with water in smashed all to pieces. Hit a sharp rock and cut wide open."

"I found water," Shaw told him, "up here at the end of the cañon."

"Follow a horse trail? Or what?"

Shaw bent over Timmy. The boy's lower lip had cracked. "You can have all the water you want. We'll fix that lip." He moved toward the sacks, answering Griffin: "I just happened to run onto a spring under some rocks."

The pilot took an envelope from his pocket. "Here's the note from the sack. We're pretty bad off."

Shaw read it aloud, slowly:

You are ninety miles from Concho City. Stay where you are. Pack outfit started this morning. Will reach you three days, unless river rises. Will fly over again today. Wave white flag if injured and will try give you medical supplies. More food tomorrow morning. Good work giving signals. A. Hanson. UX Airlines.

Timmy danced. "March said cowboys would come for us with horses."

NALTMAN folded the note. His face, marked with caked dust, was haggard. "If there are horse trails out, we might start walking."

"Walking, hell!" March Griffin's eyes burned. "I'm not walking in this condition, and that kid can't walk over country like this in sandals."

The firmness of Shaw's face frightened the boy. He stared at his grandfather. When he spoke, he was obliged to draw upon his courage. "Did you see any Indians?"

Shaw laughed emptily. "Yes," he said thickly, "Indians, Indians everywhere." Then he sat down beside the sacks and shook his head. "No, son, I didn't. I didn't see a thing on this earth. Only I was alive out there."

Griffin's voice was quiet. "There's bacon and canned beans there."

"I'll cook it. I'll warm the beans."

"Timmy knows how," March Griffin said. "He knows how to cook bacon. I didn't want him fooling around the fire."

Now no fear remained in the boy's eyes. "I know how to do it. Daddy showed me how cowboys cook bacon on a stick, when we were camping."

"Yes." Shaw got up. "I'll eat something and then go back with the jug to the spring." He knew Griffin was watching him.

THE days had a similarity that left nothing for contemplation. Nights brought only silver-sharp stars, cool piñon-scented air, and a silence that seemed even nearer perfection than that of the days.

For the first time Shaw had sworn in Timmy's presence. He had felt morose afterward, and he had gone away from the camp, taking the newspapers with him.

The newspapers the plane dropped on the third day had made him swear. He had been obliged to let Timmy see them. Timmy couldn't read the stories, but he could understand the pictures.

"There's Daddy!" Timmy had exclaimed joyously. "And there's me! And you, Grandfather! Who's the lady on the horse?"

Shaw had not answered for a moment. "Just a lady who won a prize at a horse show." He felt something cut sharply at his throat.

The pilot turned away and said nothing.

Alone beyond sight of the camp, Shaw's fury tore at him. It was all there. Everything was. Did they have to resurrect the family history just because he had cracked up? Did they have to open graves? He failed to see any justification for publishing those pictures. The stories were just as bad. The death of Marion and George was no longer news.

"Died after winning blue ribbon. . . . Killed at a jump while training new horse . . . retired industrialist in desert crash . . . heroic pilot lands plane in cañon . . . trio sighted lost in desert . . . food and water dropped by mercy plane . . . desert men breaking through to wilderness rescue . . . cow ponies will carry helpless trio to safety."

Shaw crumpled the paper. The word "Helpless" clung to his lips.

His eyes burned with the vision of those news photos. He had thought they had been printed for the last time. His son's death closed that chapter of life—that horse chapter. It was that. Nothing more: A horse killed her. A horse killed him.

Out of the rage that filled him rose a new fear. He could not bear to see Timmy get on a horse. He could not endure the sight of the boy riding over those paths cut on the fringes of cañons by

wild horses. Timmy was all he had, and if he let him ride to his death—

When at last he had got hold of himself somewhat, he considered the subject of an auto-gyro. He reasoned that it should be possible for one to land and take off somewhere near by. He had read of one landing on the roof of a building.

"If there was some way to get a message out," he thought. He would buy an auto-gyro. He would buy two of them if one wasn't enough. . . . Timmy's shrill voice brought him to his feet.

"Grandfather, Grandfather, the cowboys! The cowboys are coming!"

Trembling, Shaw started through the late afternoon tree shadows to the boy.

Timmy burst upon him from between two piñons. "We saw them, Grandfather! I saw them first. They're up there on the ridge, coming down."

"All right." He took the boy's hand.

"March said they were real cowboys."

"Yes, yes, yes." Leading Timmy, he started toward the camp.

There were two men in leather chaps, men with deeply browned faces, riding ahead of the other horses. The taller of the two had round black eyes that danced pleasantly. The short man had only one eye. It was pale blue. A shock of sunburned hair fell over his forehead when he removed his hat.

The third man was an Indian. His long black hair was clamped at a knot at the back of his head. He wore a bright blue velvet blouse, tan trousers and boots with sharp heels and squared toes.

The tall cowboy swung down from his horse first. "I'm Herb Dowell, Mr. Shaw. My partner here is Alvin Lyle. You're kind of lucky, aint you?"

SHAW took the man's rough hand and shook it silently for a moment. "You got here—"

"Thank Natani Begay, there," Dowell said, "Only an Indian could find this place."

Timmy's voice burst shrilly. "An Indian!"

Dowell smiled and looked at March Griffin. "Bunged you one, huh?"

The pilot nodded. "My wrist. I held the stick a little too long—or tried to." His lips curved in a pale grin.

Timmy tugged at his grandfather's belt. "A real Indian, Grandfather? Can I talk to him?"

"Yes, yes . . . Now what are your plans, Mr. Dowell?"

The tall man looked toward Natani Begay. "He says we better rest here tonight and start tomorrow. I reckon it's in his hands. He can smell a wild horse track a mile off, and there aint nothing else to follow in this country."

Lyle laughed. "You picked a tough place to fall down in." His pale blue eye fastened itself on Timmy, and he told Shaw, "Kind of nice boy you got there. Reckon him and me will get along. I got one about the same size that can already ride anything with hair on it."

"I can ride." Timmy's voice was defiant. "I've got a horse named Poke-along."

Shaw moved a hand across his eyes. "We can all ride. . . . I wanted to ask: How far is it to a road?"

Begay answered: "Ninety miles. Concho."

GRIFFIN turned back to the blanket and sat down.

"Seems like a hundred and ninety when you ride it." Dowell dropped his big saddle to the ground. "Why?"

"Nothing," Shaw told him. "Nothing. I just wondered."

Timmy moved closer to Begay. "Did you ever scalp anybody?"

The Indian showed white teeth in a grin. He laughed softly and looked at Shaw's strained face with obsidian eyes that were bright with amusement. "You tell the boy bad stories about Indians, eh?" He put a copper hand on Timmy's shoulder. "What color is your horse? What you call him?"

"Poke-along. He's bay and he stands nine hands." The boy turned quickly to Shaw. "Where's the newspaper, Grandfather? I want to show him the picture of Poke-along and me."

Shaw sat down. His face was wet. He wiped it, then covered it with his hands.

"Say, you're kind of sick," Dowell said. "You better—"

"Grandfather, maybe when we get to San Saba, these men will come out to see Poke-along and me. We can ride—" Timmy's excitement choked him. He ran to Shaw. "Grandfather, Daddy said sometime I would go out West and ride with cowboys and Indians." Quickly concern troubled the boy's flushed face. "Grandfather, Poke-along will be there at San Saba, won't he? Won't he, Grandfather?"

Shaw nodded slowly. He did not look up at the men. "Yes," he said almost inaudibly. "Yes. We'll get Poke-along for you," he said.

"*No te amo*," said Hud. "Will you marry me?"

The Story Thus Far:

OLD Huddleston Jones cut loose. And the vitality that had made him a power in the world, a magnate of mines and lumber, blazed now against his son: "Listen! I've handed you every chance a man ever gave a son. You scraped through college. What did you get? A degree that smells to heaven of your crammer's midnight oil. And the nickname, *Eagle!* Eagle Jones! Hell! The only living bonehead to have cracked up three planes without breaking his silly neck, and they call you *Eagle!* And now you've broken off your engagement to a girl who might have made something of you. . . . Where will I ship you?"

"Anywhere you like," said his son promptly. "I don't care whether it's hog-bristles in China, or copper on the Bahr el Jebel, or that mahogany mix-up in South America."

His father gave a derisive snort. "Paitura? That's a laugh! You'd go there?"

"Yes—anywhere."

"Then step along to the cashier. Tell him to wangle a passport for you. Draw two thousand for expenses and go, damn it!"

Huddleston Jones, Jr., went—flew his plane to Paitura, met his father's representative Derwent there, and started negotiations for a tract of mahogany in the distant jungle. . . . He had to mark time for some weeks, and amused himself with plane flights in the neighborhood. Then the deal was closed, and he wired his father—but received the reply:

YOUR JOB JUST STARTED CLOSE OFFICE PERMANENTLY DRAW PLENTY CASH SECURE EVERY AVAILABLE MULE AT RAILHEAD AND GET TO THE PROPERTY . . . . THEN START FELLING MAHOGANY HURRY . . . .

All right, Hud would hurry—go by plane instead of mule-back. And that decision changed his life; for a local girl named Paca, whose brother Hud had taken on short flights, stowed away in his plane, thinking this was just another neighborhood jaunt. Moreover he ran into a storm and made a forced landing in a tree deep in the Brazilian jungle. Neither Hud nor Paca was hurt. And

Stand Thou Still

An aviator from the States makes a forced landing at a strange Confederate colony in Brazil.

By GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

they made their way to a strange old wilderness estate, the Fazenda do Macho, peopled by the descendants of Confederate refugees who settled there after the Civil War. Intermarriage had weakened the stock. Only the patriarch Boling Brecht and his granddaughter Frances showed the sturdy stuff of the original pioneers. And Frances—"But I'm not Miss Brecht," she said to Hud when he thus addressed her. "I'm married to Felton McCrae." *(The story continues in detail:)*

"MARRIED?" breathed Hud. Then he murmured, "I'm sorry," and his cheeks began to redden.

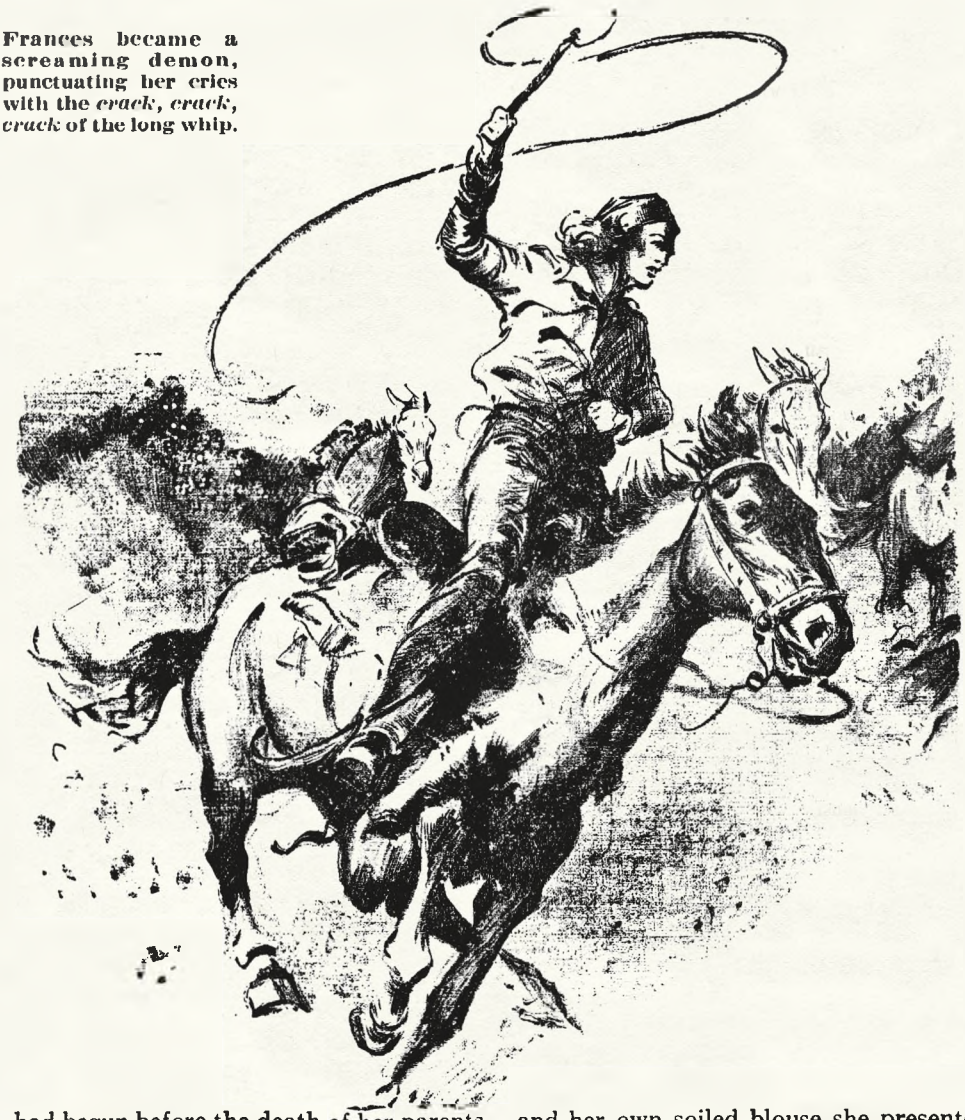
Frances felt her eyes widening. She tried to take them off him and couldn't. She had a feeling they were new eyes she hadn't had a chance to learn to manage. Then she heard her voice—not the voice of the shell in which she lived, but of her honest inner self; and to her horror it spoke casually, as if truth need never be ashamed of nakedness.

"I'm sorry too."

Release came to her at once. She hurried away, and the sweep of her wide skirt reminded him he was stranded in a bygone age. A moment ago he had felt stunned; now he was cheered. What difference did it make that she was married? Why should it excite him that she should be sorry? Why should he have this feeling of being tossed up and down? Was he in love? He jeered at himself, but kept looking at the spot where she had stood as though he still saw her.

Frances went straight to the great house, ignoring the murmured pleas of women and children it was her custom to answer and satisfy. Why had she confessed to a stranger she was sorry she was married? Because it was true, because it had been true for months before he dropped from the sky to confound her. She was dismayed by the swiftness of events in a single morning. Never before on Fazenda do Macho had anything hurried—neither man nor animal, nor time nor fate.

She remembered the long approach to her marriage with Felton McCrae. It

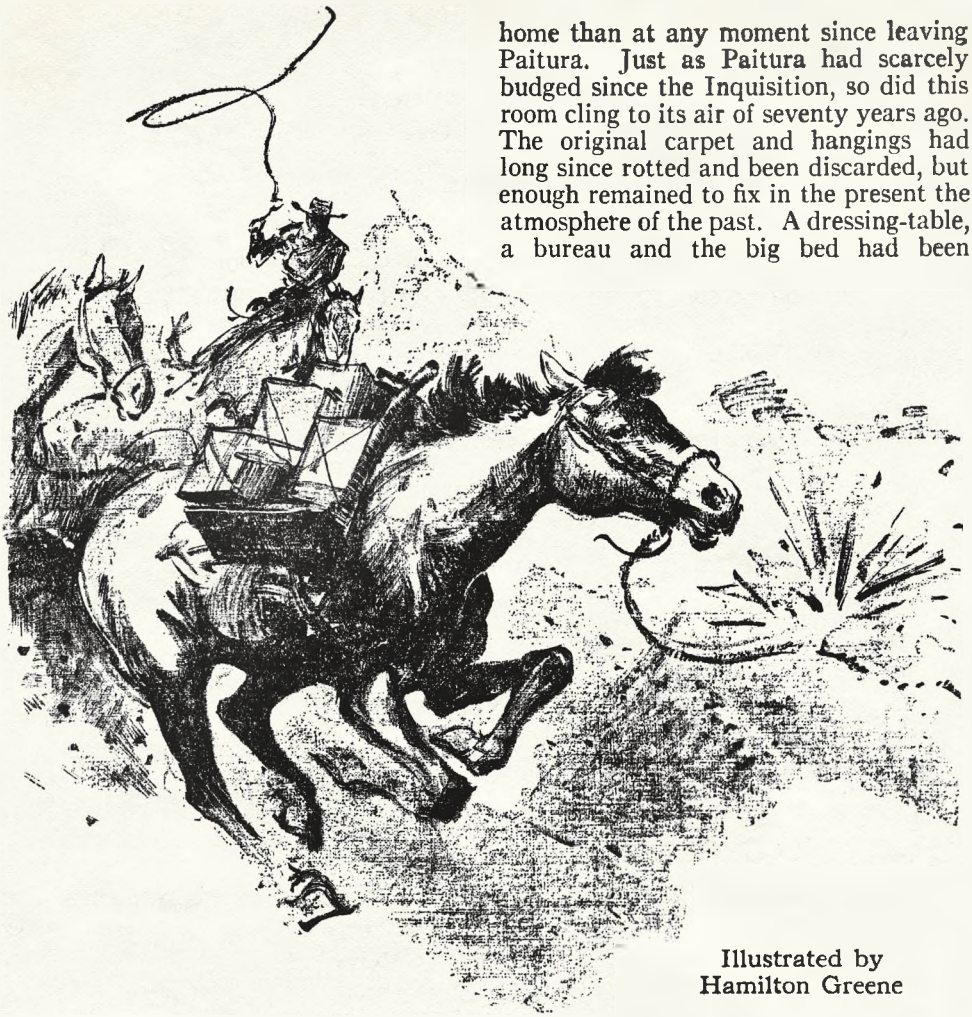


Frances became a screaming demon, punctuating her cries with the *crack, crack, crack* of the long whip.

had begun before the death of her parents and dragged along for years. In a country where girls commonly married at sixteen, she had waited until she was twenty-four; and three of those eight years of postponement had been given over to deliberation, to family argument or secret talks with her grandfather. His attitude had been hers—delay, wait; perhaps a miracle would happen. But before the miracle could come, Felton had grown restless. His only strength lay in the fact he was the one available suitor; and seizing upon the chance visit of a missionary he had played his ace meanly, with no pretense of passion. Either Frances would marry him at once, or he would go away. So she had married. . . .

Upon returning to the house she came upon Paca sitting on a bench on the veranda. Paca had cleaned up to the best of her ability, but her hair was still tangled; and in her brother's torn suit and her own soiled blouse she presented a mournful picture. She raised her eyes, but so profound was her misery they seemed not to see Frances. They were black seas of unshed tears; but her eyelashes, fantastically long, curled away from them as if denying a share in their distress. But her silence made their appeal irresistible. Frances touched her, and indicated she was to follow.

Fazenda do Macho was a feudal relic. Labor and time were words without meaning. Centuries ago its timbers had been hewn in the lowlands and brought on mules from far away. Its sun-dried tiles were the product of a local clay-pit. Its thick walls were made of *taipa,* square bricks of mud calcimined with lime inside and out. The only access to the general living-quarters was by the stairs from the great living-room. The only way into the living-room was through the



Illustrated by
Hamilton Greene

veranda. The veranda could be reached only from the court; and the only entrance into the court, save for a single secret door, was through the western gate. The gate controlled the goings and comings of every man, woman, child or beast.

Within this vast shell over a hundred people could live in comfort. Visitors were rare. Whites or landowners were entertained within the house itself. All others, principally muleteers, hung their hammocks in the *posada,* a great shed opening on the court. On the ground floor, on each side of the stair leading up to the general living-quarters, was a spacious bedroom, with storerooms beyond. Grandfather Brecht occupied the southern one, Frances with her husband the other. Upstairs, a narrow hall was flanked by numerous bedrooms. One of these had been assigned to Hud; and another, at the end of the hall, to Paca.

Frances led the way to her own room; and upon entering it, Paca felt more at home than at any moment since leaving Paitura. Just as Paitura had scarcely budged since the Inquisition, so did this room cling to its air of seventy years ago. The original carpet and hangings had long since rotted and been discarded, but enough remained to fix in the present the atmosphere of the past. A dressing-table, a bureau and the big bed had been brought piecemeal from the homeland. The bed looked strange only because woven strips of rawhide had replaced worn-out springs and mattress; but a small black rocking-chair had survived intact, as had a large mildewed mirror. The clearest note was struck by the pictures, particularly a photograph in a weathered leather case on the bureau.

The moment Paca's eyes fell on it, she realized where Frances had got the inspiration for her frock. The girl in the picture was Grandmother Brecht at the age of fourteen. She stood very straight in a tucked bodice with a ruffle at the neck. From her hips a widely belled skirt with black taffeta ruffles hung almost to the ground. Over this was an apron, more dainty than useful. Even the child's hair was done as Frances now did hers.

Back of the bedroom was the long storeroom from which Frances issued daily rations of provisions. Felton Mc-

Crae had partitioned off a small compartment, where he could sulk and sometimes sleep. Frances looked into it to make sure he was not there, then dropped the bar on the door leading into the living-room. From a homemade clothes-press she took out several articles of wear and laid them on the bed. Immediately Paca perceived why Frances' skirt was so bouffant. The effect was not due to hoops, but to starched petticoats—three of them! At a gesture from Frances, Paca began to strip. Under her blouse she wore a silk slip, the first Frances had ever seen. She fingered it, and her eyes grew round.

The two girls were drawn together in more senses than one. Frances felt only admiration for the smooth ivory of Paca's skin and the startling darkness of her eyes and lashes. For a moment Paca, half-blinded by Frances' golden radiance, forgot her jealousy. She took up a horn comb, and standing before the mirror, worked at her matted hair until it became a black nimbus of tumbling waves. She watched Frances in the mirror, and gradually her eyes half closed and her lips hovered just short of a smile. She dropped the comb, and omitting the petticoats, started to put on the skirt. Frances protested, but Paca only laughed. Making fast the band of the skirt, she put on the bodice over it, and picking up her brother's belt, drew it tight around her waist. The stretched bodice became a jacket with a little flounce just above her hips.

Frances stared; then a flush began to mount into her cheeks. It wasn't that Paca had bloomed into beauty more suddenly than any flower; what troubled her was something else. Though dressed from neck to heel, Paca seemed more completely revealed than the children who ran around unclothed in the courtyard. Bodice and skirt, worn as Paca was wearing them, emphasized every plane and fullness of her body. Frances felt vaguely ashamed. While she was putting away the petticoats, Paca picked up the things she had taken off, murmured her thanks and left the room.

AT Fazenda do Macho the six-o'clock supper was the big meal of the day. There was not much variety. Jerked beef, pork and chicken were the meats, invariably accompanied by rice and black beans. Flour ground from roasted mandioc was sifted over the beans and also was the foundation for the rusks. The only alcoholic drink was *caxaca,* raw cane rum. Clay water bottles called *moringues* were spaced along the table and stood on every windowsill throughout the house. Black coffee was not only an after-dinner beverage; it was served at all hours of the day or night. A special servant roasted and ground it daily, in the open on account of the smoke. The fragrance of roasting coffee-beans hovered like a benediction over the baser odors of the courtyard.

THAT evening Paca's entrance had a mixed effect. Though old Boling Brecht scarcely noticed her, Hud felt transported back to Paitura and the moment when he had first seen her. How could he possibly have thought this girl ugly, under the imbu tree, only hours ago? All the other men—Boling Black, Felton McCrae, Reardon and Wilbur Brecht—stirred uneasily. They were conscious of some change in Paca, but their minds and eyes were too lazy to take its measure. There was plenty of time—why hurry? During the meal nobody spoke; after it old Mr. Brecht drew Hud to his side.

"Boy," he said, "let's talk."

"What about?" asked Hud.

Mr. Brecht considered before he answered: "Anything. Talk big and talk small. I'd like to hear you whisper, but mostly I'd like to hear you shout—yell at somebody and tell 'em to go to hell." Hud laughed. "That's it—laugh!" exclaimed the old man. "It's good to hear a laugh that doesn't squirm like a wet worm, that's strong and round."

Frances, sitting beyond her grandfather, looked up from her sewing. "Is that fair to me?"

"You, Fran? Of course not! You laugh like a mocking-bird and chuckle as good as a parrot. I was thinking of the men around here—only the men."

"What shall we talk about?" asked Hud nervously.

"Tell him how you got here," suggested Frances.

Hud welcomed the chance to square himself with her. He began with the take-off at Paitura, told of the storm, of his discovery of Paca, and how he had fought to get back. To his surprise, Mr. Brecht showed no interest; apparently he drowsed. But Frances forgot to sew. She leaned farther and farther forward, her eyes fastened on the truth in Hud's face. He told how he had dropped Paca in the 'chute, and arrived finally at the

crash. The minute he began to describe the gorge and his escape by way of the thorn tree and the cleft, Boling Brecht came to life. He knew that gorge, that tree; he had descended that very cleft—they were woven into the web of his own youth. He began to talk, to tell of things he had done and seen. When the candles had been lighted, he peered wistfully into Hud's face.

"Where are you bound from here?" he asked.

"Nowhere," said Hud after a pause. "I was headed for Iquitos; but Iquitos must be two thousand miles away. How long would it take to get there?"

Frances answered: "From here to railhead, two weeks by mule-train. Three days to reach the coast. Few steamers stop at Bahia. You might have to wait weeks for a freighter to Belem. From there I've heard it's over a thousand miles up the Amazon. With luck you might get from here to Iquitos in two months."

"Too late," said Hud; "so there's no sense in my going—anywhere."

Mr. Brecht turned his head sharply. "Heh?" he exclaimed. "You're joking, aren't you? You must be going somewhere; when do you have to start?"

"I'll have to think a long time before I decide where I want to go," said Hud. "There's no hurry, and there's no reason why I should go anywhere."

"Then stay," begged Mr. Brecht. "It won't be long now; stay until I die."

"That may be for years," said Hud with a smile, "but I'll consider it on one condition."

"Name it," said Mr. Brecht.

"Though I brought no provisions with me, I happen to have money. My condition is that you let me pay board."

"Stick to that," said the old man testily, "and you leave tomorrow. Fazenda do Macho sells everything except food and lodging."

"Now, don't get sore, sir," said Hud. "I didn't mean to insult you. But what about Jackman? He wandered here too."

"Different. He's a cracker, and he's working for his keep."

"All right," said Hud; "I'll work for mine. When do I start in?"

Mr. Brecht smiled. "Now," he said. "Your job is talking to me—talking by the day, week and month."

HUD accepted, and it proved an easy job. Since Mr. Brecht rose late, slept often and tired easily, Hud's time was his own. He wandered from one department of the *fazenda* to another. He made a trip with Idelfonso for water and regretted it. They started at sunset and got back at six in the morning. The outward journey was eighteen miles, and they reached its end a little before midnight. The gorge still persisted, but its side was not quite so precipitous. A switchback path, so steep the burros looked as if they were standing on their ears, descended to a point from which the kerosene tins could be lowered into a quiet backwater. For Hud, the return to the *fazenda* was sheer agony. His heels blistered so he could scarcely walk; and to his shame Idelfonso finally persuaded him to mount one of the loaded donkeys. Relief was short. The jutting prongs of the pack-saddle bruised his back, and the sharp edges of the tins chafed his legs. By the time they reached home, he was a wreck.

DAYS passed. The four watchers continued their waiting. They never spoke to Hud, but their eyes had become alive enough to slant at Paca from time to time. Outside, the natives looked up at the cloudless sky and called it ugly. *"Como é feio!"* they would exclaim, praying for rain. Jackman proved himself worthy of being promoted to the rank of *capataz,* and as foreman was admitted to the family table. Upon his first appearance Mr. Brecht hesitated, but out of respect for the cloth, whatever its weave, asked him to say grace. Jackman's horse-face reddened with embarrassment, then flamed with ardor as he launched into exhortation.

"Too long," commented Mr. Brecht, and never asked him again.

Jackman would let his eyes dwell frankly on Frances; but when they looked at Paca, slyness would creep into them as if he were conscious of wrong-doing. Her regained beauty had its effect on Hud also. He took more pains than ever to stay out of her way, but now it wasn't so easy to banish her from mind. As far as her giving him away was concerned, he no longer worried. What did she know? Probably she had never heard of Huddleston Jones, Incorporated; so what could she tell? Nevertheless an aura of danger hung about her. It was indefinable but constant, and affected more people than himself. The one way to escape it was to avoid her, to try to stop thinking of her. Frances was another matter. He would have liked to be alone

with her, but she was either too busy or too clever at evasion.

When she was present, she diminished Paca, practically obliterated her. Here on Fazenda do Macho all the tovings with flesh and emotions of his crowd in New York seemed like a dream. He smiled, trying to imagine anybody getting fresh with Frances McCrae. She permeated the life of the ranch. Her body radiated health; and health distilled energy; and energy in that household gave her a monopoly of power. At her command fifty people wove an intricate pattern while half a hundred more lazily awaited their turn. No demand that everybody work—only the daily handing out of the jobs that had to be done. Need was the only driver.

COULD philosophy be simpler? Yet Hud heard daily a despairing call for hurry on the part of God if not of man. Old Mr. Brecht had no idea how many thousand head of cattle he owned; but from north, south and east came reports they were dying of thirst at the rate of a hundred a day. The buzzards were gorged. No longer did they spiral in the sky so one could spot the carcasses in a ten-mile radius. The birds weren't flying; they couldn't. They were on the ground, waddling from feast to feast. Reardon, Boling Black, Wilbur and Felton accepted destiny with an effortless shrug. It was Frances who rode out at the head of the weary *vaqueiros* to see what could be done.

Dressed all in leather as they were dressed, she was one of them, yet how different! The flat hat of thick leather, bound under the chin with a thong, actually became her. Hanging from her squared shoulders, the short jumper of tanned deerskin had an almost jaunty appearance. Trousers of the same soft leather fitted her slender legs like tights, and ended in heavy flaps over the arch of the insteps to protect them against raking cactus. She looked like a boy.

The *vaqueiros*, as daring as any cowboys on earth, slouched and swung to the lope of their wiry ponies. But Frances seemed built into her willing mount, as much a part of the little stallion as his arched neck, flaming nostrils and flying mane. Hud watched her go, and was waiting when she came back, the light wiped out of her eyes and face. He moved forward as if to help her down, but the sweating stallion squealed, reared and struck at him like a boxer, barely missing his ribs. Frances slid off and flipped the reins to a waiting stable-boy.

"There isn't anything you can do," she said wearily. "If Jackman needs a hundred hands to chop enough cactus for the home stock, only a couple of hundred head, how many men would it take to clear the stuff of thorns for fifty thousand cattle on the range?"

"When I was in the gorge I heard falls," said Hud. "How far are they away?"

She glanced at him impatiently. "You take us for fools, don't you? The falls aren't far, but they're lower than our land; the river is lower than our land for a hundred miles."

"Then why run cattle on such a range? Don't be angry with me; just tell me."

"You don't know Fazenda do Macho," she answered. "Wait—wait until the rains drench it. You'll see a miracle—the desert turning into a land of milk and honey before your eyes."

"If it happens soon enough," said Hud.

Frances saw Felton McCrae watching them from the shadow of the veranda, and she resented his stolid unblinking stare. "That's true," she admitted, and lingered. "Yes, you're right; it's got to happen soon."

"I have a favor to ask," said Hud. "If you ride again, would you mind taking me along?"

"Of course not."

"When?"

"Not tomorrow. The next day, if you like, but I warn you it won't be pleasant."

Chapter Seven

PACA had her moments of diversion, for her silent presence had begun to work like a yeast. Now Jackman ogled her openly. Wilbur and Reardon roused out of their lethargy and let their lazy eyes play over her. Even Felton McCrae occasionally would shift his gaze from old Mr. Brecht and envelop her in a stare like the touch of cloying fingers.

When Boling Brecht felt the urge to talk alone with Hud, he made no bones about getting rid of his male relatives. Impotent rage made them quiver like lumps of pale jelly, but they went. Paca could stay because she still understood no English; and Frances, passing through the room on her many errands, would see the girl's great eyes fixed on Hud with a strangely active immobility. There was something shocking in the openness with which they enveloped and strove to pos-

sess him, seeing nothing else, caring not who saw. Frances felt a resentment she couldn't fathom. . . .

When Hud appeared for his first ride, Frances' look was so frankly maternal it made him laugh.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Can you spare that shirt?"

"Yes," he answered, puzzled.

"What about a hat?"

"I had one, but it's gone. Anyway, I hate to wear a hat."

"You will today, and spurs too."

"I'll do whatever you say," said Hud. They brought him one of the heavy leather hats and showed him how to adjust the thong under his chin; but when he saw the huge rowels on the silver-mounted spurs, he protested: "I can't wear those; at home I'd be arrested."

"They're not for spurring so much as for holding on," she explained. "You couldn't hurt the horse with them."

He smiled at her calling the pony a horse; but the moment he was astride it, he knew he held a concentrated power-plant between his knees. They rode out at an easy gait into the blaze of the merciless sun. She studied his horsemanship and approved of it; to her dismay, she approved of everything about him with an approbation which only a week ago she wouldn't have dreamed she could have accorded any human being. He was new, something never completely imagined by her inexperience. So it was thus a man ought to look and act and talk! Without wishing it or knowing how it had come about, she was his friend.

As they passed the imbu tree, Hud spoke indignantly of its hacked trunk.

"That's why it has leaves," she said. "Wounding a tree, if you don't girdle it, seems to make it fight twice as hard for life. This one has been hacked deeper and deeper ever since before I can remember, and it's healthier and bigger now than ever. Look, the fruit is ripe. That pale yellow one—pick it and try it."

He did. It was a tart and luscious plum that seemed to mock his thirst of only a few days ago. "You know a lot, don't you?" he said.

She looked at him quickly to discover if he were making fun of her, but was reassured. "I know the things I need to know," she said. . . .

The acacias, with leaves so tiny they cast no shade, had a steel-like quality. Like steel springs they seemed to stretch out to bury their fishhook claws in his shirt, enforcing their wait-a-bit com-

BOLING
BRECHT

mand. Ahead of him Frances ducked and slithered unscathed through overhanging branches. Here was the reason for the hat and the leather jumper with long sleeves ending in flaps over her hands. She was encased as though in armor, offering no purchase to the convex thorns. Frequently she stopped to wait for him. Her eyes, half mocking, half regretful, regarded his shirt.

"Perhaps you'd better take it off, and the one under it."

"What for? They're ruined already."

"I wasn't worrying about the shirts," she said patiently, "but about your skin. It's the shirts that give the thorns a chance to catch. Without them, you'd save yourself a lot of scratches."

"No, thanks," he answered shortly.

Fortunately the country was fairly open, but now they began to border a vast thicket. At first glance it seemed a wall, but presently took on depth and transparency. Interlaced amid the acacias were the limbs of bulkier trees, making an agonized pattern of dead gray bones against the sky. Radiating heat waves quivered visibly above the thicket's wide expanse. A plaintive wailing almost like the baying of a hound came to their

ears. Frances quickened the pace, and turning an angle, they came upon a week-old calf, bellowing beside its dead mother. At sight of them it trotted hopefully forward, then broke and ran.

"Wait here!" called Frances as she put spurs to her pony.

The calf dodged through the wall of the thicket. Scarcely believing his eyes, Hud saw Frances ride straight for the spot at a full gallop. Head down and shoulders hunched, she hit the wall at the exact point where the calf had disappeared. His own pony trotted forward, mincing on his toes, tense and waiting for a touch or word of command. Hud reined him in. He could watch what was happening as through a veil. Deep within the thicket he would catch the flicker of the calf, and a second later horse and rider would pass like a bullet on the way to its mark. The calf emerged, and Frances with it.

"Head him," she screamed, "oh, head him!"

The long-legged calf passed so close Hud could have touched him. Unbidden, his pony leaped into pursuit, but the first thorn tree, seizing on Hud's cursed shirt with a hundred fishhooks, hurled him ignominiously to earth. As he fell, the jerk on the bridle checked the pony, and the calf dashed into the thicket again, passing under a heavy branch barely four feet above the ground. Hud scrambled to his feet and saw Frances making for the spot.

"You're crazy!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

He saw her disappear from the saddle, only one foot showing, its long-shanked spur locked on the cantle. Then a miracle happened. Her pony flattened, actually spread out like a flying bat and sailed under the heavy branch. Again came the weaving of the brown bolt through the thicket, and again the emerging calf; but this time Hud's pony was not hampered by a sappy rider. He headed the calf into the open and kept him there. Frances drew level, leaned over, tailed the little beast, caught it off balance with its rear feet in air and threw it. It fell full length with a thud that knocked the breath from its body. Her horse, sinking on his haunches, slid to a stop. The next instant, rope in hand, she was sitting on the calf's head and leaning over to hog-tie its long, quiescent legs.

Hud rushed up to her, more breathless than she. "My God," he gasped, "how did you do it?"

She looked up at him, laughter in her eyes. "If a *vaqueiro* and his horse can't go where a calf goes," she said, "he's no rider and doesn't deserve a horse. Of course there's a trick to it."

"What trick?"

"Follow the calf."

Hud laughed. "Simple as that, eh? I ought to have thought of it myself."

Her face sobered. "I'm not joking. It's the one rule you must never forget, and the only way through." Kneeling beside the calf, she laid her hand on its throbbing heart as though to calm it. "Poor thing," she murmured, "*you'll* never be hungry as long as you live." She looked up at Hud. "It's a heifer. Lift her up to me, please."

She mounted and took the calf in her lap, its awkward knotty legs dangling from the withers of the sturdy stallion. The other pony stood motionless close by. Hud went toward it gropingly. Something cataclysmic had just happened. He couldn't put his finger on the exact instant, but he knew it had divided the whole of life into before and after. His inner vision became as clear as crystal and as certain as a running brook, bringing contentment and peace to his soul. He loved Frances McCrae. That simple conclusion filled his heart with happiness, leaving room for no other thought.

For miles they rode in silence, making their way back to the trail that bordered the river. They paused to rest in the shade of the imbu tree. It had suited him not to talk, but now he wondered why she also should have been content with silence. Feeling his eyes upon her, she turned toward him and smiled.

"A terrible thing has happened," he said, not answering her smile.

"What?" she asked, her hazel eyes laughing at him. "Your shirt?"

"No. I love you. I never dreamed I could love anybody the way I love you."

IT was as though he had struck her a mortal blow. Laughter deserted her face; it slowly began to fill with fear. He had seen people in the grip of terror —Paca, for instance—but never anything approaching this steadily mounting dismay of the hidden soul. It shook Frances from head to foot.

"I'm married," she breathed, accusation in her whisper.

He heard the words but ignored them. "I didn't mean to frighten you," he said. "Why do you take it like that? I'm not asking anything—there's simply nothing

more in the world I want. I'm happy. What is there to be frightened about? It isn't something I could have stopped any more than I could order rain to fall up instead of down. It just happened, so I told you."

"I'm married," she repeated almost soundlessly.

"So is this tree we're under," he said, looking straight into her eyes, still wide with fear. "Just as you're married, this tree is married to the soil for all its life. Does that make it a crime for me to stand in its shade? Does it?"

The weight of her heart became too much for her. She began to cry, the tears first creeping, then rolling down her cheeks. She cried as naturally as falling rain, because she was miserable, because she was bewildered and lost amid her own emotions. But all her life she had bowed to relentless fate. It had set her lot amid barrenness and isolation. It had stolen both her parents in her childhood and had forced her into a loveless marriage. From the start it had robbed her of hope in any future; and now this last blow, this unhallowed assault on defences she had not dreamed would ever have to stand a siege.

She did not blame Hud for having come too late nor herself for having married, since fate had so ordained. But it was wrong that he should have spoken, and doubly wrong that she should have listened. Yet some rebellious strain in her blood, never before suspected, had first leaped with joy and then abandoned her to a terror she dared not name. She wept because for the first time in her short life fortitude had deserted her. He made no move; he let her cry. With a boyish gesture she blotted her eyes with the flap on her sleeve and drew a quivering breath.

"Is it a crime," he insisted, "for a man to stand in the shade of a neighbor's tree, or even lean against its trunk if he leaves the fruit alone? That's all I wanted; but since you seem to think it a lot too much, perhaps I'd better get out. Say the word, and I'll leave tomorrow."

She gave him a startled look, imagining him gone. The sudden fullness of life he had brought to Fazenda do Macho would be more suddenly emptied. She would be alone—alone as never before. Then she woke to the strength of her own position. Why, she was married—a married woman! Safe behind the unalterable bulwark of marriage, what had she to fear? How childish were her tears! She straightened.

"No," she said quietly, "there's no reason you should go. But because I'm married, it was wrong for you to say what you did. It is wrong to love a married woman."

"Is it wrong to breathe?" he asked.

"No."

"You're sure it isn't wrong to breathe?" he insisted.

"Of course it isn't."

"If you ordered me not to touch you, look at you or speak to you, I could obey even if I thought you unreasonable. But when you tell somebody not to love because it's wrong, it's like saying they mustn't breathe."

SHE gave him a steady, level look. "Let's talk about something else," she said firmly. "As long as you stay, we will talk about other things."

He studied her face curiously. "Sometimes you're so very young," he said, "and sometimes you're old as the hills—as you are now."

He expected her to smile, but she didn't; her eyes and her thoughts were too far away. "Soon you'll get tired of staying here," she stated as she started her horse. "Some day you'll ride away."

"On what?" he asked. "Is this pony for sale?"

She resented the gayety of his mood, and frowned. "Everything we have is for sale—everything except food and lodging."

"How much for this horse, saddled and bridled, just as he stands?" She told him. "Can you figure that out in American money?" She could and did. "It's a deal," said Hud, "and cheap at the price."

He counted out the absurdly small sum and handed her the bills. She examined them thoughtfully. It was the first American money she had ever seen. Like any other merchandise, it would have to be shipped out all the way to the coast and come back months later in the form of something useful, like kerosene for the lamps, or needles, or a bar of iron for the blacksmith shop. Twice a year Idelfonso, accompanied by three lesser *tropeiros* and a couple of eager boys, started out for railhead. The pack-train, made up of mules, carried nothing but hides. It was too long and waterless a journey for cattle on the hoof. So far away! Sadness entered her heart, and her eyes filled with tears.

"When are you going?" she asked.

"Shall I tell you the truth?"

The Syrian peddler's first action was to point at his tongue, swollen and black with thirst.

"Yes, the truth."

"Never. Unless you send me away, I'll never leave you."

Chapter Eight

PACA had been living in a world of sound without meaning, an enforced silence of the soul. Deliberately she had blotted Paitura from mind, for she could never go back. Hud avoided her. All the talk in the house was in English, of which she understood not a word. Outside, everybody talked Portuguese. Whoever knows Portuguese can understand Spanish, but the reverse doesn't hold. It was harsh to her ears, and she understood it only by snatches. She sat on the veranda watching for Hud and Frances to come back from their ride. Riso came close to the balustrade and smiled at her, but when she invited him inside, his face sobered and he shook his head. She was lonely. She went out to him, laid her arm around his shoulders and started walking with him. She was surprised and pleased to find he could understand all she said. She laughed.

The gate swung open, and Frances and Hud rode to a stop before the stables. Frances, with the baby heifer lying across her knees, looked down at Paca, whose arm still encircled Riso, and felt a stab of sympathy. She didn't fool herself. She knew she and Paca could never be friends, but the Spanish girl's kindness to Riso struck a chord buried deep in her heart. She gave the calf into the care of a cowhand, and Riso went off to help him. When she dismounted, she took Paca with her; and on the veranda they came face to face with Felton. He gave Frances a look that was almost a leer, one eyebrow raised, and his thin lips twitching nervously. She felt her color deepen, and hurried past him to their room. Paca was still excited because the boy had understood her so well—why not try Spanish on Frances?

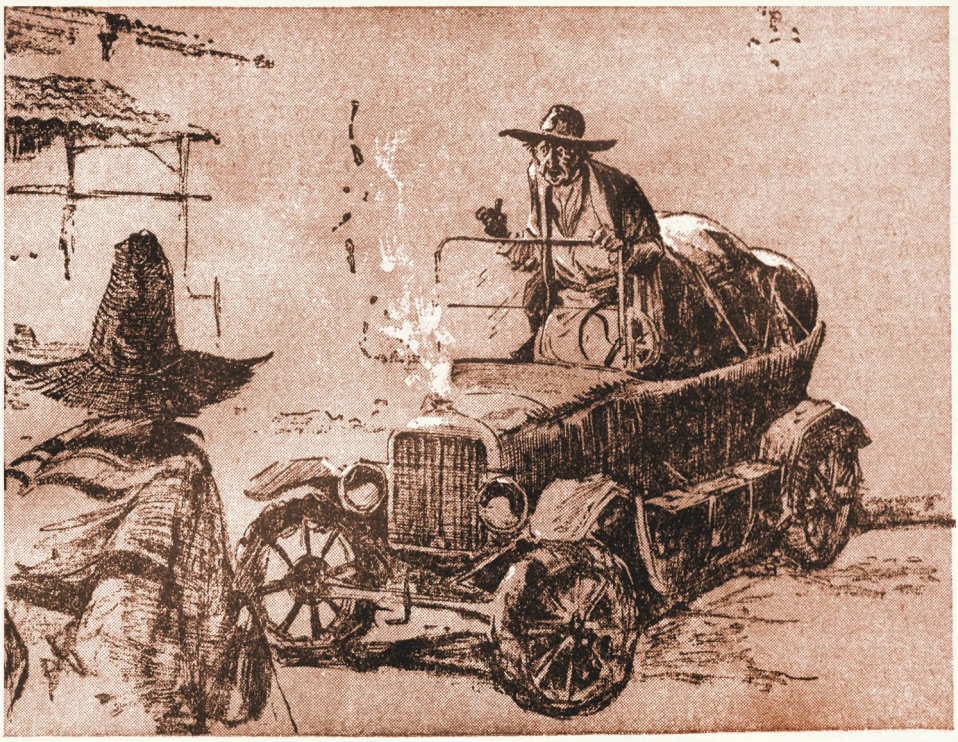
"How do you call yourself, señorita?" she asked.

"Francisca," replied Frances promptly.

Paca's eyes flew open. "Francisca!" she gasped, and then continued in a torrent: "But that is my name also! *Paca* is from *Francisca*, as is *Frasquita*, *Panchita* and *Paquita*. Francisca! Why—it is my name also!"

Frances laughed, pleased at having understood every word. "In Portuguese," she said, "the little name for *Francisca* is *Chiquita*. But I'm not a señorita," she added. "I'm married."

Paca's eyes opened still wider, then half closed to veil a startling thought.



She had made a great discovery, and her heart ached with joy. Frances wasn't a rival after all; she need no longer be feared! The news was too good to keep. She left and went in search of Hud. She rapped on his door, but apparently he didn't hear. Growing impatient, she opened it just enough to look in. Stripped to the waist, Hud was bathing his arms and shoulders, and wishing he could do the same for his smarting back.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

"Oh!" cried Paca, opening the door wide. "You are wounded, you are bleeding!"

He held the washcloth out to her. "Here. It's nothing serious, but do my back for me, will you?" Her hand trembled as she took the cloth. Each quick breath she drew had the edge of a knife in her throat as she sponged him from neck to belt. "Thanks," he said, and turned to face her. "Now. Why did you come here?"

"*No es señorita,*" whispered Paca, watching anxiously for a change in his expression. "Francisca—she's married!"

"Yes, she's married," said Hud coolly. "What of it? Run along now; I want to finish my bath."

Paca felt her heart sink. It hadn't mattered to him; nothing mattered to him. All the other men knew she was around. But not Hud. She went to her room with leaden feet and sank on the edge of the bed. Tears trickled down her cheeks. She was alone.

NEXT morning when Hud went out to the courtyard, he thought he identified an incredible sound and ran to peer through the great gate. His ears hadn't fooled him. Crawling along the colonnade of withered gum trees came a flivver on its last legs. He watched its slow approach. It was dilapidated beyond words, its top gone, its worn-out tires stuffed with sisal leaves and bound round with fibers from the same plant. On its running-boards were extra tins of gas, and in the tonneau was a huge bale wrapped in oilcloth. At the wheel sat a Syrian peddler; and his first action on coming to a halt in the center of the court was to point at his tongue. It was swollen and black with thirst.

Hud pushed his way through dogs and children and took the man into his special care. The peddler recuperated rapidly. Inside half an hour he had opened his bale of goods and was displaying them on the veranda. All those who had no right to enter it crowded up to the balustrade; all the others, with the exception of old Mr. Brecht, stood inside. Peddlers had come to Fazenda do Macho be-

fore, but never with any such cargo as this. Hud was the only one who was not absorbed in the display of silks, prints and gimcracks. He couldn't take his eyes off the flivver, decrepit though it was.

ALREADY an idea, a dream, had begun to form in his head. He stared harder than ever at the flivver, but his thoughts had switched to the wad of money in his room. He still had a few hundreds left of the original two thousand; and in addition Derwent had supplied him with a considerable sum. Up to this moment he had considered at least the added money to be the property of Huddleston Jones, Incorporated. Now he had to decide. Did he want to be traced? Was he ever going back? If this dream worked out, not for a long time.

He drew the peddler aside, and they started bargaining. In the end, for one third of his available cash, Hud bought everything the man possessed except the clothes he stood in. They went inside, and in the presence of old Boling Brecht, Hud paid over the money and took his receipt.

"This biggest luck for me since the war raised heck with shipping," said the peddler. "But what I do now without the lizzie? Walk?"

"You won't have to," said Hud. "With Mr. Brecht's permission, I'm going to send a pack-train to railhead. If you'll attend to a little matter of business for me, you can ride all the way."

"What business?"

"Buy as much gasoline, oil and grease as the pack-train can carry, and see that the men start back as soon as the animals are rested."

"That all?" asked the Syrian, his eyes narrowing in calculation.

"That's all," said Hud. "You pick out the stuff, but our head muleteer will do the bargaining and paying. Get it?"

The Syrian shrugged. "Send me back tomorrow. This country no good. Now I go sleep."

He went off in search of the *posada*. Hud returned to the veranda. He was fascinated by the reactions of Frances and Paca. Each of their faces was eager, each was a study. Frances looked as if she had given Aladdin's lamp a successful rub, and Paca was setting herself up as a guide, the half-blind leading the blind. He drew closer and Frances looked up, her eyes as wistful as those of a child outside the show-window of a cake-shop.

"If we only had money!" she breathed. "But all I've got is what you paid for the horse. What can I buy with that? Please help me. What shall I buy?"

"Don't bother," said Hud. "You've got a job on your hands—the biggest job you ever tried to handle. I've bought everything the man brought, including his wreck of a car."

"What—what for?" stammered Frances.

"For you. For everybody. That's your job. Pick out the things you want yourself, and divide the rest as you see fit. All I want is the car."

Frances gasped for breath. She felt the tears rise in her eyes; and ashamed to break down in public, she rushed into the living-room and sank between her grandfather's knees. She laid her head in his lap and began to cry. Outside, Paca stared at Hud wonderingly.

"*Que es?*" she demanded. "What's the matter with her? What did you say to her?"

He told her. . . . Anger swept through Paca so swiftly he had no instant of warning. She slapped him with all her strength. Whirling away from him, she started kicking the bolts of silk, cotton prints and khaki right and left, and stamping on the gimcrack jewelry and toys. The people in the courtyard screamed with fury and dismay. Hud sprang at her and found he had a tiger in his arms. Boling Black and the younger Brechts began to laugh, and Felton McCrae uttered a squeal like the neighing of a colt. Paca beat at Hud with her fist, struck out with her head, scratched and bit. His only salvation was to get inside her guard by crushing her to him. He carried her screaming and kicking through the living-room, up the stairs and into her bedroom. Shutting the door behind him, he threw her on the bed.

Much more than by anything she had done, he was frightened by something inside himself. He swayed like a rider on a runaway when the reins break. Paca was ugly again; she looked more like a wildcat than a woman. Yet an impulse over which he hadn't the slightest control forced him to seize her wrists, and kiss her. Instantly she lay still, all the fight gone from her body. The blood that had been pounding in his temples turned cold. He was on his knees. He sank back and stared at her, fairly aghast. Only yesterday he had told Frances he loved her! He heard the latch click and

the door open stealthily. He sprang to it, snatched it wide and was in time to see Felton scurrying away from his spying. He went back and stood looking down at Paca.

"Forget it," he said. "Forget everything. I don't know why I did it. No—that's a lie. I know all right, but I'll never do it again." She lay still; only her eyes moved. "You were a fool to act up the way you did," he continued. "There's plenty of stuff for both you and Frances. You can each take your pick and give the rest away."

He went down into the living-room. Frances was still on the floor before her grandfather, but her head had lifted. It was turned away from the stairs as if she were trying not to listen.

Hud came close to her.

"She's all right now," he said. "She was sore as a pup because she thought I was giving everything to you. Of course you'll see she gets her share. But now you'd better hurry out to the veranda, or there'll be more trouble."

Frances rose and went out. She ordered everything into the storeroom, saying she would attend to the division later. She needed time to think. She had lain awake half the night worrying over what had happened between Hud and herself on their ride, and thinking had got her nowhere. Now she felt an answer of some sort was hovering near, but she couldn't quite seize it. Somehow it had to do with Paca. She went up to her room and found her lying as Hud had left her, so relaxed it was as if she had forgotten her outstretched arms and hands. Her eyes were on the rafters, and her face dreamed.

"PACA," said Frances, "you can choose what you wish; I'll take only what you don't want."

She repeated, changing the phrasing, but Paca had already understood. She swung her feet to the floor and sat with her elbows on her knees.

"The things? What do I care about the things?" She looked up, distress in her eyes. "Listen, Chiquita—can you understand me?"

"Yes, everything you say."

"Who am I? Nothing. Our town was a big jail, and every house a smaller one. All the girls were let out only for mass or to show themselves in the plaza on Sundays. The *soirées*—perhaps two a year. Everybody watching while you danced; then the girls would go to one side of the room and the boys to theirs. No girl could be alone with a man for five minutes and keep her reputation. So what happens? What happens?"

It was a wail for help, but Frances knew no answer. She shook her head, and Paca plunged on. "This Señor Honez—who is he? Where does he come from? Nobody knows. He flies in from nowhere. He stays. We hear and see him flying, small and high as a *zopilote* in the sky. I steal into his airplane, disguised as my brother. I say to myself nobody will know. I'm a fool. Yes, I'm a fool. Now I'm here. I'm nothing to him, nothing to anybody. Everything for me is finished. I'm nothing."

She twisted and threw herself face down on the bed; her shoulders shook with her sobbing. Frances sat down beside her and started to touch her, but her hand hung uplifted, then fell to her lap. She had found the answer she sought.

She loved Hud. Though she could never tell him so, why lie to herself? To the young, death is far away and marriage can seem eternal. Since she was married she was safe; but what about Hud? Her lips were sealed; here was the chance to seal his. Married to Paca, they would be equally safe. Like prisoners in adjoining cells, they could give their hands and hearts in friendship, only in friendship. She wouldn't lose him; he needn't go away. She saw nothing childish in this reasoning, based on a faith so naïve that if Hud could have heard the argument, only astonishment would have kept him from laughing aloud. . . .

But at the moment Hud's thoughts were far from Frances or Paca. He had bought the flivver; and now, seated beside old Boling Brecht, he was intent on his second move. "Mr. Brecht," he said, "I've got an idea. It may not pan out, but if it does, it will be one very great idea. It depends entirely on you."

"Me?" asked the old man. "How?"

"Has this place ever shown a profit?" said Hud.

"In cash? No. Why?"

"How would you like me for a superintendent—boss of the outside ranch?"

"Go on; I'm too old to think fast."

"Leave Frances in charge of all the housekeeping," complied Hud, "but hand over everything else to me. I'd want it in writing."

"In writing, eh?" A shrewd look came into the old man's eyes. "What pay?" he asked.

"Twenty-five per cent of the cash returns for five years."

Mr. Brecht started to laugh, and choked. He coughed violently and then gasped: "Is this a joke?"

"I'll tell you how much of a joke it is," said Hud. "If you agree, I'll stay. If you don't agree, I'm going to leave."

"Write out the paper," said Mr. Brecht; "I'll sign it."

"What about Frances?" asked Hud. "If she isn't for it, of course the deal is off."

"Of course," said Mr. Brecht; "but that girl's head is twin to mine."

Hud went out and moved the flivver into the blacksmith shop. He checked the motor anxiously and found it fairly sound. When he loosened the cap of the radiator, steam shot to the roof. He dared not use the water from the well —though people could exist on it, there was no telling what it might do to machinery. He waited for Idelfonso's arrival and stole one of his cans. He poured oil into the crankcase and filled the gas-tank. The car was ready for his purpose, all but a drumlike extension on one rear hub the blacksmith could make. But there was something else to be attended to, and days must pass before he could put his idea to the test.

THAT night old Boling Brecht, having signed the contract with Frances' consent, announced Hud's engagement as superintendent of Fazenda do Macho. The next day Hud ordered all the cowboys off the range and put them to braiding horsehair rope. From Frances he borrowed a hank of heavy cotton cord and disappeared. He rode alone to the cleft up which he had climbed in his escape from the gorge and found his memory had served him well. The chimneylike opening was more than perpendicular; if anything it slanted in. He tied a stone to the cord and measured the exact distance from the top of the cliff to the level of the river. Returning, he ordered the cowboys to take a rest and talked to them.

"Men," he said, "all the ropes you're making are to be spliced into two long ropes. When completed, each must be sixty meters in a straight line, thirty when doubled with the two ends spliced to form an endless belt. If you work fast and well, I promise each of you a fat bull as reward."

"A fat bull!" yelled a voice. They shouted with laughter and returned to work. The same voice began to compose a song: "I know a man who knew a man whose sister once saw a fat bull!"

Chapter Nine

FELTON MCCRAE never left the main house, and Reardon spent most of his time in the court. The other two, Wilbur Brecht and Boling Black, were scarcely less lazy, but their habits were different. Black liked liquor, and Wilbur women. Though they sometimes rode through the gate together, they never seemed to speak, and at the end of the colonnade of gum trees one would turn right and the other left. Invariably each came home alone, sometimes after an absence of days. Hud would have liked to be at least on speaking terms with them, but found he couldn't stomach even that degree of friendliness.

Boling Black was heavy, and sagged in the saddle like a sack of wet meal; only a mule could carry him. Wilbur had the same appearance of a white grub unaccustomed to the light, but was shorter and weighed less. He rode a spirited horse and carried a quirt. His idea of fun was to whip the horse, then wrench him to his haunches when he tried to bolt. The sight of blood dripping from the pony's jaw sickened Hud. He looked forward to putting a stop to that sort of thing, never imagining the day of reckoning was to spring on him long before he was ready.

He was so busy that Paca caught mere glimpses of him. Not only the horsehair ropes absorbed him. He had a gang clearing the cleft of every obstruction, and tumbling boulders into the river at its base. The rocks rolled out, piled up in a crescent and eventually would enclose a reasonably quiet pool. He had another gang felling giant bamboo trees and sawing them just below each joint. Each section became a bucket that would hold half a gallon. He meant to bind these buckets three feet apart to the double endless rope, jack up one back wheel of the flivver, and by means of the home-made belt raise a steady stream of water from the bottom of the gorge. He explained his intention to nobody, not even to Frances. She was avoiding him, dreading the moment of broaching her plan, but he didn't notice it. His activities cut him off not only from her but from the life of the house. He snatched food when he could, and slept from twilight to dawn.

Meanwhile the girls were almost as busy superintending the making of all sorts of garments out of the peddler's wares. Frances copied Paca's slip, her

A toy parachute drifted down; when the plane had become a mere speck Hud recovered the container.

blouse and Hud's shirts. Even his riding-breeches served as model for jodhpurs of khaki for Paca and herself. Paca cut simple modern dresses out of silks and prints, and forced the shocked needlewomen to fit them closely to her figure. She should have been content, but she wasn't. She had food, clothing, a roof over her head, and Jackman to wind around her finger if she pleased. In their lazy way the other men admired her—only Hud held out. His preoccupation got on her nerves to such an extent she decided on a desperate move.

One evening when only he had gone to bed, she left the living-room just as Wilbur returned from some excursion. She climbed the stairs without subterfuge, went to Hud's door, knocked softly and entered. Moonlight made the room as light as day. Hud was in bed with only a sheet pulled to his waist. He half rose on one elbow.

"What do you want?" he asked angrily.

"I must talk to you," said Paca. "I want to go away. You must send me back to Paitura."

"You're crazy," said Hud, but as the words left his lips, he realized he was up against a shrewd play. "Get out. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

"No; now," said Paca, taking a step forward. She was dressed in one of the new frocks, and with the moonlight pouring over her, every curve of her body took on sharp outline. "You have plenty of money. If you don't send me, I'll write. Señor Jackman will see to the letter. I'll tell where I am, and say you enticed me with the promise of a short flight."

Hud sank book and closed his eyes. He didn't want to look at her, because if he did, he wouldn't be able to think things out. All his plans were threatened; the whole of his rebuilt life was

at stake. What was the worst that could happen if she really went? Unless she flew from some point on the coast, it would take her a month to get to Paitura, and more than a month for trouble to come back. Would his father bother to accuse him of embezzlement? Shucks—he'd be glad to be rid of him at the price. What about her people? Could a man be extradited from Brazil to Peru for seduction? He doubted it. Then for at least two months, possibly for years, he would have a free hand. He decided to call her bluff.

"All right," he said, "I'll fix it. Now run along and let me sleep."

She turned slowly, exhibiting herself on the pedestal of her heels, but he wasn't looking. As she left the room, Wilbur reached the head of the stairs. He drew back before she saw him, and returned halfway to the platform of the turn. When she reached it, he stopped her. In the dim light she recognized him by the quirt dangling from his wrist. She smiled uncertainly and started to pass. He slipped his arm around her.

"Nice," he whispered.

She struck with the quickness of a cat, raking her nails down his cheek. The sharpness of his pain was like a fuse tossed into a powder-cask, and rage burst inside him like a bomb. He caught her hair, bent her forward and lashed the quirt across her back. She screamed, but the louder she screamed, the harder fell the rawhide lash. Old Mr. Brecht began to shout, his voice breaking into a shrill screech. Boling Black, Reardon and Felton ceased their idling, but only to look up. Jackman rose and stood paralyzed. As Frances reached the foot of the stairs, Hud appeared at the top, dressed only in slacks.

HIS bare feet made no sound. He hurled himself at Wilbur, sent him reeling to the bottom of the lower flight, seized him by the collar and started dragging him across the living-room. Paca ran to Boling Brecht and fell on her knees before him, her face buried in her hands. Terror still clamped her throat, and her sobs had a wheezing sound. Hud had only one idea—to get outside. As soon as he reached the veranda, he tore the quirt off Wilbur's wrist and paid him in full for what he had done to Paca. Then he remembered the horse's bleeding jaws and paid him again. When he had finished, he dropped the quirt and returned to stand before Mr. Brecht.

"Did you kill him?" asked the old man.

Now that it was over, Hud began to tremble so hard his teeth clicked together. "No sir," he managed to answer; "not quite."

"Too bad," said Mr. Brecht, his eyes fixed on the darkening streaks across Paca's back. "It wouldn't have been any crime. It's no crime to kill a man that's been dead for years."

"Then—then I won't have to go?" stammered Hud.

"Go where?"

"Away from here."

"Hud," said Mr. Brecht, "that would be murder. I'd die inside a week. Talk to him, Frances. Clear his brain."

"Yes," said Frances, "there's something I want to say only to him. Will you come with me, Hud?" She walked out into the courtyard beyond the veranda, where nobody could hear her. "Hud," she said, "there's a way for you to stay and be safe—as safe as I am."

"SAFE?" cried Hud. "Do you think I'm afraid of any white-livered—"

"No, no," broke in Frances, "not that. Oh, Hud, please listen."

The trouble in her face gave it a sort of incandescence. He remembered his first sight of her, how he had thought her lovely without being beautiful. Just as the finished cathedral of Cologne leaves the soul flat, while the unmatched towers of Chartres win heart as well as eye, so can perfect features be a bore. Possibly what he now saw in Frances' face might be invisible to everybody else, and he hoped it was. That made it his, a drenching light nobody else could share. Under its urge he was ready to give her himself, all he possessed, anything she asked.

"Go ahead," he said. "I'll listen."

"I want to be your friend," said Frances, "and hold you for a friend. I want to see you often and go with you whenever I please. Don't you want that too, Hud?"

"Yes. More than I've ever wanted anything."

"Then there's only one way—a hard way. Promise you won't be angry; promise you'll understand."

"I'll try."

"Marry Paca."

He stood quite still. He had felt a premonition of what was coming, and had thought he would laugh. Now he found he couldn't laugh if he tried. The runaway heart can be a traitor. Not content with blinding its possessor, it can

make him believe some impossible leap is a fair measure of his love. It was so with Hud. A mania to give, possessed him. Anything Frances wanted of him she could have. If the only way to make her happy was to share her fantastic faith in the bond of marriage, then he would share it, accept it for his own.

"You're sure you want me to marry Paca?" he asked.

Her lip trembled, but her eyes held. "Yes, I'm sure."

"If I do, then I can see you as much as I like? You'll ride with me, talk with me?"

"Yes. Every day, Hud."

"All right. If she'll take me, I'll do it —but I won't lie to her."

IF he could have approached Paca at once, his pity for her injuries might have helped a lot. But he couldn't. He was too full of Frances, too near to his hail-and-farewell to love. He hurried across the living-room and went back to bed. Tomorrow would be soon enough.

Tomorrow passed, and the day after. Frances said nothing, but on the third evening her eyes gave him a long accusing look. He stood up and glanced around the room. With the exception of Wilbur, who had not been seen since the night of his thrashing, all the members of the household were present. As usual Frances sat beside her grandfather; Reardon and Boling Black were scraping cornhusks paper-thin, and Felton merely waited. Jackman was watching Paca, and Paca had her eyes on Hud; when he walked over to her, she brightened into expectation.

"No te amo," he said. "Will you marry me?"

Even Jackman understood that *"No te amo,"* and his eyes flickered with curiosity. What answer would Paca give to a man who proposed in public and opened the proposal by saying he didn't love her? He read the answer in her face before she spoke.

"I love you," she said.

The simplicity of that statement gave Hud and Frances a jolt. He stood his ground and bowed. Frances raised her head, only to lower it again as she met Felton's jeering eyes. Old Mr. Brecht seemed depressed; when his bedtime arrived, he not only refused to go but told everybody except Hud to clear out. Sitting in the big chair with his thin hands hanging over its arms, the old man looked more like an eagle than ever.

"Hud," he said, "I've grown mighty fond of you, and I wouldn't want anything to happen would bring you grief. Marriage and the giving in marriage is a queer business. I reckon what started it was the utility of the thing, the easiest way to keep property in a straight line; but along came St. Paul with another reason. . . . Now this child that calls herself Paca, she's as pretty a little filly as ever stepped. I can't say I blame you; but are you going to marry her?"

"How long has Frances been married?" asked Hud.

"Ten months almost to a day."

"If I'd got here a year ago," said Hud, "nothing could make me marry Paca. As it is, Mr. Brecht, I'm going to do it tomorrow."

"So that's how it is," said the old man. "I'm sorry Fran is married, Hud—I've been sorry since the minute I laid eyes on you."

"I'm sorry too," said Hud thickly.

"Then perhaps you're right, boy. There's something my Uncle Jonas used to say—'The time to jump a fence is when you come to it.' Tell Frances I'm ready to go to bed."

THE strange marriage took place on the following evening. At first Jackman balked at officiating, saying he had lost his book. Frances, already having surrendered her mother's ring, now fetched her grandmother's prayerbook and gave him the choice of performing the ceremony or losing his job. He fumbled for a long time before he could locate the proper service. Old Mr. Brecht, having refused to give the bride away, sat with head sunk on his chest. The proceedings were so simple that Hud filled the offices of bridegroom, best man and interpreter without awkwardness. *"I, Paca, take you, Hud—"* Frances' heart filled with tears for Paca, for Hud and for herself. This was her doing; she had had her way.

Only silence told Paca the ceremony was finished. She looked inquiringly from face to face, and finally read the truth in Hud's eyes—it was over; she was married. She crept against him; her hands went to his shoulders; her head dropped and she began to shake with sobs. Out of pity his arms became kind and closed around her. Frances felt a sharp pain in her breast, and a shiver passed through her. But almost immediately her spirit triumphed over fear. She recognized a familiar road, a road she had

Hud hurled himself at Wilbur and sent him reeling.

traveled all her life—the road of abnegation. She went to Paca and kissed her cheek. Her lips were wet when she turned away, but she let them stay wet.

Chapter Ten

WITHIN a week Hud awoke to a cleavage between his days and nights that divided him into two men, strangers to each other who could never meet. By day he rode harder, smoked more and worked longer than any cowboy in his troop. Paca acquired three new occupations: she made cornhusk cigarettes for Hud by the hour, tying them neatly in bunches of ten. Whenever Frances was busy elsewhere, she played up to old Mr. Brecht with the skill of a born coquette, tucking in his rug, fetching him water when he pointed to a *moringue* and sitting where her handsome person could cheer his old eyes. Finally, with Riso for a teacher, she started to learn to ride.

Frances kept her word. She no longer avoided Hud, and talked to him freely, whoever happened to be about. Nobody except Paca watched her. Trying to guess at what was said, her puzzled eyes would pass from Frances' to Hud's face and then to Felton's. Invariably Felton's blank expression would calm her—if he had no reason to complain, neither had she. When Frances and Hud rode together, again Felton's indifference helped by reminding her that all *bifes* are mad. *Bife*, being from *beef*, naturally meant an Englishman or anybody who talked, English. Nevertheless, she decided to practice hard at riding.

She would have been pleased had she known she wasn't the only one who was puzzled. Frances grew less serene day by day as she studied Hud's drawn face. He was on edge. Instead of joking with the men, he shouted when he wished something done. He tried to explain to her why he wanted the horsehair ropes, but mechanics had been left out of her

mind. She thought the donkeys with their kerosene tins far more practical, and he gave up explaining with an impatient shrug. This wasn't the companionship they had paid for so dearly; it was division. A small matter served to draw them closer again. He started raving over a shortage of horsehair, and she broke in on his angry muttering.

"But it's so easy, Hud. Just corral a hundred runts of ponies with tails that brush the ground, and you can get all the horsehair you want."

He gave her an absurdly grateful look, as if she had saved his life. When he had issued the simple order, he asked her to ride out to the gorge where he knew the last of the rocks were being toppled into the river to form a pool. She went gladly, feeling nearer to him than at any moment since his marriage. They watched the work for a while, but this time he attempted no explanation. Turning away, they rode to the imbu tree and stopped in its shade. They were strangely silent.

FRANCES took off her leather hat and hung it on her wrist. Her hair, a softer tone of the desert sunlight, was swept straight back and gathered low on her neck. Tiny points of perspiration glistened above her eyebrows, on her upper lip and in the cleft of her chin. The freckles across her nose looked like larger drops of dew.

"Hud," she said, with a smile she tried to keep from wavering, "we're not afraid, are we? Don't let's ever be afraid."

He didn't answer, and he couldn't smile. Instead he tightened his knees, and promptly his pony started for home.

The next day he rode alone, and had scarcely left the *fazenda* when he heard the far-away drone of a plane. It was flying low, and had it kept its course would have passed well to the west, but abruptly it veered and headed toward him. Presently it began to circle, and he realized the pilot had spotted the cluster of buildings and was searching for a chance to land. As he watched, excitement, fear, then a complacent smile followed each other in quick order. "Hard luck, old boy; you won't find a runway within a hundred miles!"

The plane flew so low he grew worried again. What if he were really the object of its search? However fantastic that thought, he considered how he would look from the sky. Long since, he had surrendered to the extent of adopting leather hat and deerskin jumper, universal garb of the *caipiras;* but he still had on the whipcord breeches and laced boots in which he had left Paitura. To hide them, he pressed his legs close to the pony's flanks until the plane, abandoning any attempt to land, headed south. But before it went, it let fall a toy parachute. It drifted down lazily; and when it was caught and held by an organ cactus, Hud was tempted to ride to it at a gallop. But he controlled himself. . . . When the plane had become a mere speck he recovered the container and opened it. He found a leaflet, unrolled it and read its contents.

In three languages—English, Spanish and Portuguese—a reward was being offered for news as to the whereabouts, fate or welfare of Huddleston Jones, Junior. Nobody but his father could have chartered a plane for such a search. Hud remembered the old man's hatred of flyers and flying. What had happened to him? Had he gone soft? Then rose a vision of the old man's uplifted fists so vivid Hud could hear the hoarse whisper of his parting words—"Get out before I hammer your face!" What did it matter what had happened? The old nail-eater was too late—too late by twenty years. Huddleston Jones, Junior, the boy he had never wanted, was dead and buried. Hud Honez lived, and was up to his neck in more than work; Hud Honez was married! He made the notice into a spitball and flipped it over the cliff. Releasing the parachute, he watched the draft of the river snatch it into the gorge.

THE day of experiment arrived. Taking with him only the most trusted of his men, he loaded the horsehair belt into the flivver—the back seat long since had been torn out,—drove to the brink of the gorge and backed inch by inch until the rear of the car hung over the chimney-like cleft. The rest was routine—jack one wheel up behind, chock the front wheels, and for good measure anchor her with ropes laid flat to the ground and tied to the tough trunks of a couple of thorn trees. Over the drum bolted to a rear hub he looped the belt, and ordered the men to pay out the rest of it smoothly. At last three of the bamboo buckets hit the water at once, but they floated. Hud gulped and gave the belt a tug. Before the jerk could travel halfway down, one bucket filled and then the others. Now! He climbed into the car, started the motor and eased in the clutch. Nothing happened.

Sick with disappointment, he leaned out and looked back—the drum was whirling, but his homemade belt was still. He stopped the motor and sat thinking. His head went up with a jerk, and he leaped out. What he needed was water, only a little water. He made the men grip all four strands of the belt and haul. Sweat poured in rivulets off their brown and black backs. They cursed, then laughed, then sang out for Idelfonso—"Oh, Idelfonso, sweetheart, bring your burros on the run!"

At last the three bamboo joints that had filled reached the top. Ignoring the protest of the thirsty men, Hud used all the water to soak the rope on the drum, then sprinkled it with sand. Once more the belt was lowered. The motor coughed and then hummed. This time the belt held. Slowly the buckets descended; and when they rose again, they were full. As they reached the horizontal at the top of the revolving drum, they shot out water. It splashed against the top of the cliff and flowed back into the gorge. The men stared open-mouthed.

Hud didn't hear them. Because he knew he had succeeded, he was more excited than ever before in his life. He got out, studied the exact angle of the water as it left each bucket and made a mark on the side of the car. He stopped the engine and sent for his horse. The rest of that day and all of the next was spent in building a wall from the spot he had marked, fifty yards straight out toward the desert. The wall had a gentle downward slant, and into its top were set ordinary roofing tiles with the concave side up, so that they formed a continuous trough. Now he was really ready.

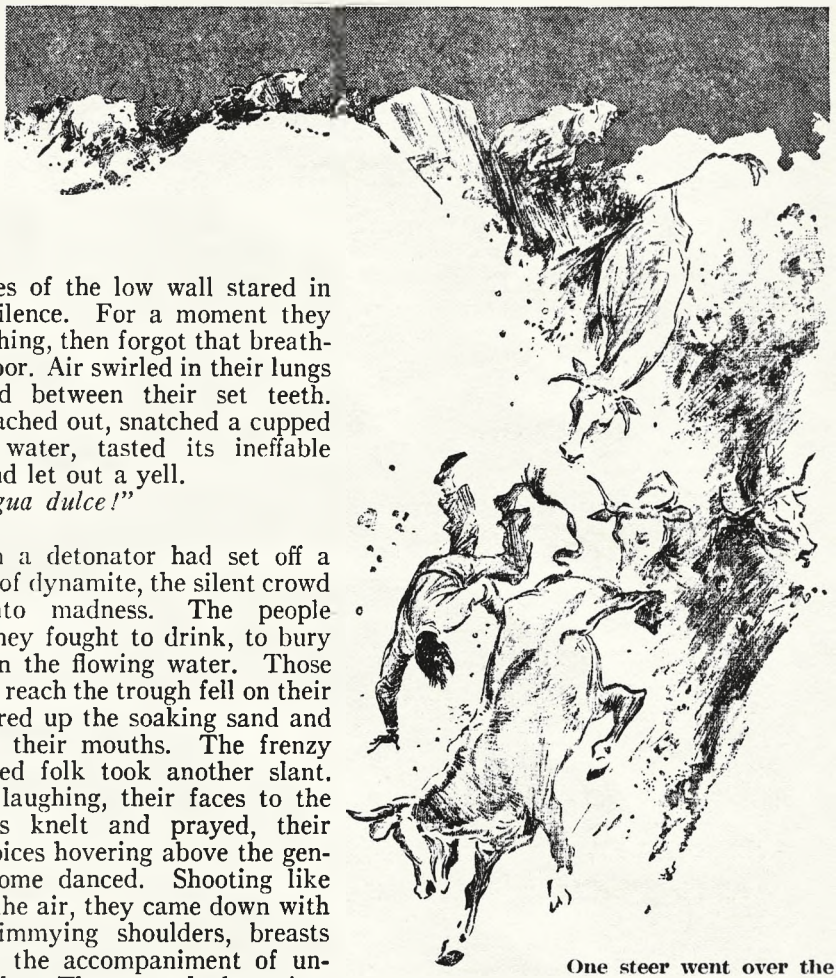
THE next morning he woke tingling like a child on the day of a picnic. For him alone in all the broad reach of Fazenda do Macho the cloudless glare of the iron sky had lost its terror. He did his best to persuade Mr. Brecht to let himself be carried to the scene of action, but the old man refused. It wasn't that he was too weak; he simply preferred to visit his youth only in memory. But everybody else prepared to go, for rumor had been working like a yeast. It had roused Jackman, and even stirred the sluggish blood of the three cousins—for Wilbur was still absent.

Hud knew how the drones he had supplanted must hate him, but his mood made him try to find good in the putty of Boling Black's face, and strength in the melted arch of Reardon's shoulders. But when he glanced at Felton McCrae, his inner warmth was suddenly chilled. In Felton's weasel eyes he had caught a gleam so calculating it wiped out Hud's boyishness and left him old. Hatred was one thing, threat another. Realizing how easy it would be for one man to wreck all his hopes, he went to his room for the gun he had not worn since the day of his arrival. He had no intention of using it; he knew the mere sight of it would be enough to take the shine out of Felton.

An hour later the whole of Fazenda do Macho had assembled around the flivver. The horses of those who had ridden were tethered in the bush, but most had come on foot. Paca and Frances were in the tonneau, as was Pounce, on account of his great age, and Riso on account of his smile. Reardon, Boling Black and McCrae stood in a group on the side away from the belt. Jackman was kneeling at the edge of the cliff, looking down. Hud considered calling him away, but decided he wasn't dangerous. There were three easy ways of causing trouble—slip the belt from the drum and lose it in the gorge, kick the jacks from under the car, or advance the throttle with a jerk. Hud felt ready to forestall them all. Though outwardly calm, he churned inside with excitement, and any meddling would have touched off the hair-trigger of his nerves. He wet the drum with water brought for the purpose. The desert was a vast oven, centering its white heat on the spectators. The heat sealed their pores and oppressed their lungs so that breathing became a labor. Silence fell.

Hud warmed the motor just as seriously as he would have warmed the motor of a plane. When its clattering had become a steady purr, he eased in the clutch. By the sag of the frame of the car he knew the belt had caught and that water was rising. He set the throttle and climbed over the back of the seat into the tonneau. Standing there head and shoulders above its other occupants, he could keep watch on everything—spectators, throttle and the precious belt.

As the ascending buckets began to hurl their jets of water, half a gallon at a time, he let go a quivering sigh. He leaned over and advanced the throttle. Promptly the trickle in the trough became a stream that quickly gathered strength and speed. It filled the tiles to the brim along all their length, and even overflowed before it reached the lower end and spouted to the ground. The crowd



One steer went over the edge, then more — with Felton in their midst.

on both sides of the low wall stared in fascinated silence. For a moment they ceased breathing, then forgot that breathing was a labor. Air swirled in their lungs and whistled between their set teeth. Idelfonso reached out, snatched a cupped handful of water, tasted its ineffable sweetness and let out a yell.

"Agua—agua dulce!"

AS though a detonator had set off a charge of dynamite, the silent crowd exploded into madness. The people screamed; they fought to drink, to bury their faces in the flowing water. Those who couldn't reach the trough fell on their knees, gathered up the soaking sand and stuffed it in their mouths. The frenzy of the colored folk took another slant. Some stood laughing, their faces to the sky. Others knelt and prayed, their quavering voices hovering above the general din. Some danced. Shooting like arrows into the air, they came down with violently shimmying shoulders, breasts and hips, to the accompaniment of unearthly shrieks. The water had no time to form a pool; the thirsty earth drank it as eagerly as the people. They were drunk, mad drunk on nothing but water, sweet water!

The soil turned dark in a wider and wider radius, and finally began to shimmer with the promise of a lake. Children rolled in its ooze. Then shrill screams pierced the rising uproar like Roman candles streaking through some master theme of fireworks. The general bedlam wiped out the steady clatter of the motor and set a wall beyond which none could hear. Cattle near by, that had so far stood aloof, raised their heavy heads as though in wonder. Cattle farther away not only raised their heads but stretched lean necks and lifted flaring nostrils. Steers, bulls, cows and calves began to quiver as if all had been stricken with the same infectious ague.

To cattle, water has a smell unknown to man, a smell that can pour into skin and bone. Blanketed by the deafening yelling of the crowd, a low moaning rose from far and near. Rolling in from north, east and south, it increased so slowly it was no more to be noticed than a rising tide. Still unnoticed, its beat changed into the rumble of thunder. Fifty, a hundred, a thousand head of cattle had got the message of the smell of water, and had passed it back to thousands more. With no further warning, the moaning of desire mounted in one leap into the panic of stampede.

Fascinated by the antics of the crowd, Hud and the girls had no eyes or ears for anything else. Felton McCrae was standing on the running-board, possibly cudgeling his brains for some move that would transform Hud's triumph into disaster. He knew nothing of mechanics, but through his feet he became aware of a vibration superimposed on the trembling of the flivver. The next instant he was the first to identify its source—the pounding of ten thousand hoofs. Without a word

of warning to anybody else, he stepped down and started on a run for the ranch.

Something in the manner of his going drew Frances' attention away from the crowd. She raised her eyes, and stood appalled before the approaching avalanche of cattle. She knew cattle, knew that the mass fear of no mob on earth can equal the idiotic frenzy of a stampeding herd. Felton's disappearing figure, the one object moving in a contrary direction, brought her to her senses. From her perch she could see what must happen, and screamed at him to come back.

At her cry Hud raised his eyes, but he looked straight ahead. The desert was alive. As far as he could see, its sandy soil had risen into hummocks that heaved in rhythmic waves. The waves were crowding each other, piling steadily into a more solid sea of yellow that converged from right and left on the flivver. There was no horizon. It was gone, blotted out by a vast semicircular wall of dust. The wall climbed higher and higher in golden puffs and veiled the sun.

Frances still watched Felton, pounding toward the ranch. A spasm in her throat matched the check in his stride as he saw his way being pinched to nothing by the spreading herd.

At first there were gaps here and there, and he dodged into one and then another. The steers began to flow past him. He glanced toward the gorge. When he looked back, every gap was closed. He ran closer and closer to the brink; then there was no brink. With the desperation of a cornered rat, he turned at right angles and made a phenomenal leap to the back of the nearest beast. From that first perch he looked over the endless heave of more backs, and must have dreamed of running across them to safety. He clambered away from the cliff to a second back, and scrambled to a third. But the speed of a leopard couldn't have saved him. The herd was crowding, crowding harder. As though paralyzed by a nightmare, Frances watched—as one steer went over the edge into the gorge, then three more, then a dozen—with Felton in their midst.

HUD had no recollection of cutting the ignition of the motor or of drawing his gun—he never knew it was in his hand until it was empty. He had been shooting in a trance, and instinctively had aimed straight ahead. Five steers had fallen to the eight shots he had fired, and formed the nucleus of a barrier. Praying that the anchor-ropes would hold should any of the onrush hit the car, he reloaded, started adding to the barrier and saw it become a mound. All this at the dead center of a hurricane of sound—tethered horses screaming, and bulls bellowing amid the earth-shaking thunder of hoofs and more hoofs. In strange contrast no human cry was heard. The people had fallen silent. They scurried like frightened rats. With more sense or a surer instinct than Felton, they lay flat and took it, or hung to some bush just over the edge of the cliff, or clambered down to cling like flies to the horsehair belt.

Jackman, Boling Black and Reardon dived under the flivver. The rising mound before it became a plowshare. Cattle swept to right and left, and hundreds went over the cliff. But more hundreds began to resist with all the might of their weak haunches. Terrified by the brink, they added pressure to pressure until at last the cattle away from the river began to mill. Soon the word went back, and back from beast to beast that there was no water after all—only the same old tantalizing gorge. The noise of the hoofs was stilled, and when bellowing had dwindled into a plaintive moan, Hud stumbled down to take toll.

He shouted to every man to gather his family and report the names of the missing. To his amazement and relief there were none. A few had broken limbs; many had been trampled, but there were no dead. A load had lifted from his conscience, and in an instant he became another man, a man of action. He detailed half a dozen cowboys to ride the cattle back, and ordered every other able-bodied person, women as well as men, to set to work to build a stockade with the flivver just inside one end. He himself staked it out. It was to be a semicircular fence a quarter of a mile long, and around its outside wall he planned a continuation of the trough of tiles. It was the sort of job the people understood; they could see its need from beginning to end. Already laughing, though some carried cripples on their backs, they raced to fetch axes and hoes.

Hud was surprised Frances had not joined him long ago. He looked around for her. Paca, Pounce and Riso had climbed down to join the three who had taken refuge under the car and who were still brushing dust from their clothes. Hud saw Frances still in the tonneau. She was kneeling on its floor, her arms

against the back of the front seat and her face buried. It amazed him that she of all people should have broken down, and he thought she must be praying. He reached in to lay his hand on her shoulder.

"Snap out of it, Frances," he said cheerfully. "Everything's fine. A couple of broken legs, and that's all. Nobody's killed."

She lifted her head and stared at him out of empty eyes, all her face seemed empty. When she spoke her voice was hoarse, a voice he had never heard. "Felton," she said.

"What about him?" asked Hud with a frown.

"He's dead," said Frances. "He went over the cliff."

"Lots of people did that," said Hud, his mouth suddenly dry. "He'll probably climb back."

"No," she said. "The steers carried him over. I saw it happen. He's dead."

Chapter Eleven

BLINDLY Hud walked away; instead of going toward the ranch, he headed into the desert. The cattle stood all about, too tired to stir. He had to push through them and sometimes dodge a stubborn steer. He had no idea where he was going; nor was he thinking. His mind was as blank as the barren land around him. Hours later he was still walking. Sometimes he stumbled, and minutes would pass before he realized he was on his knees. He came to the thicket where Frances had rescued the heifer on the day of their first ride. She had ridden through it at a gallop; yet to a man on foot, it presented an impenetrable maze. He followed its irregular edge so close thorns scratched his face.

He heard a voice cursing—his own voice. It went on and on until the words became images. The words had faces—not bodies, just faces. Elaine's face, his father's, Tom Derwent's, and Arnaldo's. There they stopped and started passing all over again. There were others, faces of people he had seen without knowing who they were, but Arnaldo's was always the last. That's where all the faces in the world came to a halt. . . . The sun was already setting when he became vaguely conscious of somebody calling.

"Hud! Hud! Hud!"

It was like a raven croaking, sometimes near, then far away. He tried to flee from it, but his legs would no longer obey. They turned him around and he saw a rider weaving back and forth. It was somebody he knew and could name; it was Frances on her stallion, leading his own horse. Dreaming became nightmare, but a waking nightmare. So it was all true—his weeks at Fazenda do Macho, the way he had felt about Frances, his marriage to Paca; and now this! It was true. He was married to Paca, and now Felton was dead.

Frances was riding backward and forward in a wide swath. She would come up against the wall of the thicket, follow it for a few yards and then strike out until she disappeared from sight. When he could see her, he kept still. When he couldn't, panic seized him and he tried to cry out. Then he would run toward where he thought she was, but after a few steps he forgot what direction she had taken, and would turn and run the other way. He was staggering in a small circle when she found him.

"Hud," she said, "Hud! Here's your horse."

He caught the pony's cheek-strap and laid his right arm across the saddle, but just hung there with his face against the pony's mane. Frances slipped to the ground and touched him.

"Hud," she whispered. *"Hud!"*

He turned and she wrapped her arms around him.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me," she begged. "Be angry, Hud. Break my heart, please break my heart."

Her lips went to his, and she kissed him with the abandonment of a lost soul. They kissed each other's eyes and throat, and bruised their lips on each other's cheeks. He forgot he was tired, and his arms crushed her until she cried out and wilted in their grip. Immediately he became gentle. His hand smoothed her hair and passed tenderly down her cheek.

"This won't get us anywhere," he murmured.

"No," she answered.

"There's nowhere to go."

"Nowhere."

"I love you," he said.

"I loved you," she whispered. "Now I've got no right to love anybody. I'm vile. I'm the sort of woman who sees her husband die, and then does this on the same day!"

"That doesn't matter," said Hud. "I don't know why, but it simply doesn't."

"No," she admitted, "it doesn't matter. I don't care what happened to Fel-

ton—I just don't care. That's what makes me horrible. It matters only on account of you, because I sold you away. For nothing, for something that didn't exist! You didn't want to do it. I made you—I made you."

"Hush, now, hush."

"Yesterday I was Frances McCrae; before that I was Frances Brecht; long ago my mother used to call me Fran. All that's gone. There's nothing left of me, of what I was. I'm lost."

"You're talking rot," said Hud, still smoothing her cheek. "You're alive, and so am I. When you come to, you'll be Frances again—the Frances you've always been and always will be. Don't worry about her—and that means you needn't worry about me. I love you."

"You're doing it, Hud—you're breaking my heart."

"Hush it," he said, lifting her chin. "We've got to get out of this. Help me up on my horse, Fran—my legs are like plaster casts. There's just one thing you must remember. Whenever you look at me, whatever I say, whatever I do—remember I love you."

They started for home. Riding in silence, Hud became aware of a change in himself as fundamental as the sprouting of a kernel of corn. No longer need his days and nights be divided; he could quit being two men. In the last half-hour he had been born into a dream, and with no taint of the miraculous, the dream was now reality. It was as concrete as Fazenda do Macho itself, and had just as definite boundaries. He belonged to this dream, not to Paca nor Frances. He reviewed all the girls he had known, not forgetting Elaine, and could remember none who had given him the sense of warmth of this dream. As long as he could stay inside it, he knew he would be safe from Paca's arms and safe from himself.

AS he and Frances neared the ranch, they caught up with a weird cortège, stumbling along in the dark. The men had found Felton's body—not all of it—hanging in the same thorn tree into which Hud had leaped to safety from his plane. Using the ropes of the hoist as a ladder, they had recovered it, and were carrying it in a hammock strung on a pole. The accidental meeting wiped out all need for explanations on the part of Hud or Frances when they arrived. Besides, the entire community, those who had worked and those who had waited, was at the point of exhaustion and more than ready to call it a day.

IN the morning Felton was buried in the family graveyard inside the clump of bamboos. As on the occasion of the wedding, Jackman tried to avoid officiating, but once more Frances produced the prayerbook, found the service for him and forced him to go through with it. Old Mr. Brecht seemed stunned, and attended only under protest, escorted on one side by Hud and on the other by Pounce.

Though Hud had superintended the felling of bamboos on the outside of the clump there were two reasons why he had not before penetrated to its center. For one thing he didn't know there was a center; for another, the entrance was so deep it was masked by a double turn. Though the path was fairly wide and well worn, it started from so close under the ranch wall he had never noticed it. Only when he was inside did he perceive the trees must have been set out in a circle that had been permitted to grow only outward during over half a century. The circle was still clear and carpeted ankle-deep with brittle leaves. There were no mounds; only fairly large boulders, irregularly placed, represented the gathering of the family dead. It was a friendly and quiet spot, always in shade.

He looked around curiously, his eyes avoiding the newly dug grave. Someone came here quite often. The flattest of the stones was brushed clean of leaves and looked as if it was used as a seat. Against it lay a bit of paper, and paper was so rare a thing on the *fazenda* that he managed to pick it up. It was the yellowed flyleaf from an English primer.

The perfunctory service was soon over and Mr. Brecht wasted no time. He called for Pounce and Hud. They were not permitted to help him; it was he who took their arms. Half hanging by his hands, he lifted his knees high when he walked, like an old horse trying to show off. His chin, jutting out from beneath the brim of an ancient Panama hat, suggested the sharp prow of a yacht.

Following the three came Frances with Paca, then Reardon and Boling Black, Jackman staying behind to supervise the closing of the grave. The people of the courtyard who had crowded into the grove pressed back to let the master pass. Near the exit stood Riso, encircled by the arm of a kneeling woman. For once his smile seemed to flutter, now on his

"Oughtn't we to get going?" Hud asked. "There's no hurry," said Frances.

face, now off. As Boling Brecht drew level with the woman, she lifted her head and pushed back the shawl with which it was hooded. The wreck of great beauty was in her eyes, her high cheekbones and in all the contours of her face. The old man looked down at her, and Hud felt him check perceptibly. Deliberately Mr. Brecht gave her a pleasant nod, and at sight of it joy flashed across her face. As though she had received more than she had asked, she dropped her head almost to her knees.

"Pounce," said Mr. Brecht as they walked on, "wasn't that Ataïde, Reardon's gal?"

"Yas-sir, that's who."

"There's a lot of nonsense in the world, Hud," said Mr. Brecht presently. "The older you grow, the more nonsense you see in yourself and in the world. The funny thing is, seeing it don't do any good. Folks can't seem to figure out what to do about all the nonsense."

Chapter Twelve

OWING to Hud's urging, added to the eagerness of the people themselves, the stockade and its surrounding trough were completed in quick order. He rode out to resume pumping; and as he approached the hoist, he saw an irregular patch of what looked like green scum. He frowned, but his frown soon broke into a smile. Only three days had elapsed since the stampede; but this green was not scum; it was life: Tiny leaves and hair-thin blades of grass were thrusting into sight wherever the soil had been dampened! He started the motor; the water began to flow; the long trough filled to overflowing.

This time the cowboys had the cattle well in hand. Broken into small herds, they began to drink, some two hundred at a time. The yells of the cowboys, the thwacking and thrusting of their goads and the occasional cracking of a bull-whip mingled with the constant mooing of cows and the deeper rumble of the bulls. Whenever the trough threatened to run dry, the riders would gather in a phalanx and drive off the entire herd. Soon the trough would fill, and the cutting-out would begin again. It was work the ponies loved; they could have done it alone. Under their handling the cattle became patient and were content to wait their turn. Ponies, men and cattle were happy. So was Hud.

His dream still held, bolstered by a staggering burden of work. He scarcely saw Frances; consequently Paca had no reason to connect her with the abrupt change in his ways. Since their marriage they had occupied two rooms, one a mere alcove on the farther side of a curtained arch. In the alcove there was a hammock such as guests used in the *posada,* and Hud had taken to sleeping in it. He said it was because it was cooler; and Paca smiled, reminding herself all *bifes* are mad. Yet she was puzzled. She wondered how any man could feed himself to labor the way cane is fed into a sugar-mill, leaving nothing but *bagasse.* She amused herself making clothes and more clothes until Frances protested. Was this to be the last of all years? Did she think an event like the peddler happened twice in a lifetime? Paca stared at her, again wondering. She wondered why anybody should worry about tomorrow. Look at Felton—would it have helped him, to worry?

THE motor had become Hud's absorbing concern. He babied it. Not content with lifting the flaps of the cover, he had a shelter built so it would be continually in shade. By an ingenious contraption of reeds, he ran a constant stream of water into the radiator. At the first sign of the motor heating, he would call a halt and everybody would take a rest. But soon he began to worry. He still had a reserve of gas, but how was she on oil? At her age, probably she ate it up. He began adding cottonseed oil to his remaining supply, but warily, not knowing what it might do to her insides. He trained Jackman to run the motor.

It was nothing much to learn, but Jackman squirmed so with joy that Hud looked at him hard and happened on a startling discovery: Jackman had a face with character in it.

His eyes were small and a bit too close to his long nose, but they were deep. Hard work had narrowed his horse-head and thinned his legs and arms into a loose-jointed flail. The line from his big ears to the end of his lantern jaw was the shape of a boomerang. No doubt a longing to feel superior had sent him out to range the world in search of lesser souls than his own to save, but a single collision with old Mr. Brecht had been enough to chuck him back to his starting-point. On the other hand, all four of old Mr. Brecht's kinsmen wouldn't have added up to one Jackman.

Hud struck his flint to smoke a cigarette, but the rope-like wick was wet and wouldn't light. Jackman had been more careful of his tinder; he struck smoldering fire and held it out.

"Get this, Jackman," said Hud after a puff: "if anything goes wrong—if you even think something may be going to go wrong—cut the ignition and send for me."

"Yes sir."

"Don't say *sir,* and don't say yes before you think," said Hud. "My name's Hud. I haven't liked you much up to now, but I'm going to like you a lot if you do just as I say. If you don't, I'll do what little boys do to grasshoppers. I'll take you apart."

"Don't worry, Hud," said Jackman, his small eyes suffused with pleasure at being permitted to use Hud's first name.

They established watches of six hours each, for Hud intended to water every beast on the range at the earliest possible moment. But early on the second morning, upon being relieved by Jackman, he called in four of the *vaqueiros.* He told them to guard the stockade until he got back, and rode off at a gallop in search of Frances. He found her on the veranda.

"I'm in trouble," he said.

"What kind of trouble?"

"The worst kind—gas and oil. When will that pack-train be back?"

"Any day now."

"Any day will be too late."

Frances frowned; then her face brightened. "Wait till I get into my riding-clothes," she said, and started off.

Paca followed. "Can I come too?"

"If you think you can keep up."

Frances stopped to call into the courtyard. She issued a string of orders that tumbled out faster and louder, infecting

her listeners with her own haste. When dressing, for once she discarded the heavy leather hat and bound her hair beneath a tightly knotted bandana. Paca hurried off to put on her jodhpurs, worn only half a dozen times. On the way she saw Hud standing in the central door, looking out into the court. His face had a light in it she hadn't seen for days. It was alive, and it made her heart skip a beat.

OLD Mr. Brecht called to him as she ran up the stairs:

"What's up, Hud? What's all the row?"

"They've rounded up a dozen ponies," said Hud, "and they're cinching Idelfonso's sawbuck pack-saddles onto them. They're having one devil of a time."

"Ponies? Don't you mean mules?"

"No sir—ponies. The best remounts we've got."

"That's crazy! Who told them to?"

"Frances."

"Oh—Frances. What for?"

Hud explained.

"What about the halters?" asked the old man. "Are they loose or tied to the saddles?"

"Tied."

"Son," said Mr. Brecht with a cackling chuckle, "you're going to ride."

Frances crossed the living-room, trailing two bull-whips. "Hud," she asked, "can you handle one of these?"

He hefted the short stock and waggled the long lash on the floor. "I've never tried," he said, "but I'll soon learn."

As they went out to their horses, Paca joined them and the three mounted. The dozen pack-ponies wore only hackamores. So that's what the old man had been driving at—they weren't to be led! Scarcely the thought formed in Hud's mind when Frances' whip flew out with the crack of a pistol-shot. Instantly there was a riot; women and children screamed; men scattered. The great gate opened. In a compact bunch the ponies headed for it like a single bullet. Dogs yelped at their heels, and Frances crowded the dogs. She shouted only one word over her shoulder: "South!"

Hud drove his spurs hard into his pony's flanks, but even so, he was left far behind. As for Paca, her mouth wide open, she started not at all. The ponies held to the road for the length of the colonnade of trees, while Frances dodged through the row on her right in spite of the rougher going. But she had guessed they would break north, and they did. Hud thought he had seen her ride before; now he knew that the business with the little heifer had been only child's play. She became a screaming demon, punctuating her cries with the *crack, crack, crack* of the long whip. Feeling like a silly spectator, he saw her catch up with the flying wedge, ride parallel with it, then lean and swerve against the leaders.

Her stallion pressed harder and harder, throwing all his weight inward at every leap. The wedge began to turn in a wide sweep, and to his horror Hud realized it was headed straight for the river. Gathering up the lash of his own whip, he beat as well as spurred his horse. He had learned better than to try to guide him—let the pony work it out himself. He was wise; the pony knew exactly what to do. When the bunch, with Frances in its midst, sank to its haunches and slid to a stop at the brink of the gorge, Hud's pony was there to see that they headed south.

Frances turned blazing eyes on Hud. "Good work," she panted.

Then it began all over again—her yell, her whip and the thunder of galloping hoofs. Now the pack-ponies knew what it was all about; they were expected to take the trail to the south. They did it at a hard gallop, still frightened by the strange sawbuck saddles anchored to their backs.

"They'll kill themselves," yelled Hud.

"Not by running," shouted Frances. "The only one I'm worried about is you. If you get left behind, just take it easy. Leave it to your—" At a dig from her spurs, her stallion shot across his pony's nose. A scream floated back to him: "Hold them!"

The stallion laid his belly to the ground till he looked more like a flying bat than a horse. Far ahead one of the pack-ponies—not the leader—had decided to try for home by a wide detour, and Frances was riding hell-bent to head him off. She was furious at herself for having abandoned her leather hat, but she had an answer even to that. As the pony sailed under the first of the thorn trees, she went out of the saddle and glued herself to his side, her head buried in his mane, and there she stayed. It was the last Hud was to see of her for a time.

He brought his attention back to the bunch of galloping ponies his own mount had been holding to the trail. Slowly their pace began to slacken, but almost an hour passed before they settled into a steady long lope that gave him a chance

to light a cigarette. He kept looking behind for Frances, but when he finally discovered her, it was straight ahead, trotting toward him from the south. The fugitive pack-pony meekly joined his mates; Frances waited for Hud and fell in at his side. Not a scratch marked her. She unknotted the bandana and went to work on her face. Though from infancy her skin was innocent of rouge, no more brilliant color ever stained cheeks or lent a purer red to lips. Even her freckles were gone, lost in the rosy glow.

"Say," said Hud, "you're beautiful."

She laughed and choked. "Don't make fun of me. Please don't."

"So I was making fun of you!"

They cantered in silence mile after mile. Hud was saving himself, determined to escape disgrace. The bull-whip he carried was a nuisance, and he let it slip to the ground when he thought Frances wasn't looking. From time to time he glanced at her, but only hurriedly. He didn't want to talk. He was happy. His dream was showing color, panning pure gold. If this ride could last forever, he felt he would never tire, never know hunger, thirst or loneliness. Without warning the ponies slackened their pace to a walk. Frances peered ahead.

"Look," she said.

HUD saw an advancing plume of dust and guessed its meaning. Half an hour later he heard the *tinkle-tankle* of the leader's bell; and soon after, the cavalcade and Idelfonso's pack-train met. The panting ponies mingled with the mules, forcing a halt. Frances talked to Idelfonso, who punctuated each pause with an understanding nod. She turned to Hud.

"Five of the ponies are still in fine shape," she said. "Each can carry two five-gallon tins or their equivalent. Pick out what you want."

Scarcely ten minutes passed before Idelfonso and his helpers had loaded the ponies, binding the tins firmly in place. Idelfonso headed the leader toward home and gave her a slap. One pony trotted out after her, and then another. All of them went, the loaded ones first. They seemed meek and contented. They had caught the pack-train two days out and would be home by dawn. They had saved Hud two precious days.

He dismounted carefully, not sure his aching legs would hold him up. Frances slid carelessly to the ground. Their horses, relieved of saddles and bridles, rolled, scratched and snorted in the dust. Idelfonso fetched them water from the oxcart in the rear, and fed them corn out of the shallow halves of gourds.

FRANCES and Hud lay stretched full length, thankful the sun had set. They slept. There was no moon, but presently the stars came out, crowding into the sky. Idelfonso made a fire, cooked a pot of beans and tossed in chunks of jerked beef. When the mess was ready, he woke the sleepers. After the meal Hud sat smoking with his arms locked around his knees.

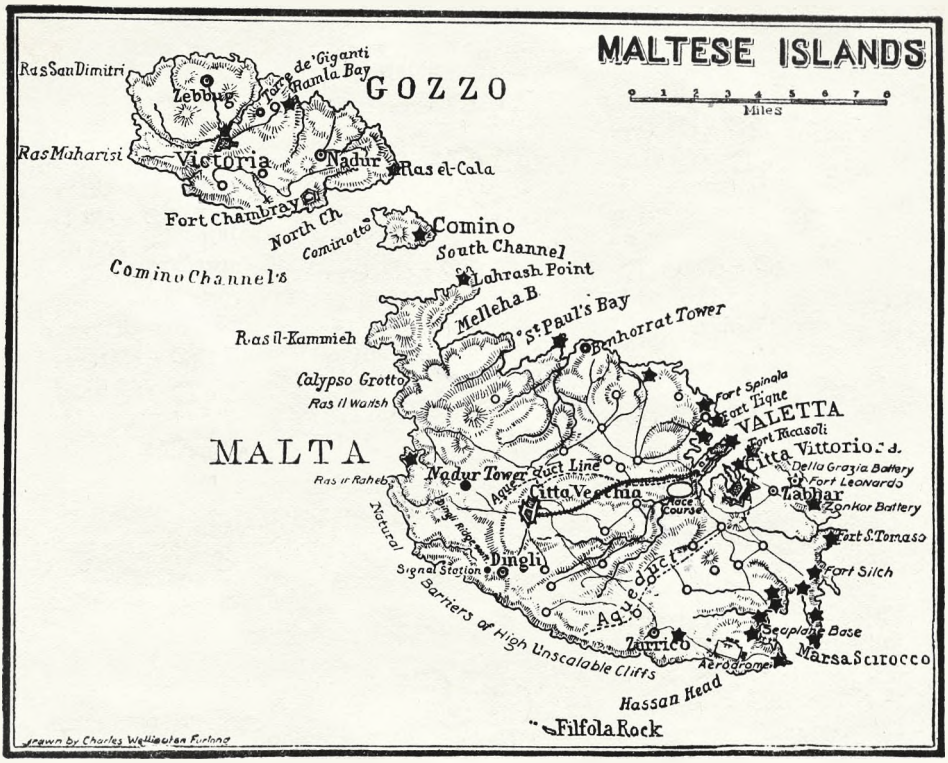
"Oughtn't we to get going?" he asked.

"I suppose so," answered Frances, "but there's no hurry. Since we didn't water the ponies, they won't stop till they get home."

They mounted, and from the first the horses settled into a running walk. It was an easy pace, a pace they could keep up for hours on end at four miles to the hour. Their bobbing heads were almost touching, and sometimes Hud's knee would brush Frances' leg. Away from the glow of the campfire the night had seemed dark, but now the stars became brilliant and descended close to earth. Hud could see quite clearly. The weird forms of the desert reminded him of the dawn when he had first discovered Fazenda do Macho, only tonight the light was a hazy blue instead of green. Frances seemed abnormally still. He glanced at her, and to his amazement found she was sound asleep. She had dropped her knotted reins, and her clasped hands were cupped on the pommel of the saddle. She would sway, nod, half wake, steady herself and sleep again.

He grew envious and thought he would try it himself. He knotted his reins and placed his hands as she had done. The next thing he knew he had pitched against her, and only her quickness saved him from tumbling off his horse. Neither of them spoke, but now they were awake. It seemed to Hud he had never been so awake in all his life, and instinct told him the same was true of Frances. His arm brushed her hanging arm. Without volition or apparent motion their hands came together, her hand settling into his like a tired bird returning to its nest. They rode in silence, neither of them daring or wishing to speak.

The concluding installment of this story of South America will appear in our forthcoming September issue.



Island Fortress

With the fall of Crete, Malta becomes doubly important. Colonel Furlong, whom you will remember for his articles on Gibraltar and "Our War in North Africa" writes with special knowledge of this beleaguered outpost of empire.

By CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

IN the middle of the Middle Sea lies an island. It is an isle of romance, a beacon of history, an outpost of empire. All this centers about an indented bay on its northeast coast, in the most impressive, picturesque and stupendous pile of masonry in the world. The island is Malta, and the focal point is its capital Valetta. Over this mighty fortress, during the past year, airships escutcheoned with fasces or a swastika, have sent their bombs hurtling down upon this inimitable landmark of history.

Malta, eight and a half miles wide by seventeen and a half long, includes its little neighbors Gozo, Comino, Cominoto and the islet Filfola Rock, all one mighty fortress. Its vital area is the city of Valetta and the adjacent towns of Vittoriosa, Senglea and Burmola, which surround and protect this great naval base.

Unlike Gibraltar, Malta cannot be brought under the land guns of an enemy. Although Malta's harbor, like Gibraltar's, is her softest spot, it is much better protected. Gibraltar's harbor, of only 422 square acres, lies right under the guns of a potential enemy country, while Valetta's two harbors of about five square miles is free from enemy land guns.

The morale and loyalty of the civilian population is a very important factor in a situation such as Malta's. During the 142 years of English occupation, the Mal-

tese have steadily increased in population, wealth and productiveness. They have been given a constitution, have representative government, and furthermore have the protection of Britain. A decade or so ago Italy, through the language question, tried to propagandize the Italianization of Malta, and stirred up a tempest in a teapot affair on the Island. The Maltese know that were the British to give up Malta, it would fall into the hands of Germany or Italy and nothing would be gained. Certainly much of their liberty would be lost. The Maltese, like the Egyptians and Indians, know that under British control their lives and liberties are better protected than under that of any other imperialistic power.

Proof of the loyalty of the two hundred and seventy thousand Maltese to the British Crown and garrison is assured through the interrelated interests of the Maltese, and the fact that last February Britain was able to conscript their manpower for both the combatant and noncombatant services.

TO understand not only Malta's significance, but Malta's importance, we must see it in its geographical and military relationship to the strategy of the present situation. The shortest distances by water from Europe to Africa are the nine-mile-wide Strait of Gibraltar, the less-than-mile-wide Dardanelles and Bosporus, and the ninety-eight-mile-wide Strait of Malta, which divides the eastern and western Mediterranean and separates Europe from Africa at its center. Malta is equidistant in the 1916-mile stretch between Gibraltar and Port Saïd. With Africa as an Axis objective, Malta is the key position between the east and west flanks of Europe.

It is obvious that in the present invasion movement of Africa and attendant movement of closing the Mediterranean to the British, Malta must be included as one of the three major objectives of such a campaign. In fact, it is the central *tête-du-pont* of the three military bridgeheads which separate Europe from Africa and control the narrowest water barriers.

As the main territorial Axis objectives of this war are the control of the Middle East and Africa, we may look in the near future for a simultaneous drive against all three straits or the possible circumventing of them by surprise movements by air and water.

The Axis, it is reported, has for some time had powerful sixteen-inch siege-guns ready on railroad cars in northern Spain, awaiting the moment to move on Gibraltar and secure control of its Strait, with or without Spanish leave. Recent movements of German troops through Italy into Sicily and Libya and the constant attempts to soften Malta by air-raids since September, 1940, *indicate preliminary moves for an eventual attack and occupancy of Malta itself.*

Ever since last fall Italian warplanes have been busy in the Mediterranean area, bombing Gibraltar and Malta, showing increased activity since last summer, but with apparently little success. During this period Italy appears to have lost sixteen hundred out of her thirty-five-hundred planes, about thirteen hundred of which have been destroyed in the Mediterranean area. Most of these were lost in the Libyan campaign, but a fair number have fallen to Maltese gunners.

Around the first of this year the Germans came more into the picture: The most important attack was in mid-January, when the cruiser *Southampton* was badly damaged by German dive-bombers, and the twenty-five-thousand-ton *Illustrious* crippled in the Sicilian Straits, the Germans later claiming she was further bombed in the Naval Base at Valetta Harbor, a merchant ship struck, the arsenal and port works of Valetta hammered, and hits made on hangars, barracks and runways.

BRITISH sources from Valetta admitted some damage, and slight civilian casualties, and claimed that ten German or Italian planes were shot down and three damaged during that attack. The Italians fly so high, the British state, that in more than two hundred raids, since June 11, 1940, they have caused only slight damage. Both Maltese and British have far greater regard for the courage and ability of the Germans, than what they call the "safety-first" Italians.

Following the battle of the Sicilian Channel and the crippling of the *Illustrious,* a series of intensified day-after-day and night-after-night attacks by German dive-bombers occurred, with port installations and defenses in general their objectives.

The R.A.F. retaliated on the home nests of Nazi dive-bombers in Sicily. The establishment of these air bases in Sicily has, as primary objectives, an offensive against the British Mediterranean fleet, the closing of the Sicilian channel to Britain, and the softening of Malta to

render it useless as a naval base and preparatory to its eventual invasion. But Malta is a hard nut to crack—as has been demonstrated time and again throughout its stormy history.

AT one time or another Malta has been held by most of the greatest nations of the world. First came the Phœnicians, who stayed for seven hundred years and left the Temples of Hercules and Hagiar Kim. They gave Malta the name of *Malet,* meaning *shelter* and were the ancestors of most of its present native population. Then came the Greeks and changed the name from *Malet* to *Melita,* meaning the *bee* or *honey* and from which its present name is derived. Followed the Carthaginians, descendants of the Phœnicians, who were heartily welcomed by the Maltese. After two hundred and thirty years appeared the Romans.

During their rule of over five centuries there occurred in 58 A.D. Malta's great historical event, the shipwreck of St. Paul. This apostle remained here for three months, converted some of the inhabitants to Christianity, and laid Malta's religious foundation. With the Fifth Century, the Vandals swarmed in from the north, and seized Malta, only to be driven out ten years later by the Goths.

Then Belisarius, the Byzantine, reunited Malta to the Eastern Empire. But as the governors abused their authority, the Maltese rose up and surrendered their islands to the Arabs until, tired of their Saracen oppressors, the Maltese connived with Count Roger of Normandy. So in A.D. 1090, out went the Arabs, leaving their culture, architecture and language indelibly impressed upon the people.

Count Roger now united these islands to the Crown of Sicily; but seventy years later Malta passed into the hands of Germans. Because of sixty-seven years of heavy impositions, many inhabitants immigrated to Sicily, and Malta was inhabited almost only by soldiers.

The Germans gave way to the French in 1266, and the French to the Spanish Kings of Aragon in 1284. Again the Maltese revolted, redeemed their country by payment and were re-united to the Kingdom of Sicily, until in 1530 the Islands were ceded by Charles V of Spain, through Pope Clement VII, to the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.

Why the Knights? When the Roman Empire crashed, out of a war-torn Europe new states emerged, united by the common bond of Christian faith. Christian pilgrims trekked to the Holy Sepulcher; and in the Eleventh Century, Christian enthusiasm culminated in the Crusades, a movement to rescue the Holy Land from the Saracens.

A small group of devout Knights formed a brotherhood and the Hospital of Jerusalem, to care for pilgrims, wounded, sick and impoverished which this war produced. But a hospital in a land infested by hostile hordes called for defense. So these Hospitallers in their black-cowled robes formed themselves into Knights Hospitallers, whose duty it was to exchange their robes for armor and provide for the Hospital's defense.

Thus the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem was founded, and their duties were hospitality, religion and militancy. They were enlisted as Knights, Chaplains and Servants at Arms, and took for their ensign a white cross on a red ground, symbolizing peace and consolation in the din of battle.

DRIVEN first from Jerusalem by the Saracens, they established themselves in Acre, then in Cyprus, and later in Rhodes, which they appropriated and occupied by conquest from 1308 until finally driven out by Sulieman the Magnificent in 1524. In 1530 they were presented with the rocky island of Malta, and at once established themselves about the great harbor of Valetta, principally at Vittoriosa.

The Order drew recruits from the Catholic aristocracy of every part of Europe, and were grouped according to their respective nationalities or territorial divisions of origin, and when the Knights settled in Rhodes, the Order was divided into Legions or "Langues" (Tongues). There were a little over two thousand in the whole Order when the Knights were in Malta in 1631, and the Langues were as follows: Provence, Auvergne, France, Castile, Italy, Aragon, Germany, including Bohemia.

Each Langue had its own quarters, known as Regional Hospices or Auberges, and each Auberge was responsible for the defense of a certain post on the fortifications. Within the Auberges or Inns, the national units of young Knights were much like college students in a fraternity house.

The endowing of Malta to the Sovereign Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem was consented to by every sovereign of Christendom, and so Malta

became the center of this remarkable international aristocratic community, *a sovereign power, a country in itself.* Here was the head of the Order, his court, consul and the Langues, who continued their duties toward Christian humanity in general and *themselves in particular.*

Again its Knights took up their militant role of waging war against Moslem enemies who infested the Mediterranean. They were rescuing captured Christians, enslaving captured Moslems, making Malta itself a refuge for Christian vessels. But the Turkish Sultan Sulieman was still on their trail. He not only intended to turn the Knights out of Malta, provide himself with a direct route of attack on Sicily and Italy, but to extend the Ottoman Empire into Europe. So in 1565, thirty-five years after the Knights were established in Malta, Sulieman began what Voltaire said was the greatest and most terrific siege of history.

AFTER an epic defense, Fort St. Elmo was taken, the walls of Vittoriosa breached, and the flag of the Moslem actually placed on the uppermost ramparts. Only through the indomitable, inspiring leadership of their Grand Master, Jean Parisot de la Vallette, a hardy seventy-year-old veteran who fought in the breach in person and held it, was Malta saved. In reply to a demand from the Turkish commander-in-chief for a surrender, when all seemed lost, Vallette retorted that he would slay any messenger even daring to bring him such a demand. Some of the defenders swam out in the Great Harbor, with knives and swords in their teeth to meet the swimming, attacking Turks, and hand-to-hand duels were fought in water out of the fighters' depths. Knights loaded their cannon with the decapitated heads of their captured enemies, and hurled them back into the invaders' ranks! Two hundred and forty Knights and about nine thousand other Christians were slain during the siege, which was raised when the Knights, rallying from all Europe at the head of reinforcements, arrived from Sicily; and the Turks, with a loss of thirty thousand men, were driven out, never to return.

All Europe rang with Vallette's name; funds poured in to rebuild and restore the prosperity of Malta. A new capital was begun on Mt. Scebbaris; and on March 28, 1566, this great Grand Master laid its first stone. Little wonder they named the city Valetta.

From then on, the Knights held Malta in peace for two hundred and thirty years. The Knights were a celibate order; but as their prosperity increased and life became more one of ease, women came from Europe to trade upon their charms, and were added to those captured from the harems of the Moslems. Malta became the resort of libertines and the Maltese Islands the scandal of Europe.

Then one day in June, 1798, a French fleet appeared. Twenty-four hours after its arrival, Napoleon the Corsican, on his way to conquer Egypt, walked through the Porto Reale into Valetta, and Malta was conquered by the treachery of a Fifth Column comprising some of the French Knights, and the weakness of their Grand Master, Von Hompesch.

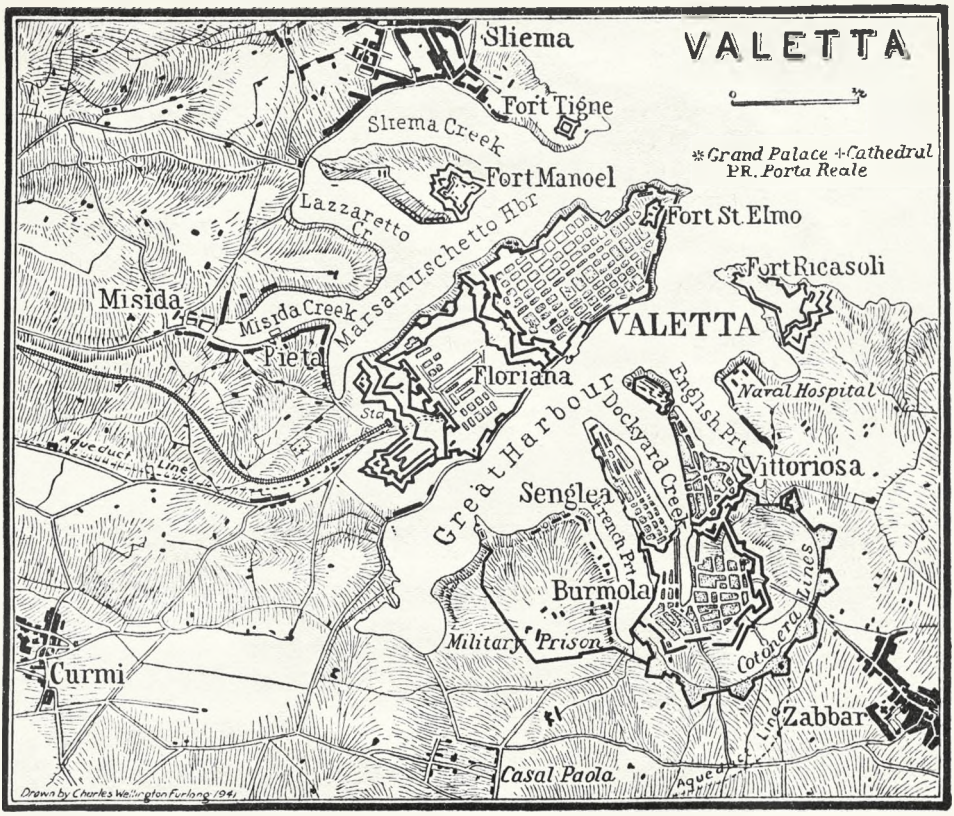
During the week Napoleon spent in Valetta, and the six weeks he spent on the Islands, palaces and churches were pillaged, and he sailed away not only with the sacred jeweled sword of La Vallette, but with the famous solid silver service of the Hospital of Valetta, which he "melted down into 3,499 pounds of bullion to pay his soldiers on their Egyptian campaign."

Following the treacherous surrender of the Knights, the infuriated Maltese slew some of the traitors and dragged their bodies into the Council Hall, where, so the records go, the native women drank their blood.

WITHIN six weeks after Bonaparte left, "the Maltese were so . . . . sick of Liberty and Fraternity that they shut up the small French garrison left behind . . . within the monstrous walls of Valetta and called upon Sicily for assistance." But instead came the British, hot-foot, not so much to win the gratitude and loyalty of Malta, as to secure their own position, when later, in the whirligig of wars, they should themselves become masters of the coveted stronghold.

So in 1799 Great Britain, with the help of the Maltese, captured the French garrison. Nor was Britain deaf to pleadings of some of the Maltese, "who preferred the rule of Britannia to that of the famous Hospitallers." So in 1814, by the Treaty of Paris, Britain gracefully accepted this strategic stronghold of Malta as a Crown Colony, and has held it ever since.

The Knights and their galleys disappeared from the Mediterranean in 1799. But today from their offices in the Via Condotti in Rome, under a Grand Master,



the Order still carries on a religious and charitable service. The Knights still maintain and administer hospitals and ambulances. In fact, it was their work that gave birth to the ambulance service and the Red Cross. For a period of half a thousand years *they gave an exemplification of the practical functionings, on a small scale, of a true United States of Europe and a League of Nations combined.*

This same year the Knights left Malta, the American consuls, William Eaton and James Cathcart, were endeavoring to arrange treaties of peace with the Moslem Dey of Algiers and the Bashaw of Tripoli. In that same year our government was completing the building of those first fighting frigates which were to appear in the Mediterranean in 1801, to take up the fight against the Barbary corsairs, where the Knights had laid it down. For fifteen years *our infant navy fought the last crusade on the sea against the Barbary rulers,* until treaties of peace had been effected with all of them.

Malta itself was used by our squadron as a rendezvous, and a base to refit and replenish stores. On the arrival of the first American frigates there in 1801, the Americans found Malta in the possession of the English, who had occupied it only ten months before.

The attitude of the British rulers toward the history of the island's occupation by the Knights, like that of the native Maltese, is severe and unsympathetic. A "corrupt, fanatical and hypercritical lot, as cruel as the Turk they fought" is the verdict of most British army and navy officers. But they forget the original intention and actual charitable work of the Order toward the needy, which extended over centuries, and that romantic, colorful life which has left us one of the most unique and valuable historical records of a sovereignty, and the best preserved and marvelous piles of architectural heritages extant.

To Britain, whose pride and power is centered in her naval supremacy, the security of Malta has always been jealously guarded. Notwithstanding that the Maltese Islands embrace a population of two hundred and seventy thousand people and 122 square miles of terrain, Britain does not consider this possession as a colony, but *an important military focus, more vital than Gibraltar.* In peacetime Britain usually has maintained from eight to ten thousand men of all arms on the islands, a much greater surplus than would be

necessary under peace conditions, for maintaining the military establishment. But *Malta's importance is not only as an effective naval base, but also as a base of military operations*—as a large military reservation from which she can draw for service elsewhere, in emergency.

She has always looked ahead in case of another Indian mutiny, which would surely follow an invasion of India by Russia. Consequently, Britain could always draw troops at once from her Malta garrison, as they would already be halfway to Bombay or Calcutta; and a brigade known as the "Indian Contingent" has always been kept there on a war footing.

A policy His Majesty's Government has adopted to a large extent in India and more or less in all British dependencies, has been a military police force of natives officered by British. Even in Hongkong and in Singapore, Britain has large contingents of such police, mainly Sihks from India. The Maltese regiment, called the Royal Maltese Fensibles, officered by British, is mostly employed to man the outlying points of the Islands. Some months after the opening of war Britain not only reinforced her Malta garrison, but used Malta for a replenishing and trans-shipment point to Egypt and the Middle East. We may be assured that at the present moment Malta's garrison has been reinforced in sufficient numbers amply to defend the Islands.

But it is to the naval arm of Britain that Malta is of primary interest as Britain's most effective and useful naval base, 2280 miles away from England. Her naval men consider Malta as the warden of the million square miles of that great sea, the *Magna Mare* of the Old World. To naval men, then, Malta just means one thing: a naval base.

FROM time immemorial the harbors of Malta have been prized by maritime powers. But for these harbors of Malta, the entire history of Europe would have been changed. In the middle of the rocky terrain of Malta lies the old capital, Citta Vecchia, in appearance like a medieval dream. It was a fortified metropolis centuries before the Arabs came. The Arabs contracted its defensive walls, more easily to man and defend it. The Arabs also erected strong defensive works on Gozo and on the site of Port Angelo at the entrance to Great Harbor. The Knights of St. John added to these in Citta Vittoriosa and Senglea, but the greater part of the fortifications of Valetta proper were built by the Knights after the great siege in 1565. And high on the escutcheon of Malta's names, alongside that of De la Vallette, must be written that of the master mind who designed and superintended Valetta's unequaled amphitheater of fortifications—Chevalier Jerome Cassan, the accomplished architect and engineer. Nature has prepared both Gibraltar and Malta for man's military adaptation; and man, through his science and art, has done the rest.

THE port of Valetta has four splendid assets for a naval base, *i.e.*, an adequate but narrow entrance, storm protection, well-defined shores and adequate depth. The average depth is sixty feet, the result of many years of systematic dredging. This enables Valetta to receive ships of the largest tonnage and to afford ample anchorage space for the entire British Mediterranean fleet.

Although many of Malta's ancient defensive structures are inappropriate for modern use, modern instruments of warfare have revolutionized her forts and today there is not an unprotected point in the entire group of the Maltese Islands. In the early days of hand-to-hand fighting and short-range weapons, Malta's defenders depended on fighting from behind the main fortifications of Citta Vecchia and Valetta, and on occasion making sallies from them. In the case of the Great Siege, the Moslem forces consolidated positions on the peninsula of land only two-fifths of a mile across Marsamaschetto Harbor where Fort Tigne now stands. Aside from modernizing and strengthening both guns and fortifications of Valetta Harbor, Britain has ringed the entire island with a series of forts and gun-emplacements whose arcs of fire intersect, and has not left a single weak spot at any of its coastal approaches, while well-camouflaged anti-aircraft batteries, protect against air approach, particularly in the vicinity of Valetta, so both Malta, Gozo and even little Comino can bristle like porcupines when threatened. While the basic plan of these fortifications are based on the old lines of the Arabs and the Knights, they have been strongly reinforced and extended. (Map 2.)

There are two natural factors that have enabled the Royal Garrison Engineers to make this fortress well-nigh impregnable: the rocky character of the islands, and the numerous caves and grot-

toes found throughout them. Though probably to a lesser extent than in Gibraltar, the Royal Garrison Engineers have been sapping and mining tunnels and chambers in the yellow rock and creating storehouse and reservoirs for food, fuel and water. And these caves, subterranean passages, rock-hewn cellars and massive buildings offer the best air-raid protection of any city in the world.

Malta's ten thousand little four-acre farms have produced in one year 145,000 bushels of wheat and 96,000 bushels of barley. As this would be barely enough for the garrison alone, it will be seen that most of Malta's wheat and grain must be imported and stored. So many of these caves and excavations serve as great chambers, designed for the storage of grain in anticipation of a siege or blockade. Malta abounds in springs, and the Knights brought pure and excellent water from the mountainous part of the island and conducted it to both Valetta and Citta Vecchia through aqueducts built Roman style. Today water from these same springs is brought into the cities through modern, underground supply lines.

From attack by sea alone Malta may be considered impregnable; but Malta and the Fleet today must reckon with new factors, not only from the air alone, but from the air in coöperation with landing infantry.

There are five enemy bases from which Malta might be attacked from nearby coasts: the three Italian-owned islands of Lampedusa, Linosa and Pantellaria, distances of about 95, 75 and 125 miles respectively; from Sicily, 58 miles away, and possibly from Tunisia, and from Tripoli, each two hundred miles distant.

THE Germans are in Tripoli, Crete and Sicily; from the latter place lies Malta's greatest threat; there the R.A.F. have been centering their attention on German concentrations and airdromes. They claim to have turned the Catania airdrome buildings into a blazing holocaust, exploding gasoline stores and bomb dumps and destroying grounded planes. The blaze could be seen sixty miles away. Similar attacks were made on Italian airdromes at Marizza, Caleto and Cattavia fields, and on Rhodes, the former stronghold of the Knights Hospitallers.

The Axis has boasted that "Malta could be made ready for storming" by her dive-bombers alone, and Italy has bragged that "the first definite change for the worse will come when the base of Malta is completely dismantled and the ports and airports made absolutely unfit for service." All this is to be achieved by the intensified, perpetual bombing of Malta.

It is my opinion that Gibraltar's harbor has already been made untenable, and to a certain extent and lesser degree, the harbors of Valetta. But the two greater and more constant uses of a naval base, fueling and supplying warships, are by and large unaffected, and will continue to be, so long as these greatest two fortresses in the world hold out and there are ships of Britain to use those bases.

It is not only a battle between airship and battleship, but between airship and naval base. If Britain were forced to abandon Gibraltar, she might attempt to establish a western Mediterranean base on the Balearic Islands, at Port Mahon in Majorca. Spain has known for centuries of Britain's interest in Mahon; and Minorca was occupied by the latter during most of the Eighteenth Century. Italy established and occupied an air base on Majorca and on other of the Balearic Islands during the recent war in Spain.

The great question today is whether air power or sea power, the air bomber or the battleship, is supreme. Perhaps nowhere in the world do conditions and circumstances permit of the solution better than in the Middle Sea. From the toe of the boot of Italy, Germany has just "kicked off" in the greatest and most far-reaching naval game in history. It is my opinion that the question of the superiority of airplane versus battleship will be solved within the year, and in the Mediterranean. Battleships are built singly, air bombers by the thousands. Germany is credited with building 31,640 aircraft in the past six months; these included 1,350 dive bombers and a new type of tank-carrying plane. Nations are no longer dependent on ferrying armies by sea. The battleship has its use, but the air fortress and the tank seem to be the present answer.

In a broadcast last winter Winston Churchill described the destruction of ninety out of one hundred fifty dive-bombers which attacked Malta. "I dwell upon this incident," he concluded, "not because I think it disposes of the danger in the Central Mediterranean, but in order to show you that there, as elsewhere, we intend to give a good account of ourselves."

A colorful and very human story of the Foreign Legion that was —and which may be again.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Madame

THERE was nothing to distinguish the woman from a hundred other housewives in the noisy and crowded marketplace. She was certainly close to fifty, a large, chunky figure bundled in the rusty-black cloth which French matrons of the middle class seem to acquire in their middle years as naturally as some animals grow thicker fur when winter approaches. She wore no hat on her dull-brown, grayish hair; her face was soft, pinkish and placid. From one rather large hand hung a shopping-bag of cord netting, half-filled with provisions. And she had been bargaining for a bunch of carrots in the sonorous mixture of Arabic, French and Spanish employed for such petty trading in the Oranese district of Algeria.

Yet Sergeant Vonheim was gripped by strong emotion when he saw her. He lost composure, a remarkable phenomenon. For Vonheim had been in the French Foreign Legion ten years; he was thirty, stood six feet tall, a seasoned, hard-muscled veteran with a rainbow of ribbons adorning his khaki tunic. His calm and self-assurance were proverbial; I had seen him converse with high officers, colonels and majors, without a trace of awe. Now, as the woman extended her hand, the blood rushed to his face.

"Why, what a surprise! Vonheim, what are you doing in Oran?"

"I'm on convalescence leave, madame," the Sergeant replied, much as if he were reporting to a superior. He released her hand, cleared his throat to ask: "May I ask news of your children, madame?"

"Oh, they are well. Well and troublesome. Pierre is away at school."

She granted him permission to introduce me with a quick, almost imperceptible move of her firm chin.

"And Madame Dormayer—"

When I met her glance directly, I understood, somewhat, my comrade's behavior. This plainly garbed woman was not ordinary: her eyes, while brown and deep, soft and gentle, shone with some odd inner light—resolution, courage, absolute patience. She was an honest person, and a splendid human being.

"*Widow* Dormayer, Sergeant Vonheim means," she corrected him with a smile. There was intense pride in that smile, a ring to her voice as she continued: "My husband was Captain Dormayer, who commanded the Third of the Second. That was not yesterday. All of eight years ago."

"Yes, madame, eight years. I'd just been promoted to corporal."

"Come to dinner tomorrow night, Sergeant. You must see my girls. Jeanne will remember you. Bring this gentleman with you, as long as he is interested in the Legion. You know, I have my husband's log-books—Dardanelles, Western Front, Morocco, Syria, and many photographs he took. My husband, monsieur, was a real Légionnaire. The Sergeant can tell you."

"You bet he was, madame."

She took leave and walked away.

Vonheim dropped his right hand, which had risen in an instinct to salute. He drew me along in silence.

"She doesn't invite the first slob who happens along to dinner," he assured me after a while. "That's a compliment, you know."

"I realize that," I replied. "She's a very nice lady."

"A lady, a lady?" Vonheim shrugged. "I don't know whether she would like that. She's a good woman, which is rarer

Takes Over

—out here, anyway. And she is a fine soldier too. No, I'm not joking. She made a fine wife for the old man; and when you see her kids, you can realize what a mother she makes. But she's something more, bigger. Something almost impossible to find among women. She has a man's idea of soldiering, of service. Nothing counts, nothing—not until the job is attended to. I know that's not very clear. So I'll tell you and maybe you can understand."

I HAD been promoted to corporal after eighteen months of Legion [Vonheim said], and I was transferred from Meknès to Ksar-Meharam, in the hills. It was what they call a principal post, built by the French; and a little town was growing all around it already—traders' shacks, native huts and so on. It was held by the Third Company of the Second Battalion, commanded by old man Dormayer.

As you could guess from his name, he was an Alsatian. He was one of those who'd run away from home to dodge serving Germany, had enlisted at seventeen, and had been in the Legion between twenty and thirty years. He was a big fellow with a red face and a bald head, and one of those old-fashioned mustaches. He was very popular, because he was very brave; but he was loud-mouthed, always roaring about this and that. A maniac for cleanliness, you know, and a stickler for rules and regulations.

He was allowed to have his family with him, as we were theoretically within the pacified area. His wife and three kids—a regular little devil of seven, Pierre, and two little girls, one maybe four, the other a few months old. They had two orderlies, one to take care of the horses, one for the house. But the house guy had a soft snap, mostly watching the kids, because the Captain's wife wouldn't let him work around inside. She cooked and she baked; she made dresses for the kids; she mended clothing, with the help of a native girl from the village down the hill. Once in a while, when some young guy was sick from homesickness, she would go to the hospital and mother him a bit.

She still had her looks then; her hair was thick and dark. You saw she was tall, and she had a fine figure, already a bit on the heavy side. But although there were very few European women around, and an outpost was then what it always has been and still is, nobody hung around her. To start with, any fool could see it was no use; then she had not been around army posts all her life without learning a few choice words. Also, most of us knew her story.

She'd been born and raised in North Africa, the daughter of a sergeant-major of the Legion. When she was about eighteen, living in Saïda, she met Dormayer and fell in love with him. He was a handsome young corporal then, with a big mop of blond hair. And it was ar-

ranged that they would get married as soon as he was a full sergeant. That was supposed to mean inside two years.

But Dormayer was somewhat of a rounder in those days, and liked to drink. He got his gold chevrons in due time, all right, and the wedding date had been set. But he went on a farewell party with six or seven pals, and ended in the jug, reduced to second-class private. He was transferred, and the marriage postponed.

SHE waited three years that time, until he had worked up to sergeant again. She went south to marry him, in Beni-Unif. But when she arrived, he was in prison again, demoted, with three months sentence for drunkenness and insubordination. She had to take the train home alone. And she started to wait again. She could have married any one of a dozen guys, because she was handsome, and her father, retired from the service, had opened a big café—in Mostaganem or Mascara; I forget which.

But she would not take anyone else, although her waiting for Dormayer was getting to be a big joke. Dormayer could not pass up absinthe, and it didn't agree with him. Her parents, not wanting an old maid around—you know French families?—found a candidate, and tried to force her into marriage. She was about twenty-six now, and Dormayer was supposed to be through. She left her family, went to the dump in the Far South where he was serving as a private, and made him get married! He always was brave; so his major, as a wedding-gift, made him a corporal—but decently, he could not be made a sergeant, because of his drinking.

In those days a corporal earned a few sous a day. She worked at odd jobs wherever he was stationed, waiting in a café, taking care of washing and kids in some officer's home. But whenever he was off duty, she would manage to be with him, or she quit her job. When he was with her, he did not drink. She made him study nights, read books.

When she had her first kid, he celebrated. And for that reason he never saw it, because he was drunk all forty-eight hours of its life. They broke the news to him in a cell, and he asked for permission to see her. She never reproached him; and he knelt by the side of her bed, and he swore that if he ever took another drink of absinthe, he was no Alsatian. From that time on, except for a little wine with his meals, he never drank again. Naturally, he became a bore about temperance after reforming, and I remember his long lectures to any one of us hauled up for drunkenness:

"Now, look at me: A captain. I get along without booze. Booze ruins your stomach and spoils your chances. My friend, I am a patient man, but if I ever learn of your using absinthe again, I'll break you."

You see, he thought his own drinking had been forgotten. He had become an officer during the World War, was a Knight of the Legion of Honor, had a fine record, and even though a man from the ranks, was sure to get a battalion if he lived long enough.

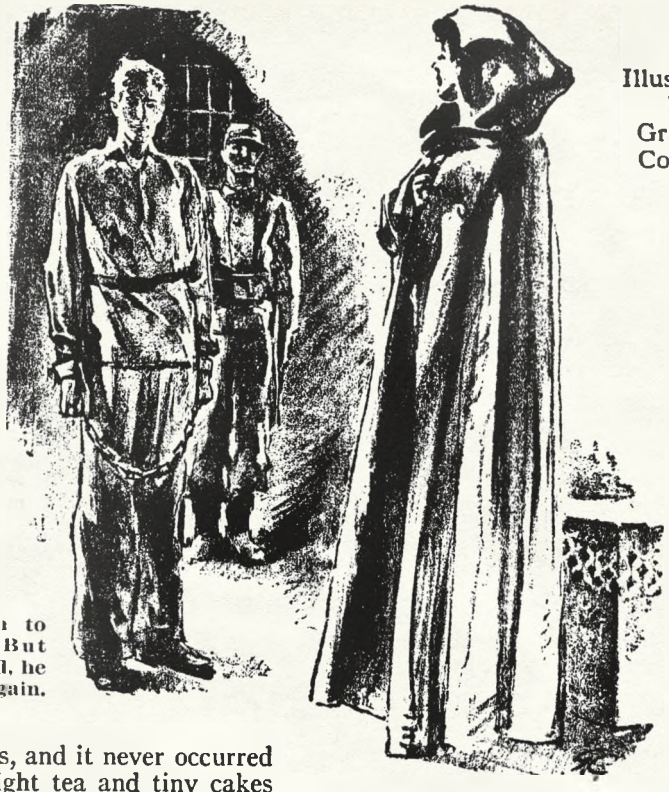
We would not mind him very much, we non-coms and privates. But his petty tyrannies irked the younger officers. His Legion was the pre-war Legion, and he tried the impossible, to reconstitute it. For instance, he'd object to a guy shaving his upper lip; he'd make ironic remarks about a modern uniform; he took a paternal interest in their private affairs. We had a very brave young lieutenant, Didier Jacquemont, whom the Captain really loved, and pestered a lot to shape into his own notion of a Legion subaltern.

Jacquemont tolerated his elephantine advice with an effort. The Lieutenant was twenty-three, a school officer, who came from a very rich family. He had a lot of money to spend, was very good looking, and loved to spend his money on horses, uniforms and boots. Dormayer would invite him to his home, sit him down, and with pencil and paper prove to him that he could dress "more like a Légionnaire" on one-sixth of the money.

Naturally, Jacquemont would moan about this to his friends. And we would all hear what he said, through the orderlies.

"It's awful, awful! He hammers into my ears with his Alsatian accent, while his wife serves tea! What tea! You could float a rifle-bullet on it. And her notion of a cake—they taste fine, but they're the size of a mule's hoof, with four centimeters of icing. They're tea-cakes for a Gargantua, for a Titan. And if you eat less than six, she looks hurt. She's sweet, but without much brain. She actually believes her husband is a great soldier. 'Listen to him, Lieutenant,' she tells me; 'he's been through the mill and knows the ropes!' Then she hands me a plate this wide, crowded with a half-dozen of these enormous cakes!"

He was right, in a way. Madame Dormayer had always cooked for robust men



Illustrated by Grattan Condon

She went south to marry him. But when she arrived, he was in prison again.

with simple tastes, and it never occurred to her to serve light tea and tiny cakes the way they do in the shops in the big cities. There were some comical yarns about her, too, when in a garrison city, because she never got used to serving cocktails or fancy *petits fours*. Once, at an official reception in Meknès, she scandalized a gang of women who were gabbing about cold cream, by saying: "Too bad it's so expensive the Government can't buy it for the men's feet!"

See, she was a soldier's girl, and she knew what sore feet were—as important to a Légionnaire as a few wrinkles to a fine dame. She meant all right, but it did make a laughable picture—a company at the halt, boots off and cold-creaming their aching toes!

WELL, at that time there was not much doing in Morocco, nothing except the absolutely necessary expeditions on the border. We had a civilian boss, the French Resident, a guy who had been a lawyer, a deputy, a senator, and who was under the delusion that he was a great man. He knew nothing about natives—Moors, Arabs, Chleuhs—nothing except what he was told. And he had decided to conquer by peaceful methods. So our patrols were under orders not to shoot until actually fired upon. It's like giving the other guy the first punch at your chin in a fist-fight.

Except in actual self-defense, no shot was to be fired inside our zone without absolute orders from the Government. No operation in the least resembling war must be made without special authorization. That means this: Suppose a patrol was fired on and lost a couple of guys killed or wounded, it could not pursue the attackers. Presumably, the incident was to be reported by telegraph to Rabat, where a bunch of desk-officers would decide what to do. I read in Kipling that they had cases like that in the British Army, and somebody once told me the Americans occasionally put such saps in charge in the Philippines. Nations want possessions, but act ashamed of the guys who shed the blood.

We had had two or three attacks, and by the time they had been duly reported and orders came with permission to arrest the culprits, they were miles away. Don't kid yourself natives don't know what general orders are issued! They watch that just like a farmer watches the calendar, in the line of business.

Elsewhere, two or three Legion officers had acted on impulse, taken the law into their own hands. They had been called to headquarters, threatened with court-martial, transferred to France or the Colonies. Peaceful penetration, that was the system!

"You can shoot me," he said, "but I killed your chief! Who found me? The woman?"

One Sunday afternoon the Captain had gone hunting with one of his orderlies and a sergeant he liked. That was about the only passion left him—everywhere, anywhere, rain or shine, he would go out with a shotgun, and get himself fowls, rabbits, and in that region, a wild boar now and then. It was a hot day, late in May, and everything was very still. You should know those quiet afternoons in the hills. They're beautiful.

About three-thirty in the afternoon the three of them came back. And the Captain had a bullet through his chest, another through his belly. The Sergeant's arm was broken by a slug; the orderly was half-blinded by a head wound. They had been ambushed by some natives, and how they had managed to get back to where they'd left their horses is a wonder.

We had a doctor stationed with us, but he was away on a tour of the native villages, giving injections against smallpox, typhoid and all that. So the pharmacist sergeant went with the Captain when he was taken into his house. Madame Dormayer had come out, taken one look at him, then one at the ambulance guy. I guess she knew from the first, but she never yelped or acted excited. I heard her call out to her maid for hot water; then she yelled for the second orderly to get the kids out of the way.

Naturally, the minute we saw those three coming in all banged up, we made for our equipment and rifles. Not an order was given, but in five minutes a lot of guys were streaming for the gateway. Nobody was saying much, but we all knew where to head for—the native village down the slope, because the younger guys from there had been getting pretty fresh for a few weeks. When the kids throw stones at you, you can be sure their fathers, uncles and older brothers will be out with rifles pretty soon.

But Jacquemont was standing before the gate, all dressed up in his best uniform, his whites starched until they glistened, his képi cocked over one ear. He removed a cigarette from his mouth, gestured us back.

"Sorry, boys! I sympathize with your emotions, but direct action is out." We halted, of course. We knew that young fellow was as brave, as game as any one of us, and that his sarcastic talk was for himself more than for us. "This is a

slight incident in an otherwise peaceful penetration, you know, and has been reported by telegraph. So, rack your rifles and find some useful occupation."

An old sergeant stepped forward.

"Please, Lieutenant—"

"Orders, Lavaux," Jacquemont told him. "An old soldier should give the example of obedience."

THERE was a lot of swearing and grumbling, but we all knew he was carrying out orders. We were about to disperse, when Madame Dormayer pushed through us to face the officer.

"The Captain's badly hurt," she said.

"I'm sorry, madame. I would have been in to see him before, if these men hadn't started off like this."

"But they're right," she told him. "We must go down to the village and find the swine who pulled that stunt."

"Impossible, madame."

"Listen: I've known this was coming for a long time. There's a preacher rousing them in this region. He has told them that we were afraid to do anything, said he would shoot our chief and we would do nothing. If you wait until the news spreads that an officer has been shot and that we haven't moved, we'll have an uprising in twelve hours. This is something that cannot be handled from Casablanca or Rabat—"

He stood there looking at her, as if surprised. She was really beautiful when she was angry, with her face all alight. It was as if he were seeing her for the first time. He removed his képi.

"Madame, I share your wishes for a quick revenge. Unfortunately, neither your wishes nor mine count here."

"Who spoke of revenge, you imbecile!" Madame snapped. "It's saving a great many lives. I was born in Kabylia, brought up with Berbers. I tell you that if we wait without doing anything, we'll be besieged inside these walls by tomorrow night, and it will take four thousand men to clear us."

Jacquemont probably did not relish being called an imbecile so publicly.

"Madame," he said, "I regret to speak harshly to you at this time. But the situation will not be improved by hysteria. May I suggest that your rightful place is beside your husband?"

"Hysteria? My place?"

Madame Dormayer grasped that young, strong fellow by the arm and started shaking him. His képi rolled into the dust, and he lifted his free hand to his face. You could see he was afraid she would scratch his eyes. But the rest of us understood that she was not hysterical, just angered.

"You nasty, snobbish brat," she said. "You spoiled brat! You and your fancy cakes, my pretty lad—I'll give you fancy cakes!" That was the first we knew that she did overhear gossip. "You'll tell me what orders mean, and where my place is, will you? When you've learned to wipe your own nose! All you worry over is yourself and your job, and your lovely uniforms! A soldier? If you're the best France gets for army officers today, God help France!"

"Madame, madame," he protested, "let—me—go—or—"

"You'll hit me, eh?" She shoved him away four feet with a single lunge. "Try it, my sweet lad! And I'll hand you a smack you'll remember!" She whirled to face us: "Now, let's forget that kid. Most of you know what I say is right. Let's get organized. We can't all go—half must remain here to guard the walls. But be quick. I take the responsibility."

Jacquemont had picked up his képi, dusted it on his sleeve, put it back on his head as jauntily as before. But he was very pale, and his lips quivered. He watched without saying a word. Naturally, although we agreed with her, we could not take her orders. She saw our faces, and realized it. Suddenly she looked as if she were about to break down and sob.

It was then that the young chap did something very decent, because, after all, he had reason to believe he was kissing his career good-by. He came forward quickly.

"You are wrong, madame," he told her. "If you will assume command, I shoulder the responsibility." He addressed us: "Madame Dormayer's orders are mine—understood?"

EIGHTY of us trotted out behind her and the Lieutenant, who rode. She mounted astride, with her skirts hitched up. Even then, a lot of us couldn't keep from laughing, because she had nice legs, and you could see the fringe of the old-style bloomers she wore. But she could ride, and she handled her carbine as casually as if it had been her pet egg-beater. They bred them tough in Kabylia, in the Eighties!

When we got near the village, she reined her horse and looked at Jacquemont. But he smiled, shook his head and

saluted: "I have nothing to say, madame. This is your show."

"All right," she said, without blinking. "Sergeant Lavaux take a section and cut in between the houses and the hills—keep anyone from leaving. As to who fires first, use your own judgment. I don't want your blood on my head. The rest of you, fix bayonets and follow me!"

We entered that village quietly, hurt no one, but they saw we were spoiling for trouble—and made no trouble. Madame Dormayer slid off the saddle and beckoned to the Kaid, a gray-bearded old man who looked twice as mean as Judas.

"There's been a shooting. Get everybody out in the open, so we can look at their hands and see who handled the guns. Make it quick!"

The old guy shouted orders.

"Bah!" Jacquemont said. "They've washed their hands."

She looked at him and laughed a little.

"You've a lot to learn, young man."

Within a few minutes, the Kaid had his people gathered in the central place, women and children on one side, grown men on the other.

"Everybody here?" Madame asked.

"Yes, save those with the flocks and in the fields."

"Watch these swine," she ordered. "If anyone starts anything, finish it. Ten men with me to search the huts."

WE understood her plan, then. She had deceived the old Kaid into thinking we would be satisfied with a casual inspection of the inhabitants, so that those who had anything on their conscience remained hidden. We could be fairly certain that anyone we found in the huts had been mixed up in the ambush.

In fifteen minutes we had rooted out four young men, jerking them from under heaps of hides, out of corn-bins, one out of a big coffer. And we had collected seven repeating carbines—weapons not permitted natives unless in French service. We trussed these fellows up like geese, and thought the show was over.

But Madame beckoned to the Kaid again.

"Where's the holy man, the preacher?"

"What preacher?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you—" And she spoke to him in his own tongue, which is said to be easily picked up by someone who knows Kabylian. "You see, I understand your language, and your people gossip among themselves while waiting to see the doctor up at the Post. This preacher spent last night in this village."

The old chief gestured: "I cannot tell you, madame."

"Where did he spend the night?" she asked. She winked swiftly.

"There," the Kaid declared, indicating.

She led our searching party into a house exactly opposite the one he had pointed out. We had visited it before, but found nothing but an old woman who said she was too weak to walk.

"Stand by for trouble," Madame said, hoisting the crone to her feet. "Lift the rugs—he's somewhere under that straw."

She was right, of course. We hauled him out, a chap over six feet tall, a swarthy fellow with a big beard, a wandering Marmusha preacher. And he had a carbine, a fine Mauser with a hair-trigger arrangement. But he saw there was no use fighting: we'd have run our bayonets through him in a second.

"You can shoot me," he said in pretty good French, "but I killed your chief! Who found me? The woman?" And he laughed. "It is then with you as with us. Men have courage and weapons—and a woman often guides them truly with mere cunning."

And he spat at our feet.

You should have seen the Lieutenant's face when the five men were strung together, ready to be marched to jail. It all sounds very simple when you tell it after it happened. It always does. But not two hours before, there had been the menace of an unavenged killing leading to rebellion, and he had been helpless. Madame Dormayer had taken charge, and the matter was settled.

And he did not need to worry about a court-martial: not a shot had been fired by us. There had been a criminal attack, such as happens everywhere, and the culprits had been arrested. A routine piece of ordinary police work!

But Jacquemont told her nothing then of his admiration. He brought his horse toward her: "Better use this one, madame; you'll make better time. You must be anxious to get back to your husband."

"Oh, what's the use," she said in a tired voice. "He was dying fast, and must have gone, an hour ago."

Then she bit her lips, trying to keep from crying openly. It was no use; she had broken. She leaned against that horse with her face hidden in her arms, and started to sob. Did you ever hear a woman crying for the man she loved?

"He was dying fast," she said, "and must have gone, an hour ago."

"She was right again," Vonheim concluded. "The pharmacist told us the Captain had died not ten minutes after she'd left."

The Sergeant shook his head, at some inner question.

"I don't know whether you understand this, the way any of us in the Legion did —what made her act that way, I mean. You see, the pharmacist told us about what had happened when the Captain was first taken inside. 'I've got mine, chickie,' he said. And she did not contradict him; the old man had seen too many guys die to be fooled about himself. "Do you want to see Pierre, the children?' she asked. 'No,' he said; 'it would scare them. They're awfully little.' And as she was wiping the blood from his lips, her smile steady on her face as if carved from stone, he said: 'Darling, I'm worried. You know this shooting is no accident; it's a signal. But that young chap won't know the difference, and will stick to orders.'

"She stroked his cheek and said: 'Don't worry yourself. You've done your part. It's those damned civilians who really killed you.' He tried to move his head, coughed red: 'That's it, and they'll kill a lot more. I wish I could get up—I am worried.' It was then that she said: 'I could handle that lad. Would you feel better if I attended to it myself?' And he said yes, and she kissed him and left."

Vonheim rested a hand on my shoulder.

"See what I mean? She loved that man, loved him more than most women love their men. Hadn't she waited eight years for him, then worked for him? And naturally she would have preferred to stay with him as long as he had breath in him. She sacrificed the last possible minutes because there was his job to be done. She understood that came first. She's a soldier, that woman."

He gestured to show his wonder.

"She left him to die without her!"

"There may be another explanation," I suggested.

"What?" he challenged.

"That she loved him, as you say, and just wished to make him easier in mind. Sort of a last favor. Some women love like that. For instance, suppose Dormayer had asked to see some other woman, a rival—she'd have been big enough to get her. She sacrificed those few minutes because she knew that his work came first, before her. Just as she had sacrificed all those years, sacrificed her pride. If he had asked her to stay, told her that would make him happier at the last, Morocco could have been laid waste, for all she'd have cared."

Vonheim considered me for a few moments in sullen silence. Once more, his face was tinged with red. Then he laughed, his strong faith unshaken.

"I never expected you to understand!"

The Fog at Fiddler's Green*

A strange South Seas inheritance leads to battle and murder in this short novel by the author of "Gunpowder Gold."

By GORDON KEYNE

AS THE swarm of men came bursting into my hotel room, I fell back in angry dismay. One newspaper man had asked permission to come up; here were a dozen or more, voices all barking at once, cameras and flash-bulbs in evidence.

"What the devil! You must have the wrong party!" I exclaimed. "Don't all talk at once; pick a spokesman."

"Okay." A brisk young man assumed the job. "You're John Bolton, and you've just inherited an island in the South Seas near Bali. Right?"

"Wrong," I rejoined. "It's much nearer the Philippines."

"Well, Bali's better for our purposes," came the reply. "You're American-born, twenty-two years old, unmarried; for the past six years you've been attending medical schools in this country. Are you the right man?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but it's nothing to cause all this excitement."

"Now, brother, get wise," broke in the other. "In any other city you're just a celebrity passing through; but this is San Francisco. Here you're front-page stuff," the newspaper man asserted, "—or anyhow a column inside."

"But why?" I demanded. "I only got here from St. Louis an hour ago."

"The South Seas are San Francisco's back yard, Mr. Bolton. Now let's see. Your father's dead, eh? You haven't seen him for six years. He was big-time stuff in the South Seas—the King of Kerang Island—is that right? Of course, if it's all the same to you, we'd sooner have him a sultan. Makes a better story."

"Don't be absurd," I retorted. "He was just a trader. The island's nothing but an atoll. It doesn't produce anything. It's all nonsense to call him a king."

Almost instantly the genuine gems leaped into sight.

The news man grinned. "Maybe. Still, you're going to the South Seas to take

*Webster's Unabridged Dictionary gives the definition of Fiddler's Green as: "The imagined Elysian Fields of sailors and vagabond craftsmen, where credit is good and there is always a lass, a glass, and a song."

over an island kingdom and a whopping big inheritance; you're a rich man. Now, give us a good story and we'll meet you halfway. Get on your high horse, and we'll give you a spread full of Bali gals and harems. Which will you have?"

This time I got the idea, and relaxed. "Okay. Shoot away; I'll be good!"

I made an honest effort, too. There was nothing to conceal; they knew all about me. I had been called home suddenly to an island I had not seen in six years. It was true that my father, Captain "Spike" Bolton, was famed as a character in the South Seas; he had made a fortune in pearls and other things. My mother was dead, and I had no other relatives.

"No, I've no picture of him with me," I said patiently. "Is it hard to reach Kerang? No. I'm going by the Clipper to Manila. From there, by an island boat."

My eye had been caught by a man who had appropriated the chair at the writing-desk, and who remained silent and immobile. A man with hat pulled over eyes, and a brown, sharp face with bony jaw.

Now this man said quietly: "The Clipper won't leave for several days."

I nodded. The statement meant nothing to me; the man did not speak again. The others babbled away. One of the photographers wanted to fetch a girl to pose with me, which I refused.

All the while, I was thinking of that grim man, my father. It was six years and more since our parting; yet he had bulked large against the whole background of my life, like a gigantic retaining-wall. Gone, now—no more letters, no more hard-headed affection.

"Is it true that Spike Bolton was a pearl pirate?" someone asked. A touch of anger whipped at me.

"You're damned cheeky to ask such questions!" I said.

He merely grinned.

"Well, let it pass. What about your mother? I understand she was a Berkeley girl. Want me to deny that she was kicked out by her family for running away with a pirate?"

One thing led to another; I did not realize that they were deliberately leading me on. Then I lost my temper completely and knocked my chief tormentor galley-west. At this, they simply piled on me. Someone hit me and doubled me up; when they got all through and departed, I was sitting on the floor propped against the wall.

"Good Lord!" I muttered. "I certainly showed myself to be one damned fool!"

"Correct the first time," said a voice, and it jerked my head up.

IT came from the quiet man sitting at the writing-desk, hat still over eyes, cigarette in hand.

"Get out of here with the rest of your gang!" I snapped.

He shook his head and said placidly:

"Your mistake, Bolton; not my gang at all. They used to be, when I was on the city desk. Now I'm out of a job and broke and hungry, but if you say the word, I'll depart. And your luck will go with me. I can save you from a terrible lot of grief if you'll give me the chance."

"Okay, then; show me how." I rose, went to the door, locked it, and with a grimace of pain dropped into a chair. A cigarette eased my nerves. "Who are you?" I asked.

"Harper, James E.—for *Endicott*," he rejoined cheerfully. He held up a little sheaf of papers, and laid them down again. "Your letters; the other lads would've grabbed them if I hadn't snaffled them first. You don't realize what a story you are in this town! I gave you one tip already, and you missed it."

"I? A tip?" I repeated.

"Yeah. I said the Clipper wouldn't leave for several days."

"How was that a tip? I don't get it."

"LORD, is your brain stuffed with straw?" Harper exclaimed impatiently. "You're a story. Those boys teased you into being a better story. Don't you see the consequences?"

"No," I said, really puzzled.

"Okay. In about three hours from now your phone begins to ring, and half of San Francisco climbs on your tail—a few hundred thousand people, notoriety-hunters, autograph fiends, plain beggars, society nuts and so forth. Among them are maybe fifteen or twenty swell guys and ravishing dames of another sort—crooks, and classy ones, out to nick your wad. Fine, slick, educated crooks. You've no bodyguard; not even a valet or a secretary. Boy, what chance will you have?"

"Well," I rejoined, "I suppose the hotel will take care of all comers."

Harper sighed. He shoved back his hat, revealing piercing dark eyes and a good-humored, cynical face.

"You're a good guy, Bolton, and I'm for you," he said. "Right now, the hotel's being watched; you'll be played for follow-up stories, see? This is no fancy hotel; it can be cracked right and left. You're a romantic figure. Wealthy, an island king, pearls and girls! All the furies will be after you."

"I see what you mean," I said. "I'm nothing of the kind, of course."

"But you'll be built up to it before you know it. There are two remedies: First, go to one of the luxury hotels, hire a couple of dicks, and surround yourself with a wall built of money bricks. I don't suppose you'd know how to go about it?"

"No," I said honestly. I had not been brought up to throw money away; putting on side was foreign to me. "What's the alternative?"

"Trust to me. Employ me; I'm stony broke," said Harper. "Put yourself in my hands; put me on salary until the Clipper takes off with you aboard. It'll be money well spent, and I'll guarantee you all the amusement you want, and thrills if you want 'em."

I chuckled. "Apparently you're the first of the furies, eh?"

"Right!" He grinned widely.

"You're front-page stuff!" the newspaper man asserted.

"But why?" I demanded. "I only got here an hour ago."

I was beginning to like him. Also, I vaguely glimpsed some of the difficulties that might lie ahead of me. Still—

"Tell me what scheme you have in mind," I told him, "and I'll give you a yes or no."

"Fair enough! Give your pal Harper a hundred bucks," the prompt response came. "In an hour it'll be dark; fog's coming in heavily now. I'll return for you at five o'clock, with a handbag for a few things. Send the rest to the Clipper offices, later."

"And where do we go?" I asked.

"We'll get out of here before the storm breaks, and go to a joint up the beach where I live when I'm flush. It's more like a club than a boarding-house—just a small place. We can stay there quietly, or go after the bright lights if you hanker for 'em. And until you step aboard the Clipper, I'm your errand-boy, watchdog, and good companion."

I pretended a hesitation I was far from feeling; actually I could have asked nothing better than this proposal.

"It's a deal, Harper," I decided.

"Swell!" Beaming suddenly, Harper stepped forward and we shook hands. "By the way, since you come from the South Seas and so forth, do you know anything about pearls?"

"About babies? Well—"

"Babies, hell! I said *pearls*."

I chuckled. "And I said *babies*. That's the slang name for 'em, down under. Yes, I used to know pearls from the ground up, intimately.... However, don't get excited," I added, seeing his face light up. "I've been away from home and pearls for six years, remember."

"But," Harper exclaimed, "if there's a real pearl in a dish of imitations, can you pick it?"

"Nobody can do that; no expert can do it," I said. "Imitations are so perfect, these days, that they answer every test except that of the electric needle which illumines the interior of a pierced pearl. If it's not pierced, only careful study can pick the genuine, and not always then."

"Well, listen!" Harper betrayed an excited, tense earnestness. "I'm not talking about imitations made to deceive experts. Suppose there's a string of real fine pearls in among some strings of the cheapest kind of imitations: Would you gamble five hundred smackers that you could pick the real string offhand?"

"In a minute! That's very different."

"Glory be!" Harper rolled his eyes ecstatically. "Boy, I'm packing myself a Santa Claus! Well, time enough later for all that. Know any folks here in town?"

"Only my father's agents. I haven't seen them, yet."

"Do it by phone. Got your ticket for the Clipper?"

"I did that before I left St. Louis."

"Fine. Then slip me a hundred, and I'll be off. Your expenses won't amount to much where we're going, if it irks you to spend coin."

I got out my pocketbook. "I'm no miser; don't figure me wrong. But I'm not used to handling wealth."

Harper pocketed the banknotes, came close to me, and tapped me on the chest.

"If I didn't know you were a regular guy, Bolton, I wouldn't be doing this. A regular guy; yeah! But if I'm any judge, you haven't knocked around much, under the lower edge of the world. Well, see you at five sharp!"

The door slammed; he was gone.

DURING six years and more, I had been practically on my own, with a comfortable allowance, no great worries, a chosen career beckoning, and a smooth road ahead. All the world of atoll and coral bud, of flashing seas and monsoons, of pearls and action, had become vague and far-away and unreal.

Now, by this freak of fortune, my present world had become unreal, and a new one was ahead. I looked forward to it with a certain excitement.

It was two minutes of five when a tap came at the door, and Harper walked in.

"Well, how's the King of Kerang Island?" he exclaimed blithely. "Had any visitors?"

"No—haven't seen a soul."

"Fine; the buzzards are flocking, down below." He chuckled. "I paid till tomorrow for your room, out of my hundred, when I left; said I was your manager and you were not to be disturbed till six o'clock. Here's a paper; read it later. You're in it. And you can sling this under your overcoat."

He handed me a folded newspaper, and a cheap zipper musette bag.

I hurriedly stuffed a few toiletries into the bag. He was eying me sharply.

"You've got a good build. Hard-headed guy. Pleasant but square in the face. Ever do any boxing?"

"A bit," I replied. "I'm fair at it. Why?"

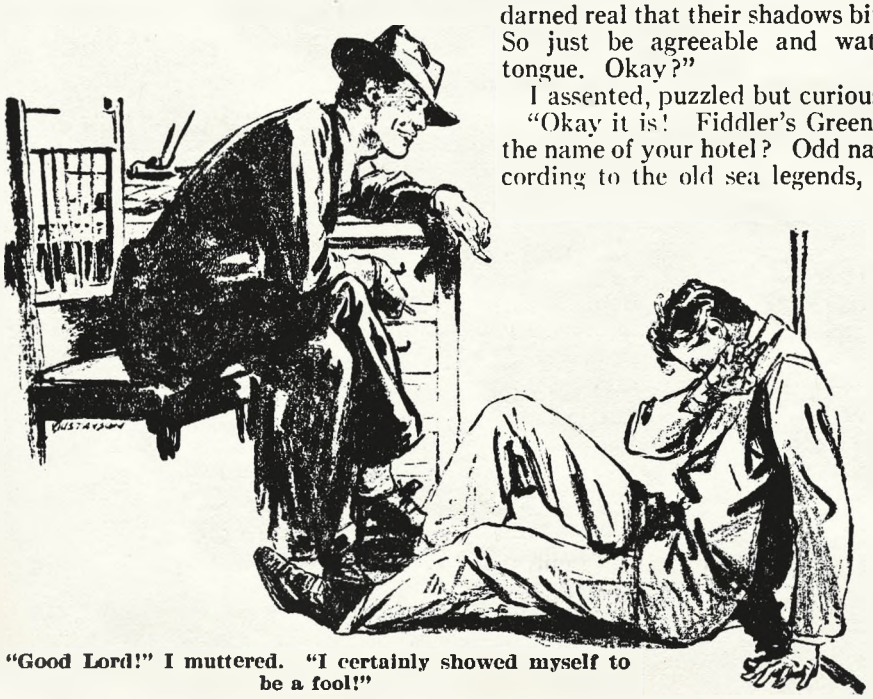
"Oh, I was thinking of Jerry Peterson," he said vaguely. "D'you know, Bolton, I'm pitchforking you right slap into an epic story of hearts and kisses and brickbats and murder? Might be, anyhow. Now listen to me."

He tapped me on the chest again.

"For tonight, at least, let me do all the talking. Play the game my way. Pretend that you're dumb, savvy? These folks at Fiddler's Green are real, so darned real that their shadows bite a dog! So just be agreeable and watch your tongue. Okay?"

I assented, puzzled but curious.

"Okay it is! Fiddler's Green—is that the name of your hotel? Odd name. According to the old sea legends, Fiddler's



"Good Lord!" I muttered. "I certainly showed myself to be a fool!"

Green was where all the dead people went."

Harper gave me a quick, sharp look, showing no surprise.

"Yes. Maybe that's how this place got its name, too! Ready?"

I slung the bag over my shoulder and donned hat and coat. Harper went to the door and paused.

"You keep six steps back of me and don't talk, even if the hotel's afire! You're stepping out of one world into another, but don't worry. It's a darned good world if you treat it right; remember that. Let's go."

He opened the door and walked out.

Six steps. A clever distance, I realized. No one could be sure whether we were together or not, if anyone saw us. As I followed along the brightly lighted hall, I unfolded the newspaper. I was curious to see what the reporters and camera men had done to me.

When I reached the stairs, down which Harper had vanished, I was no longer curious; I was burning up. This evening paper was that of the man I had smacked. There was a picture of the smacking; there was another of the "Sultan of Kerang" being put down and out.

We reached the second floor. Harper plunged straight into a beauty-parlor and on through. With a wave of the hand and a cheerful greeting to the startled females, Harper led through another door, on to a flight of stairs, and down into the open air.

"There y'are!" He turned proudly to me. "Mission Street, the grandest street in the world! Follow close, now. I'll have to find the car."

I was appalled by the fog. The whole world had turned to a swirling sea-vapor.

"This newspaper story is libelous!" I exclaimed.

"So are lots of things. Be your age!" Harper said shortly. "Hang on to my arm and stop squawking. This way!"

THE chill fog certainly had a dampening effect on wrath. I let myself be pulled across the sidewalk. Car lights blinded; horns were blaring. Swearing luridly, Harper darted at taxicabs ranged along the curb; none was right. Then a voice barked at him, and with an exultant cry he shoved me into a car, and climbed after.

"All right, Jemmy, all right! You know where to go!" he bawled at the driver, and closed the window between. Then he sank back beside me. "Well, well, the fog made it a cinch. Now we'll slide over the long hills to the sea and forget our troubles. Got a cigarette?"

I produced a package.

"About a name—" said Harper. "I'll call you Mr. Smith; I engaged a room under that handle. Suit you?"

I laughed. "Why not? Anything goes!"

"That's the ticket! Not that it'd matter if they all knew your name; they're safe. We'll be far from a car or bus line, but can always rent a car. We're expected, and dinner will be ready by six. Bang-up feed, too. Regular boarding-house heaven; and the meal goes right on, no matter if one of the gang is just pinched or killed. Food is important, and Ma Webster is a cook to knock your eye out!"

QUITE plainly, we were headed for a singular sort of hotel, and I warmed to the thought.

"You'd be surprised," Harper said reflectively, "what queer things and places and men can be found tucked away in this village. A foggy night—that's the right time to go to Fiddler's Green, too. You'll like Jerry. She worked in a bank and was a big shot, knew everybody; now she's dead."

"Eh? Not literally?" I queried.

He broke into a laugh. "I was exaggerating. Doc Means has his points too, but probably Red Conners takes the cake. To look at him, you'd never dream that he traveled with a circus and a bill show, that he was a champion pistol-shot and knife artist! A thing as fantastic as life itself."

"Is life fantastic, then?" I asked.

"When one is disillusioned, yes. This morning we were done for; tonight you put a fortune in our hand. Why, Fiddler's Green itself is the height of fantastic lunacy!"

He paused, until I prompted him to explain.

"The place was built a long while ago by some rich nut who thought he was Napoleon in exile. He went the limit on putting all kinds of contraptions into the place—secret passages and that sort of junk. In those days it stood slap on the beach, with no other house around for miles; there were some strange stories about corpses washed up on the sand. Well, he finally died, and Ma Webster took over the property and made it pay dividends. . . . So you like the South Seas better'n this country, huh?"

"No." I was startled by his abrupt change of subject.

"Then stay here. Let the lawyers collect your dough and run the place. You stay here; I like you." In the dim, momentary flash of a street light, I saw Harper's face, thin and eager and earnest. "We could go places. Why, look! If you were to put a little money into Fiddler's Green, Ma Webster would make a real profit for you!"

"Afraid not," I rejoined. "I have to get out to Kerang and settle the estate, and all that sort of thing."

"Don't take yourself too seriously, partner; that's the whole gospel of how to live," said Harper. "If you had me on your hands for a few months, you'd be a new man. You're a regular guy. But remember not to take yourself seriously! Don't matter a damn in the world's economy—you don't, I don't; the King of Siam don't. There's always a better man to fill our boots. . . . Hello! Looks like our street."

He was peering out of the window; the taxi was curving around a corner. He pointed to two of the new yellow gas fog-lights, placed close together; these, it seemed, marked the place.

"Just between you and me," he went on with a confidential air, "I'll be glad to get home. I've got a crawly feeling; it's this blasted fog, I expect. I've been nervous as a cat all day. There's a guy in this town who'd sure like to have me rubbed out! But tomorrow it'll be a different story, with your help. Well, we're here!"

The cab halted. We had arrived.

The yellow fog-lights were over a gate barely visible in the thick fog. I got out, and Harper's voice pulsed at me.

"The gate's open—go right in! Hop along up to the house. I'll be with you as soon as I get this shark of a Jemmy paid off."

I crossed the sidewalk to the gate and the yellow lights. These showed me a graveled path, as I opened the gate, and the loom of a house thirty feet back from the street; the entire place seemed surrounded by a hedge of unusual height.

Walking up the path, I wondered for the first time whether I had perhaps let myself fall into the hands of some crooked sharper, but I dismissed the notion. Harper was definitely friendly, and I liked him.

Halfway to the house, which seemed large but was all in darkness, I heard the roar of the taxicab engine as it turned and sped off into the darkness. Halting, I glanced back at the dim yellowish swirls around the gate; no sign of Harper appeared. The sound of the car died away.

The place must be close to the sea, very close, I thought. The vibration of the surf and its dull recurrent thunder were distinctly felt. I felt a slight irritation that Harper did not come along. It flashed across my mind that he might be playing some joke.

So thinking, I turned and walked back to the gate, swung it open, and stepped out on the sidewalk. My first thought was that Harper had departed altogether; then I saw my mistake. At the curb stood a telephone pole, very faintly lighted by the yellow fog globes overhead. Harper was standing against it, a cigarette between his lips.

I saw him open his lips and apparently spit out the cigarette.

"Well? Why don't you come along?" I said.

He made no reply. A sound like a gasping sigh came from him. His head fell forward, chin on chest. Wondering what on earth was the matter with him, I stepped up close—and then froze, a clammy finger sliding up my spine.

Here, close up, I could see the knife-haft beneath Harper's chin—the haft of the knife that was driven through and through the man and deep into the wooden pole behind him.

I SHALL never forget the stark horror that thrilled in me as I stood there and realized the truth.

Yet my brain was automatically at work. I had seen Harper die; this I knew instantly. That gasp when the cigarette fell, that sigh of escaping breath, that falling head—Harper had died then. I reached forward and felt his wrist; there was no pulse.

Therefore the murder had happened after the departure of the car. Someone had been lurking in wait, and had driven home this knife as the taxicab sped away. It had been done while I was standing on the path, irresolute. I might almost have seen the murderer as I came back and shoved open the gate.

Yet I had seen nothing. And I saw nothing now. Through drifting swirls of thick fog, I caught a vague *cluff-cluff* of running feet, as though the killer had slipped away and then broken into a run. The sound lessened and was gone.

I stood frozen still, a frantic hammering query in my head; what now, what now?

There was nothing to be done for the dead man. I had the entirely natural impulse to clear out, to get away and do it rapidly. This was murder. It was no affair of mine. The sane and sensible thing was to keep from being implicated.

Sensible, yes, but cowardly; my instincts revolted against it. And Harper had been helping me. The decent thing to do was to call the man's friends. Despite murder or arrest, he had said, dinner would go on just the same.

An eerie chill grew upon me as I recalled the things Harper had said about this place, his own fear of some violence, the very name of this darkly silent structure—Fiddler's Green! The place where all the dead folk of the sea came, in ancient lore.

I blamed myself for having stepped away and left Harper alone; otherwise the poor chap would be alive now. Had the knife been thrown? He had mentioned someone who was an expert at this sort of thing. I looked closely. No; it was too firmly driven in. And its haft was heavy, of solid metal; it was not the balanced type that an expert knife-thrower would use.

Turning, I swung the gate aside and strode on up toward the house.

Where all had before been dark, lights were springing. Above the entrance burst forth a floodlight: another gas fog-piercer that lit up the path. The building seemed of goodly size, but there was nothing to indicate a hotel, no sign of any kind.

As I came to the threshold, the front door was swung wide open, with a blinding flood of radiance. The figure standing there was that of a woman.

"Good evening," I said. "Is this the place known as Fiddler's Green?"

"I'm Ma Webster," was the reply in a harsh voice. "Who are you? What d'ye want?"

"My name's Smith, John Smith." I thought of it barely in time. "I was coming here with Mr. Harper—"

"Oh! You're the one!" she broke in upon me. "Come in. Where's Harper now?"

"Outside the gate." I hesitated, then plunged regardless: "I'm sorry to say that he's dead. He must been killed as the car drove away."

I was prepared for anything, as a result of my news, but not for what happened. The woman, who was tall and ungraceful, leaned forward and caught my arm. Before I knew what to expect, she had jerked me in across the threshold.

Behind me sounded a clang and a reverberant thud. The door had swung shut. Inside it, a steel shutter had slid up. I had a confused glimpse of Ma Webster, massively built, and of a heavily ornate hallway in which we stood. Then a younger woman appeared.

"This is the guy, Jerry," said Ma Webster. "Smith's the name. Take him up to the suite and learn what you can. He says Harper was bumped off, outside the gate. We'll attend to all that. You see to him. Brace up, now!"

STRANGELY, there seemed to be no excitement; her voice was calm. It gave me the air of being in a dream.

The younger woman, who beckoned me to a wide stairway, astonished me by her alert blue eyes, her air of cool frankness; she seemed to radiate vitality, was my thought as I followed her up the stairs. Then, at the top, she halted and turned to me, and my heart leaped.

She was clutching the stair-rail desperately, sagging against the wall, almost falling. Her eyes were wide with terror.

"It was—it must have been—a joke!" she said under her breath. "Tell me so! He's not dead! It's impossible!"

"I'm sorry, very sorry," I said awkwardly. "It was done in the fog, by a knife. Who? I have no idea. I saw no one."

"Oh!" Her voice was a wrenched, moaning sound. She caught her breath. "Come along. Sorry I took it that way."

Part way down the hall, she stopped and flung open a door.

"These rooms were for you both; you'll be alone now. I expect you need a drink. I know damned well I do. Drop your bag anywhere. Poor Harp! If he'd only listened to me!"

I entered a large living-room boasting the heavy drapes and enormous walnut furniture of a past generation; off this room opened two bedrooms.

Everything was clean and comfortable; magazines and books lay on the table; a radio stood against one wall. Steam heat buzzed cheerfully in the radiators, and the open tantalus, to which the girl went, was well stocked. She turned; a pleasant voice, a pleasant young woman. I accepted the proffered highball, and our glasses clinked.

"I suppose you're the Jerry Peterson he mentioned?"

"No doubt." She was appraising me quite frankly. "You're not an old friend of his?"

"I met him this morning. We took a liking to each other, and he invited me to come here." Tacitly dismissing myself as a subject, I switched neatly and described what had happened outside the gates. In spite of the drink, her face grew whiter and whiter as she listened.

"I've got to hang on—can't afford to fly into tears and hysterics," she said. "He wouldn't like that. This is no matter for the police, of course. How long shall you be staying here?"

I was puzzled by her words and air; yet those clear, shrewd eyes tempted me to trust her. Reason told me that my wisest course was to get out of this place as quickly as possible. On the other hand, Harper had been a friend; and I was conscious of adventure pulsing in the air.

"Didn't Harper tell you people anything about me?"

She shrugged. "He vouched for you. That's enough."

"Well, to be frank about it, I'm a bit over my depth," I said. "I don't want to know too much; I'm not curious. This is Monday, and on Thursday I'm leaving town. Until then, I'm at loose ends. Harper did me a good turn; can I do anything to repay it? I think he'd like me to help."

Her eyes warmed suddenly. "How far do you mean that?"

"All the way."

I got out my cigarettes, then remembered that Harper had last dipped into this package. The realization jerked at me, steadied me.

AS she accepted one, I became more aware of the terrific tension gripping her. She puffed the cigarette alight, and for one instant her self-control slipped. Her cheeks paled again, her lips quivered, a queer mirthless laugh came to her lips.

"I seem to be shakier than I thought," she said. "Hard to realize a thing like this; it hits you after the first shock wears off. I warned Harp this would happen; he thought he could beat it out. Did he tell you that we—he and I—were going to merge once the clouds blew over?"

I was thunderstruck.

"Good Lord, no! Look here, I'm terribly sorry—"

"Don't," she intervened sharply. "Cut out any sympathy!"

"Okay.... He mentioned Doc Means, and someone named Red Conners."

"Yes. Red is in the affair—our affair. I'm in it. Now you may be in it, if you mean what you say." She went on: "There's work to do. It may be a crazy idea, but there's just a long chance that you might provide the two things which would nail the murderer of—of the best man I knew."

"When I said 'all the way,' Jerry," I rejoined gravely, "I meant just that. Count me in."

"All right. And now, mind that you don't get to talking about Harp, in front of Red Conners." She spoke with a fiercely incisive manner that denoted her tension. "Crooks can blubber like any other fools. Well, here are the two things which neither Red nor I can supply at a pinch: First, five centuries—five hundred in cash."

She paused inquiringly. I nodded.

"I have travelers' checks and can cash them anywhere; one of the big hotels. So that's taken care of. What next?"

She smiled faintly. "Maybe you're an angel all the way. Would you know enough about pearls to tell real ones from false ones?"

The question startled me. I recalled Harper's queer exclamation, "Boy, I'm packing myself a Santa Claus!" and his questions about pearls.

"That's odd," I said. "We discussed that; yes, of course I can—at least, I think so."

Her face lit up. A flame came dancing into her eyes; she caught her breath.

"Why—why, you *are* an angel! I might have guessed it.... See here! You can go along with me and Red Conners tonight, this very night, and we'll take care of the whole thing! Are you game?"

"Of course; but mind, I told you I'm in over my depth! I don't know what it's all about."

"You will, you will!" she exclaimed vibrantly. "It means taking chances—you understand that much?"

I nodded, feeling my pulses thrill again.

"Then it's settled. Brush up and come on down to dinner. And don't talk; just smile and look wise. If the Professor opens up with his line, keep on smiling and yes him, and say nothing. Understood?"

"I guess so."

When she was gone, I finished my drink, lit a cigarette, and took my bag into one of the two bedrooms. A bath was adjoining. I looked at myself in the mirror, passed a hand over my chin, and decided I needed no shave.

What was it all about? Impossible to say. Was she a crook? Not by a long sight! Why was I in this thing at all? Because a man, now dead, had said I was a regular guy! I nodded gravely at my mirrored reflection.

"I may be a sucker," I muttered. "I may be making the biggest mistake of my life by sticking around this joint—but I'm going to play my hunch and see it through! So laugh that off, Bolton."

Somewhat more cheerful, I went down to the strangest dinner I had ever eaten.

I DISCOVERED that this place was precisely what Harper had said it was: a boarding-house. Ma Webster, harshly dominant, headed the table; a mousy little man in a greasy apron, Pa Webster, acted as waiter. Mr. John Smith was introduced by Jerry Peterson to the company assembled.

Miss May Webster was a maiden lady with gray bangs and a sharp nose, occupying the foot of the table. Doc Means was a mournful-looking gent with a discouraged goatee and a furtive eye. Professor Fuller was a brisk little man who, like many little men, exerted incredible audacity trying to show himself the equal of larger men. Mr. Brown—obviously an alias—was a sardonic man with a challenging gaze, and a bulge under his left armpit. And last, to Red Conners.

He too was a small man; small and gray, softly gentle in the voice, and nothing red about him except his red-rimmed eyes. He said little; just sat trying to gulp down food, and staring at me. I read him for a dangerous man, a vicious man and one to steer clear of; those eyes were eloquent.

Yet I knew him to be a friend and ally.

THERE was no mention whatever of Harper; there was no empty chair. Fiddler's Green was where the dead people went; maybe, Harper had said, maybe that was how this place got its name! Just what had those words meant? I could only guess that some if not all of those at the table must be "dead" in one sense or another.

As the meal progressed, however, I noted one thing; no one seemed out of place here. Even the sardonic Mr. Brown evinced a certain *savoir faire*. If these people were crooks, I reflected with some astonishment, they neither looked nor talked it. Harper's words came like an echo: "Under the lower edge of the world." Jerry, then? I looked at her, met her clear fine eyes, and did not know what to think.

Amid the general talk, Professer Fuller leaned across the table and briskly apologized to me for so small a company. Usually, said he, there were more present. And could Mr. Smith favor him with some personal trifle—a pencil, a cuff-button, a handkerchief, anything at all? I stared somewhat blankly.

"What he's driving at," intervened Ma Webster with a sniff, "is that he wants to tell your fortune. Some say he's good at it.... Oh, I know, I know, Professor!" she added, as the little man bristled. "Crowned heads of Europe and all that; but there are mighty few crowned heads left these days."

I laughed. "I'm sure, Professor, that if it will give you any satisfaction, it'll be a real honor! Here's my cigarette-case. Will that do?"

The Professor beamed, and I went on eating. I was hungry, and the dinner was excellent. So rapidly had things piled up that the death of Harper was already losing its poignant sting. Red Conners, I perceived, was studying me intently.

The Professor held the cigarette-case between his palms for a few moments, then closed his eyes. Doc Means, with a wink at the company, hastily dumped the pepper-shaker on the Professor's potatoes. There was a grin at the boyish trick, but Conners did not grin.

"I see something very singular," said Professor Fuller, his eyes still closed. "My young friend, you are destined for great things. My vibrations tell me you are born to command, to rule, to a heritage of power and wealth in distant places. I see women in your life—not one, but many. I see feathery palms leaning against the sky, and white, white sand, in an island in the ocean—"

He broke off, intent, muttering to himself. Somewhat astonished, I glanced around and caught another wink from Doc Means, who seemed amused.

"I see danger close to you," went on the Professor abruptly. "Very close. It is connected with a young woman. Everything is vague, as though in fog—"

ACROSS the table came a soft voice that bit like a knife:

"D'you want to take a walk down the shore, Professor?"

Fuller opened his eyes with a start, and changed countenance. I looked to see who had spoken; it was Red Conners, whose gimlet gaze was fastened upon the Professor. Hastily and in utter confusion, Professor Fuller came to his feet; stammering something inarticulate, he shoved the cigarette-case across the table at me, and hurriedly walked out of the room.

"Confound it, Red, look what you spoiled!" complained Doc Means, pointing to the Professor's forgotten plate.

"Shut up," snapped Conners, and stood up. "Jerry! Fetch him to my room when you're through," he said, with a nod toward me. "No time to lose. I'll arrange about a car. Sorry, Ma, sorry. The Professor gets on my nerves."

With this half-apology, he also departed.

Ma Webster spoke up, about the fog and the bus service; the incident was passed over. All this time there had not been a mention of Harper, and it was a fantastic lack. Where was Harper now, I wondered; what had been done with the body?

"The Professor," I observed lightly, "seems to have something on the ball, at that. I'm bound to say that he seemed to have a surprising—"

My voice trailed off, before the cold looks directed toward me. I caught a warning in the eyes of Jerry. I remembered the admonitions not to talk. Damn it, what had I said amiss? No telling. The others ignored me. Perhaps strangers were supposed to keep quiet.

Jerry glanced at me inquiringly; I nodded, and we rose. I turned to Ma Webster, thanking her, and she eyed me frigidly.

"Don't thank me, Mr. Smith," she rasped. "I'll collect from you in the morning; pay for room and board is always in advance. Good night."

I followed Jerry from the room.

She led me up the stairs and down the hall to a door, which was opened at her knock by Red Conners. We walked in. Conners looked me up and down, aggressively, and spoke in his curiously soft voice.

"A minute more, and that blasted Professor would've spilled the beans! Why did you let him get started?"

"Why not?" I stared at him. "I don't get your point. He did pretty well; he came close to the facts about me."

"Of course he did!" exclaimed Conners. "D'you think it was by accident? He'd read the evening papers; your picture is plastered all over 'em! You're not the sort to be hiding out under this roof. What are you here for, anyhow?"

Jerry was about to intervene, but I forstalled her; the man scarcely knew what he said.

"Listen, Red: I was invited here. I'm not hiding from the law, but I'm hiding just the same. If I was good enough for Harper to bring here, I'm good enough to help you run down the man who murdered him. I want to do that, if I can."

Conners turned, his mouth working.

"Dammit, I'm sorry!" he groaned. "I'm fair wild, with him laying dead and all."

"Well, get yourself under control," Jerry Peterson said bitterly. "I'm not having any circus myself, am I? Sit down, both of you, and let's get to business. Red, don't be a fool! Bolton is putting up the five hundred to bribe the Smoker. And he knows all about pearls, too."

There was a silence. Red Conners stared at me.

It was no secret who I was, eh? I had fooled nobody here. The Professor had been on the point of giving away some affair. What? Never mind. Conners had prevented it; let all that go with the fog, then, and get down to business!

"I'm sorry," Conners said suddenly. "I didn't know. Jerry, you didn't tell me this. You just said he was going along."

"So he is," I struck in, and laughed. "Now tell me something. Where's Harper's body? Come on and face facts. Has he been taken care of?"

"Certainly he has," Conners answered with some asperity. "He has friends who'll take care of everything. By the time the police get sniffing on the murder trail, I'll have the low-life who knifed him. Here's the knife that did it."

He laid something on the table. It was the knife, cleaned and polished; I recognized the metal haft. The blade was long and deadly.

"Why did you touch it?" I demanded. "There might have been fingerprints."

"Oh, for God's sake, be your age!" said Conners impatiently. "Prints! You talk like a fool. Nobody leaves prints. This was a professional job. Anyhow, we know who did it; all we got to do now is to reach him. I can't do it alone. The three of us can, with the pearls. Do we have to gab all night to make you understand?"

I saw now, with pitying comprehension, how this little man was driven by an inward storm of passionate grief and fury, goaded and lashed by emotion. So was the young woman.

"I told you I was in over my depth, Jerry," I told her. "Just the same, I'm in; and I'm beginning to understand the two of you. You knew Harp a lot better than I did; you thought a lot of him. Now, give me credit for playing along with you because I liked him and he liked me—that's all. Let's go, and you can talk later. I don't ask to understand the affair; I can trust you. Whatever it is, I'm with you."

JERRY reached out and touched my arm with her fingers.

"You're all right," she said, her eyes warming. "Red, what about the car?"

"I told Jemmy to bring it and leave it; so it must be waiting now. Jemmy didn't know a thing about what happened," Conners said. (They were talking about the man who had driven me and Harper here, of course.) "He said Harp paid him and was all right when he left."

"I think that's true," I said.

"Of course it is; Jemmy doesn't lie to us," snapped the little man. "Well, what we waiting for? Let's go."

As he spoke, he caught up hat and overcoat. I bethought myself, and said: "I'll get my travelers' checks and coat, and meet you downstairs."

From the door, I glanced back in time to see Conners slide that murder-knife up his coat-sleeve. It seemed to fit there, to vanish, to be absorbed.

In my own room, I got hat and coat, and my travelers' checks. To go where? I neither knew nor cared, frankly. My pulses were thrilling again. Here was a compelling mystery of fog and life and death, a strange world of strange people.

"I may be clear off my nut," I reflected, "but be damned if I don't like it!"

And switching off the room lights, I was on my way. . . .

The car stood idle and empty, a phantom shape at the curb—the same car that had brought me and Harper here. We got in, Conners sliding under the wheel.

"Palace Hotel first," said Jerry. "Bolton wants to cash his checks."

"Right," Conners replied, and we were off into the fog.

I turned to the girl beside me. "If you know who did the work, Jerry, why not go straight to him? And how do you know he's not hanging around here watching the place?"

"My Lord! I suppose you think we're going to hand him over to the cops!"

"I haven't stopped to think," I rejoined. "I don't care particularly what you do with him. Only, I'm in over—"

"Aw, save your breath!" came the voice of Conners. "G'wan—tell him. Get it over with."

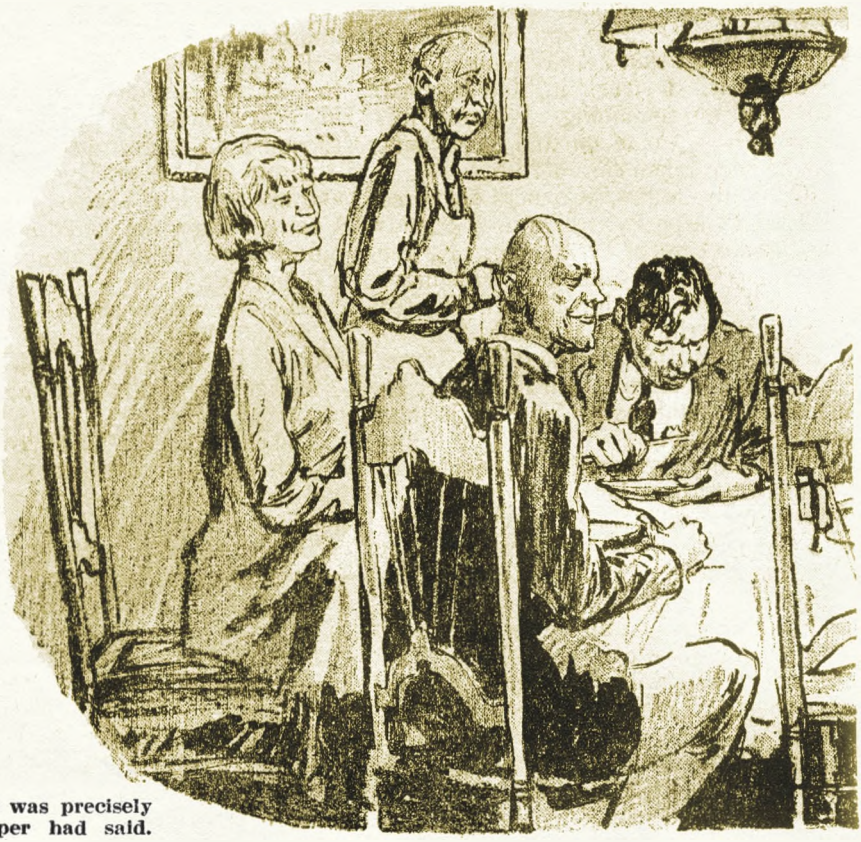
She laughed nervously. "Well, Bolton, we know the guy, but it's impossible to reach him. Or at least, it can only be done in one way. He's not the one who knifed Harp, but he had it done."

"Oh, lay off!" came the soft but piercing voice of Conners again, sharp with impatience. "Let me tell him myself. . . . Bolton, there's a guy named Albers, a lawyer. He's tops in every way—law, society, wealth, politics. If he wanted a span out of the Golden Gate bridge for his watch-chain, he could have it; he's just that good. He's nuts about pearls."

"And about women," put in Jerry. Her voice was harsh, bitter unnatural.

"Albers wanted Harp to do something for him. Harp wouldn't do it," said Conners. He paused to swing the car around a corner, cautiously. How on earth he could find his way was a mystery, for the fog was thicker than ever.

"So Harp lost his job," he went on. "Lost everything else he had. And tonight, lost his life. That's why we're



This place was precisely what Harper had said.

after Albers right now. I warned him. I warned him to leave Harp alone!" The soft voice shrilled, taking on a peculiarly venomous effect. "The actual killer doesn't matter; Albers is the one responsible. He's the one we want."

"Just what did he want Harper to do?" I demanded, with a touch of incredulity.

"Do you have to know everything?" broke out the girl at my side, almost fiercely. "For God's sake, use your brain! A few guesses won't hurt you. We can't give you a checkerboard map of the world in five minutes. . . . Red, you fool, are you going over Twin Peaks in this fog?"

"It's all right; that's the shortest way, Jerry, and safe enough," Conners rejoined soothingly. "You're too nervous. Ease off everything!"

I got out cigarettes; my own nerves needed a touch of tobacco.

"Do you mind," I asked mildly, "if I ask just what all this has to do with the matter of pearls?"

"Yes," rejoined Conners. "Remember, Albers is nuts about pearls. Well, Harp learned where there was a gorgeous necklace; it had been stolen long ago, time of the earthquake. He had meant to get it and skip out, or else to compromise with Albers, who's crazy to get this necklace. It would have meant the end of all trouble for Harp, see?"

"Too bad," I observed, "that he could not have had a day or two longer. He had counted on my knowledge of pearls to get these."

It was merely a polite little interlude to cover my own vague bewilderment. This affair was like a puzzle picture with the key pieces missing.

"As it stands now," Conners went on, "those pearls give us our own chance to reach Albers; he's better watched than the U. S. Mint. We'll have to do it tonight, pretending we don't know anything has happened to Harp. It'll take all three of us to create the proper illusion; maybe I'll be with you; maybe I won't. And then I'll give that fellow what he gave poor Harp."

"The pearls," spoke up Jerry, "are on a statue in the Japanese joss-house. Not the big one in Chinatown, but a little one for Jap sailors. The Smoker's the man in charge of it. He doesn't suspect that one of the necklaces is real; for five hundred he lets us take one of the necklaces, which are supposed to be sacred. So there's everything."

"Mr. Smith," was introduced to the company.

Was it? I tried to make sense of the whole business, and it still remained vague. The essential thing, of course, eluded me; the one supreme thing, the reason why Harper had been killed.

Well, let it go! At least, I knew the night's program. We must get the pearls in order to reach Albers; when we reached him, Red Conners would kill him. The enormity of my share in this task escaped me.

The car was downtown now, dodging traffic in the fog-thick streets.

"Red, I'll go with Bolton," said Jerry Peterson. "Drop us at the hotel, then go on and meet us at the joss-house and have everything understood with the Smoker. We'll take a taxi there from the hotel."

"Okay," replied Conners. "Bolton, just one thing: You must point out the necklace to me and leave me to get it—don't grab it yourself. It's no cinch to remove a necklace from a big statue; I'll have to cut it, wrap chewing-gum around each end to keep the pearls from losing, and slide it off the statue."

Evidently Mr. Conners was an artist at more things than knives and pistols.

The car slowed at the curb. I got out; Jerry followed and took my arm; we felt our way through the surging fog, and the hotel entrance loomed ahead.

In this long corridor of the Palace, I came back to myself, to my own environment, with a jerk. The fog was gone. With it was gone all the lower edge of the world. In the mirrors, I saw myself with a strange woman on my arm; a woman in a gorgeous cloak of black and scarlet, tipped with gold. I had scarcely noticed her clothes until now, but now I stared. Her lips curved slightly as though in scorn.

"It came from Magnin's; it's ultra-ultra. Does it suit you?"

"You," I replied, "would suit anyone, whether in silk or in rags."

She really smiled at this, and squeezed my arm.

"Thanks. You sound as though you really mean it and aren't making a pass. So taken, so accepted! There's the cashier's window."

When I had cashed the checks, we walked back to the entrance. There I paused for a brief instant.

Outside was the swirling fog again, and the lower edge of the world with its incredible surroundings and people. An ordinary night would have held no mystery,

but fog lends enchanted touches and bizarre terrors to everything.

"Makes me think of the Professor," said Jerry. She must have shared my thought. "The old boy is actually more than half off his nut; a shut-eye, as they're called in the trade. He claims a fog like this is the safest place there is, because spirits can't navigate in fog."

I smiled. "Why can't they?"

"Search me! I don't believe he knows, himself! But he doesn't like spirits; that's one of his queer streaks. Well, let's go!"

A moment later were back in fantasy, as our taxicab plunged into the mist.

I stared at the darkly swirling vapor, and thought of the odd little Professor and his fear of spirits, made me smile. So spirits couldn't navigate in a fog, eh?

Unexpectedly, the cab slowed at a dark corner; where we were, I neither knew nor cared. We alighted; I paid the driver; Jerry pulled her gorgeous cloak about her; and we walked for half a block up a dimly lighted alley. Under an immense colored lantern a figure materialized—it was Red Conners.

"All set," he said. "Gimme the cash. The Smoker has a party of tourists in there now; he says to look around until they're gone."

I handed over my roll of bills, half-inclined to wonder whether the whole thing were not a plot to get my five hundred; suspicions floated into my mind, and were gone instantly, unreal as was everything else this night.

We turned in at the not imposing entrance, to be swallowed up by an entirely different fantasy.

This was a dimly lit place of clear air and fragrant incense aroma. There was a wispy, cadaverous figure in Oriental robes; a clump of tourists with a guide whose voice rolled crisply. There were paintings and statues of all kinds. Last came the Buddha—a huge gilded sitting image with many little lights and votive offerings around, and over the gilded chest and swelling stomach looped string upon string of pearls.

"Here, use this." Into my hand Conners pressed a pencil flashlight. "Tell me which one is the real string, that's all."

The tiny ray in my hand shot a clear illumination upon those many ropes of glistening pearls. I leaned forward, intent and curious. Almost instantly the genuine gems leaped into sight.

Here was a glorious double string, not large but of perfectly graduated beauty and obvious value. Even in the artificial light their white luster told that they came from the Ceylon coasts. Conners could not distinguish them from the other strings.

"The fourth and fifth loops—count from the outside," I told him. "Only Ceylon pearls have that peculiar sheen."

"I get it, but they all look alike to me," Conners replied. "Four and five—okay. You folks go on. Stay over by the door, Jerry, give the Smoker this roll and talk to him."

I GAVE him back the tiny flashlight; Jerry and I strolled on. The Smoker was seeing the tourist party out. When they had gone, she approached him and fell into talk. I glanced back at the Buddha; but the figure of Conners, in front of the image, blocked out whatever might be taking place.

Two men came in at the entrance, two Japanese, their faces distinct in the light. The Smoker blocked them, asking sharp questions, holding them in talk. A quick footstep sounded, and here came Red Conners, with a nod.

"All set," he said. "Here, Smoker, buy some joss for the gods." He handed the Smoker a coin and spoke casually. "How did you like the place, folks? Come on, let's be moving."

Outside, as the chill fog clamped down around us, he spoke under his breath.

"Quick, now! That yellow devil may double-cross us. Here, turn left."

The car was standing dark and solitary. We piled in, and next moment the lights were on and the car was plunging down a cobbled hill street. A cable-car, with a clang and a lurching rattle, cut athwart our way; with an oath, Conners swung the car into the side street.

"Those blasted cockroaches have the right o' way," he grunted, and drew in at the curb. "Hey, Bolton! Take this string; careful—I had to cut it. Don't lose any. Snap on the overhead light and make sure what we got. Can't afford mistakes."

"Good idea," said Jerry.

Under the dome light, I looked at the looped string of pearls. No, there could be no question; these were the ones, for the imitations had been extremely poor in quality. I whistled as I examined them.

"A lot of money here, Red! You seldom see so many perfectly matched Ceylons. Yes, this is the right string".

"You keep 'em for the present. Jerry, I'll head right for Albers' hotel, and phone

him from the hotel drugstore. He lives up on the roof, you know."

"Better pick another spot," said Jerry. "Some of his outfit might spot us."

"Let 'em!" Conners laughed harshly. "We've got Albers where we want him, now. He'll be nice as pie—long enough for me to do my stuff, anyhow."

The car roared up a hill, then swooped down the other side, and with grinding brakes came to a halt at the side of a hotel block, before a drugstore entrance. Conners got out; he was in high jubilation.

"Get on your lipstick, Jerry!" he exclaimed exultantly. "In five minutes you'll be up in his penthouse. Remember, make him think you've fallen for him at last. Think of Harp, and play the game as we've planned!"

He swung jauntily away across the sidewalk and disappeared.

"Lipstick—that's right!" Jerry, who sat on the side of the car next the curb, swung open the door. "Forgot my handbag. I'll get a compact and be right out while he's phoning."

She followed Conners, and disappeared in the drugstore entrance.

So they had agreed on some definite plan, eh? Little Conners was nobody's fool. And his parting words— I straightened up suddenly. Those words, their meaning, hit me like a blow.

By Godfrey, she was the reason herself! The whole fight was over her: Harper had refused to give her up to the other man! Yes, here was the reason for Harper's murder.

Excited, nervous, I got out of the cab and paced up and down in the fog. I had solved the secret now. She stood out among all these shabby figures that moved under the lower edge of the world, furtive, crawling things. She alone stood out clean-cut and splendid, with a bravery that wakened admiration.

My thoughts died as I saw her coming from the drugstore. A man was at her elbow; she was flinging him off impatiently, angrily—a tall fellow, a stranger. He caught up with her, said something about Albers, and seized her arm.

Just there, I slid between them. The one full crack I landed should have knocked that fellow silly; he merely swung around and pitched into me. He must have had an iron jaw. I landed glancingly; then he nailed me and sent me staggering back against the car.

Jerry was crying out something. Other figures were moving around us; the sidewalk was a movement of swirling fog and men. I was down and up and down again, battering at everything within sight and sound.

The voice of Conners came from somewhere. The scream of some woman passer-by broke through the mist. The mêlée became more furious—rushing figures, hot oaths, blows given and taken. Of a sudden my blind rage passed, and I discovered Red Conners hanging on my arm, blood on the little man's face.

"She's hurt!" His cry penetrated to me. "Damn you, I'm done in—get us out of this!"

I was amazed to see that, except for several sprawled or motionless figures, the sidewalk was empty. Red Conners was lifting the limp and senseless figure of Jerry into the car. I woke up; she was injured! Get her out of here at once!

Conners collapsed in the back of the car. I slammed the door on them, slid myself in and under the wheel, and the engine came to life. I had no clear-cut purpose, scarcely knew what I was doing.

Into the glare of the headlights leaped a tall, commanding man in evening attire; his arm was uplifted; he was shouting something. I threw in the clutch and flung the car straight at him. He leaped frantically aside. Shouts and police whistles were shrilling all around.

But an instant later I had the car out in traffic, blindly heading away from the pandemonium behind, and losing it. Only then did I realize that I myself was hurt. There was a warm touch of blood on my cheek, and I felt my senses going.

DESPERATELY, frantically, I turned the car at the first corner. Here showed a dark, fog-swept street of houses or closed shops. I let the car drift in along an empty curb, then shut off the engine. Silence, and fog; I got out somehow, and struggled to get the rear door open.

"Jerry! Conners!"

No reply. The door came open at last, and I switched on the dome light—only to switch it off again, appalled by what I saw. Conners was slouched senseless across the body of Jerry. Her gorgeous cloak was gone, and blood was smeared across the front of her dress.

I straightened up in the darkness, both hands to my face, fighting off the dizzy nausea that gripped me. Slowly it passed, and I became conscious of pain. I had a slight cut on the forehead and a worse hurt in the groin, no doubt from a kick. I clung to the open car door, trying to get a grip on myself.

Jerry was crying out something; the sidewalk was a movement of swirling fog and men. I was down and up again—battering at everything within sight.

The bulge in the pocket of my coat told that the pearls were safe. I was alone, impotent to plan or act, a fortune in pearls in my pocket. If any police prowl-car came down this silent street, I was in the soup. I had not the faintest idea where to find Fiddler's Green, except that it was somewhere at the beach or shore.

Something stirred. Conners groaned, cursed and came to life. I gave him a hand out of the car. The little man had a nasty crack over the head. It would need stitches.

"Jerry?" His voice leaped in alarm. "Where is she?"

"In there," I replied. "Blood on her dress. You keep a lookout. I'll switch on the light and see what's wrong."

I got into the car, unable to repress a groan as I did so; I was hurt, all right. The light on, I lifted Jerry to the back seat, and alarm seized me at sight of the fresh blood. I bared her breast, and my probing fingers examined the deep cut. With my handkerchief and a strip of her dress, I got a compress made and in place.

"Red! Switch off the light. That's right. She's been stabbed, probably by accident. Are you too badly hurt to drive?"

"No. Is she seriously hurt?"

"I think not, but it's no joke. We'd better get her to Fiddler's Green and to bed. I can take care of all this, if you don't want to get in a physician; that would mean a police report, I suppose. You drive, and I'll hold her steady."

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"Okay." Conners slammed the back door, slid himself under the wheel, and started the engine. "What in hell did you start that ruckus for?"

"That fellow was molesting Jerry."

"Rats! I had everything fixed up with Albers. Blast it, he'd have burned that rat himself for daring to touch her! And you had to spoil the whole works! Well, no use crying over spilled milk."

"Not a bit," I agreed. "Stop lamenting and get to moving. Will Ma Webster help take care of Jerry?"

"You'd better believe she will!" rejoined Conners, and said no more.

Fog or no fog, the car skimmed over the long hills like a bird, then swooped down at last to the salt sea air and the fresher skirls of mist that drifted thickly in along the shore. I was resentful of the accusation Conners had hurled at me. Yet, as my heated brain cooled, I had to confess there was some justice in it.

My action had certainly precipitated the trouble. A cool head and less impulsive might have served us better.

"We're here!" The car halted. I discerned the yellow fog-lights again and had a glimpse of the gate, as Conners got out and opened the door. "Has she come around?"

"No." I tried to rise, desisting quickly.

"Need a hand with her?"

"I need a hand with myself, Red," I said shortly. "You go in and get someone to carry her. And I'll want someone to help me. Tell Ma Webster to fix me up an ice-pack; cracked ice in a towel will do. Maybe I can walk later, but not now."

"You hurt?" The voice of Conners held amazement. "Why, the way you mopped up on that mob back there, I thought you were made of brass and iron!"

"Stop yapping and get gone," I snapped, and he obeyed.

After this, I had some bad moments. To myself I said that, come morning, I would get out of this whole thing and stay out. It was not my affair and only a fool would have mixed in it. Running from shadows, I had plunged into a brawling whirlwind of reality!

Things faded for a bit, when I got out of the car. I have a memory of Ma

Webster lifting Jerry out, of other figures around, and of someone helping me. Inside the house I paused to rest, and found it was Professor Fuller who was aiding me. Red Conners was at a telephone in the hall; I heard his words clearly.

"Jemmy? Come get your bus in a hurry. Better change plates. May be some blood around; take care of it. Okay."

Ma Webster came and demanded whether I were able to take care of Jerry; I assured her that I was. Getting upstairs was no easy matter, however. I sank down at last on a chair beside the bed where Jerry lay.

Ma and her sister-in-law stood by; everyone else was shut out; and to my surprise, I found a completely equipped surgeon's bag at hand. I asked whether it belonged to Doc Means, whereat Ma Webster sniffed.

"Him? He's just a fake, hiding out from a dope charge up in Oregon. Somebody got bumped off by accident and they blamed him."

My head cleared. I examined the wound under Jerry's right breast, and cleansed it with care. It was nothing bad at all; a stitch or two was needed, nothing more. The bleeding had stopped, and as she remained unconscious, I lost no time in putting in the stitches. Bed for a day or so would fix her up.

This done, I had Red Conners come, and attended to his scalp-wound, while the two women watched me in open admiration. There was no one to attend to me, but twenty minutes later I was in bed with an ice-pack, and then drifted off into luxurious sleep.

MY wakening came to wan sunlight at the windows, and gray wreaths of fog about a tree-top outside. Ten o'clock said my watch; morning, then!

A twinge of pain cleared my head with sharp recollection. I examined myself with attention; I was badly bruised and discolored, but decided that my hurt was nothing serious, though it was still painful. A day of rest would put me on my feet, though I would be jumping no hurdles for a while.

"Hello! I didn't know if you were awake. Ma sent me with a tray."

I saw Pa Webster sidling in at the doorway from the living-room, bearing a tray of food. The furtive little man beamed at me, pulled up a bedside table, and unloaded his tray.

"Breakfast, and plenty of it! Here's an electric pad; Ma said you might need it. Some magazines. And how are you?"

"Well enough, thanks. What about a morning paper?"

"Nope." Pa Webster lowered his voice. "Ma says no. They got too much in them about a man named Bolton—funny stories."

"I can worry along without the papers, then. Can you lend me a dressing-gown or robe of some kind?"

"Sure. I'll bring it here in a hurry."

"How's Miss Peterson?"

"She's setting up; says she'll be along to see you after a while."

"Fine. Tell her to have her lunch brought here with mine," I said.

"All right." The other hesitated. "And—and Ma says how about some cash on account?"

I laughed. "Hand me my clothes from that chair, will you?"

He complied, and I arranged the cash settlement desired by his provident spouse. He told me the morning had begun clear, but the fog was coming back heavily, and that Red Conners was still asleep. Also, a telephone was here on the table if I wanted one.

Left alone, I attacked the tray ravenously, lit a cigarette, and sank back on my pillow to think. I must get away from here at once, of course, and wash my hands of the entire affair. I must drop it cold. The pearls were safe, as I had just found; and in the hands of Jerry and Red Conners they would mean a fortune. In this respect I had served them well and was rid of any obligation, real or fancied, to the ghost of Harper.

To get out of here, too, was very simple. I reached to the table, took up the phone book, and looked up the number of my father's agents. They could send a car for me and handle everything quietly, keeping me under cover until the Clipper departed on Thursday. I scooped up the phone and called the number.

"I'd like to speak with Mr. Ferguson, please . . . Oh, hello, Ferguson! This is John Bolton."

"Thank the Lord!" came the fervent response. "We've been moving heaven and earth trying to locate you!"

"Why?" I demanded, unaccountably irritated. "Have you any need to get in touch with me?"

"No, but we were worried—"

"Well, don't worry, I'm safe," I broke in. "I do wish you'd be good enough to get my luggage from the hotel and send

it to the Clipper. Any mail can go with it. I'll probably stay where I am, until I go aboard."

Ferguson assented, somewhat grumpily, and I hung up.

WHY had I said and done this? Why did Ferguson so unaccountably irk me, with his precise voice? He was a fine fellow. Last night I resolved to get out of this affair instantly. I had just called with that idea in mind—and lost the idea completely. Why?

I did not care a snap for the people here, of course; they amused me, but that was all. While I could admire Jerry, she meant nothing to me, as a woman. I had no sympathy with the ambition of Red Conners to murder the man Albers, whom I did not know. Then why not pull out?

"Damn it!" I said aloud. "I should quit and do it now, but I hate to lie down on a job. Particularly one where I've made one or two blunders. I'm going to see this through, if it's merely to prove that I can do a few things right!"

"You'll permit me to help you, perhaps," said a quiet voice; and I jumped.

This room opened off the living-room, which I lay facing. No one had come in that way; the bathroom door was closed; there was no other entrance. Yet, turning my head, I saw a man sitting in the other corner by the big walnut wardrobe there. It was Professor Fuller.

For a moment I thought I was seeing things.

"Don't look startled." The Professor rose, pulling over his chair. "There's nothing supernatural about my presence, although I admit to certain powers in that line. You interest me, my young friend. If I'd been let alone, I'd have warned you against venturing forth last night. The guardian spirits find it most difficult to penetrate fog, and we are at the mercy of elemental beings. That is why you had such bad luck last night."

"Oh!" said I. "The spirits don't navigate in fog, eh? I remember. So that's where to lay the blame, and not on me! You're a comforting chap, anyhow. How the devil did you get into this room?"

The Professor chuckled, his bright little eyes sparkling at me.

"I'll show you when I leave. First, let me give you the help I came to bring. You do not believe in the spirits all around us?"

"Not a damn' bit," I rejoined. "No offense meant, Professor."

"None taken." Fuller waved his hand grandly. "Let me say that I'm entirely conversant with the errand on which you embarked last night; the spirits have kept me informed. I should add that I held Mr. Harper in very high esteem, though we were not so well acquainted as I could have desired. That is why I bring you my assistance; although, mind," he hastily added, "I shall myself take no part in the business."

So earnest and grave was all this that I did not crack a smile. The Professor took himself so seriously that he was a bit of a crackpot, like most men who do take themselves too seriously. I nodded to him.

"Thank you, Professor. Far be it from me to turn up my nose at any help. I've bungled things pretty badly."

"One learns only by making mistakes." The Professor glanced at a turnip of a watch. "I've not long to remain. Let me tell you just what to do regarding this man Albers. The spirits have given me full information."

Into my mind flashed the sane and eminently logical thought that this man might be far smarter than he seemed; that behind this talk of spirits there was probably some actual knowledge.

"The burden rests on you, says the sage; therefore, assume it." He spoke impressively and slowly. "Conners is no longer reliable; you must use the pearls. They are not Ceylon pearls, but are from the Malabar coast; don't make the mistake of calling them Ceylon pearls, to Albers. He knows better. Use the name of Jerry; you will see her picture on his desk. And when you have what you desire from him, give him the pearls and leave quickly—and do not look back!"

He nodded, beamed, and came briskly to his feet.

"That's all. Now I shall go as I came . . . I like to wander about this house in my own way. Do not mention my visit, however. Ma Webster objects to my using the passages. Good-by, and good luck to you tomorrow night. That's the time, you know."

He opened the big walnut wardrobe, stepped into it, and closed the door.

I stared with fallen jaw; then the truth flashed across my mind. Supernatural? Not a bit! A secret passage, as Fuller had just said. It was all quite simple.

But was it? For a moment, recollecting the Professor's words, an eerie feeling plucked at my nerves. How did Fuller know anything about those pearls? How

could he know whether they were Singhalese or Malabar pearls? If that tip of his should be true—

I swung myself carefully out of bed. Two steps took me to the chair where my clothes lay. I reached into the coat pocket and brought forth loop upon loop of pearls, spilling a few from the broken string as I did so. I eyed them sharply, critically, summoning up my long-disused knowledge of the gems. Malabar, eh? Yes, it might be so. Under daylight, they were not so definitely white as I had thought them last night.

"Well, I'll be damned!" I murmured blankly. "Then, all this information about Albers, about what to do and when to do it—"

Common sense returned. After all, I was among crooks; no ordinary run-of-the-mill scoundrels, but crooks of a distinct class. Albers was, according to Conners, at the head of various rackets. What more natural, then, than these people having all sorts of intimate knowledge about one another?

"Hanged if I know what to believe!" I mused. "In fact, I don't know yet just what it's all about—but I guess I'll gamble on the Professor and the spirits!"

I was still thinking of the queer program he had laid out for me—and of which I did not comprehend any detail.

ONE o'clock that afternoon found Jerry sitting across the table from me in the parlor of my suite, a bounteous luncheon between us, and her blue eyes somber. What she had to tell me about Red Conners was not pleasant.

"I hate to say it, but you'll have to know the truth. All this has thrown him back into old habits. A drug, yes; not happy dust, but something that soothes him. Opium, I think it is. So he's out of everything, for the moment, and I've got to know what to do, because Albers is calling me here at two o'clock."

I was wearing an atrocious purple bathrobe Pa Webster had supplied. Jerry, in slacks, showed no evidence of her hurt.

"So you're out of it, Red's out of it, and action is coming up, eh?" I said cheerfully. "That leaves me to handle it. Oh, you needn't look surprised! Today's Tuesday. I have until Thursday. Therefore, I'll see Albers tomorrow night. By that time I'll be able to move about comfortably enough."

Her astonishment was so genuine that I smiled. The decision had come to me; I would move blindly along the lines laid down by the Professor, and trust to luck for enlightenment.

Jerry let her fingers wander over the four white pearls on the table before her. I had put them there—the ones I had spilled. She had accepted these four, with a glow of color rising in her face.

"I don't want to see Albers," she said slowly. "If you must know, I'm afraid of him."

I nodded. "I must know more than this, Jerry, before I see him."

"Eh?" Her face lifted. Her eyes held a startled glint. "You can't handle this! You can't see him! What is it you want?"

I sipped my coffee, which was an excellent French roast; I leaned back and regarded her pleasantly. It was time for a showdown. I had to bluff. There was something about a picture, eh? The Professor had given me a hint or two.

"I don't think you and Red misled me for any evil purpose," I observed amiably. "Yet you did mislead me. It's possible that both of you really meant to exact payment for the murder of Harper—"

"You know we did, and we do!" she broke in. "The man who murdered him is going to pay up for it!"

"You sang another song last night," I said. "The man higher up, you said then. Now, I mean to see this thing through to the finish. Not for your satisfaction, but for my own. Just to keep the record straight, I don't intend to murder Albers; but I shall give him the pearls—after I get what is desired. So come clean. Let's have the truth."

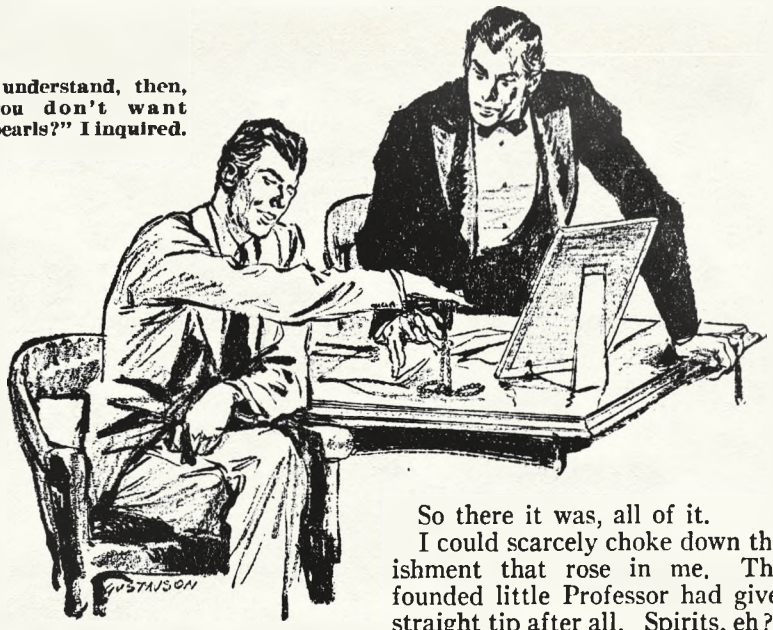
SHE stared at me, her bandaged breast rising and falling to swift breaths. I was glad to see that my wild shaft had gone to the mark.

"Then, you know—or you've guessed!"

"Come clean," I repeated. "Remember, we're friends, I'm getting nothing out of this. You're getting those four pearls; they're worth money. Let's have the truth."

She drew a deep breath, nodded as though to herself.

"Very well!" For an instant her eyes hardened. "I was secretary in a downtown bank. Albers wanted to take me out of it. Harp and I were hoping to get married. Albers went after us both. He got me and got me proper; I had forged a letter to help one of the bank's vice-presidents who was in a domestic jam. Albers got all the papers in the case. How? Don't ask me. He gets anything he wants.



"Do I understand, then, that you don't want these pearls?" I inquired.

"He put the screws on me, went to the bonding company, and they dropped me. 'Anyone who would forge, would steal.' I was kicked out of the bank. Harp stood by me, so Albers went after him and made him into a tramp. He darned near got Harp sent to San Quentin on a frame-up, but Harp outsmarted him there. Harp knew Ma Webster, so we came here a couple of weeks ago. Harp and Red were old friends, too. Red, you see, had an old grudge of his own against Albers, and threw in with us. That's the story."

I finished my coffee, satisfied that things were coming clear at last.

"Now let's have all of it," I said, smiling at her. "Of course, I'm very dumb—"

"You're dumb like a fox!" she ejaculated. "What do you want to know?"

"Where the pearls really do come in. And perhaps about that picture of you on Albers' desk."

She caught her breath sharply.

"Then—then you do know!"

"A little," I assented. "But I can't afford to guess. So tell me."

She broke, all of a sudden.

"The picture, yes," she said. "In the back of it are the papers about me, and a note I wrote Albers—a crazy, wild note threatening to kill him. That was when he was trying to frame Harp. With them is something connected with Red Conners; I don't know what it is, except that it would put him in San Quentin. Albers is afraid of Red. If he gets killed, the police would get this picture and what's in it. Well, that's the thing we want, in exchange for the pearls."

So there it was, all of it.

I could scarcely choke down the astonishment that rose in me. That confounded little Professor had given me a straight tip after all. Spirits, eh? Poppycock! Let someone else swallow that sort of stuff. The Professor simply had all kinds of information and was willing to impart some of it, but did not want to get mixed up in any private war.

"You say Albers is calling at two?" I inquired.

"Yes. He rang this morning and said he'd call again at two." Her eyes leaped to mine; she was sincere enough now. "I'm afraid of him! He's too smooth. I suppose I should pack a gun in my handbag and go kill him, for the way he's wrecked me and Harp; but I can't do that sort of thing." She shivered and looked down, miserably. "I just can't do it."

"No, you're not the sort to do that," I said quietly. "Now calm down and let me deal with Mr. Albers. Possibly we'll get back on my side of the world, where I won't be so apt at blundering. Let Red Conners quiet his nerves with opium; it won't do him any great harm, regardless of what most people think, if he doesn't carry it too far. And it'll keep him out of mischief."

THE buzz of the telephone broke in upon us. I saw Jerry start wildly, and held up my hand, checking her. A moment later I was at the instrument.

"J. A. Albers calling Miss Peterson," came a woman's voice.

"I'll take the call," I said. "I'm expecting it. This is P. T. Barnum speaking."

There was an instant of silence. I met the tense stare of the girl, and winked at her. Then came a pleasant, cultured, incisive voice on the wire—Albers.

"Hello! Albers speaking. What's this Barnum nonsense?"

I laughed. "Well, surely you didn't expect me to give my actual name? Miss Peterson has been rather badly hurt. She was stabbed, I believe by accident—"

"Good God, man!" broke in Albers. His voice held real concern. "I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds! Who did it?"

"You ought to know," I rejoined affably. "However, I'm acquainted with the whole affair; I'd like to talk things over with you, on her behalf. I have something which might be of interest to you; I believe Mr. Conners called you about it last night."

"Oh!" said Albers. "Do you mean the McGuffin necklace?"

"I don't know it by that name. It's a glorious string of pearls; I'd say, by the color and luster, they must have come from Malabar waters. May I bring them to you tomorrow evening?"

"Why not tonight?" he asked quickly. "Why not now?"

"Because," I replied smoothly, "we may not know until tomorrow just how badly Miss Peterson is hurt."

"Confound you! Let me do something about her case. What hospital is she in?"

"Fiddler's Green, as you very well know. Never mind bluffing, Albers. Is it tomorrow night or not?"

"Yes, at eight," he snapped, and rang off.

I turned to Jerry, feeling very well satisfied with myself.

"You see? I told you I'd probably get on with him. . . . Here, for heaven's sake! Don't you dare faint!"

She swayed, but recovered. Then she put her head down on her arms and gave way to the sobs that shook her. She had gone to pieces at last, and no wonder.

For the remainder of this day, and all the next, I worked over that bruised groin of mine—unguents, heat, manipulation. I gradually made it improve, until I was able to walk down to the dining-room. My mental tension was relaxed, too. Things looked very different, now that I had learned the entire story.

ALL these two days, fog continued over beach and city, now lessening, now rolling in ever more thick and wet. Of my fellow-boarders, I saw Jerry from time to time, and the others at meals. Not the Professor, because Fuller had left Fiddler's Green. Conners showed up on Wednesday, gloomy and morose, asking no questions, apparently in a state of dream. He came once to my room, wandered aimlessly about, then went to the door, opened it, and paused there.

"Jerry told me about it," he said in a lackluster voice. "Go ahead and play it out for her sake. She's a good kid. I'm finished."

He slammed the door and was gone, somewhat to my relief; nor did he appear that evening for dinner.

Dinner was over at seven-thirty; I left the table, and Jerry followed me. She overtook me at the head of the stairs, halted, and extended her hand.

"Good luck," she said quietly. "I'll be waiting. And don't let him trick you; do be careful!"

"Thanks." I pressed her fingers, realizing I would not see her again. "You'll hear from me as soon as I get it."

I WAS not returning here. I phoned from my room for a taxi, pocketed the pearls, put on my overcoat and took my few belongings. I had no hat, but no matter. Win or lose, I was now climbing back to the other side of the world this night. This Arabian Nights adventure had been expensive, and the game was by no means worth the candle. I would see it to a finish and make my exit.

I let myself out of the house without seeing anyone, walked out to the gate and waited there for the taxicab. Here, with the fog vapors swirling around, my boasted common sense began to evaporate. The world became unreal and enchanted again; the massive lonely building behind me became a mount of wizardry upon a shoreless sea. The salt air drifted into my lungs; the thudding reverberation of the surf sent my blood pulsing with its hint of coral seas and flying-fish.

How the devil had Professor Fuller known about the white, white sand? Coral sand is blazing white, yes; but very few people are aware of the fact. How had he known so much about the pearls? Malabar, yes. And he had said to get what I went after and then to depart without looking back. Why? Did he really have some second sight?

Bosh! The lights of the taxicab lifted; its horn blared; and I was out of the fog of fantastic thought. All absurd! Crooks have queer information, that's all. Here was the taxicab, here was reality!

I climbed in. A moment later the yellow fog-lights thinned and died in blank mist. Gone was Fiddler's Green; gone

was the gate, the spot where Harper had died; gone was Jerry Peterson—a brave, pleasant memory. I was on my way back to my own side of the world; resolutely I put all other things out of my mind.

THE hotel loomed up; the taxi dived at the entrance, brilliantly lighted, and the doorman appeared. Paying my driver, I walked in out of the fog, out of all this unreality, into a normal world that was richly luxurious.

This great hotel lobby held nothing bizarre; here all was stately dignity. To imagine that fracas of Monday night up the side-street, to imagine henchmen or gorillas of any racketeer lurking about here, were absurd folly. As I walked up to the desk, I even felt that it might be nonsense to ask for anyone named Albers. Yet I asked; the clerk, instead of directing me to a house-phone, asked my name.

"Phineas T. Barnum," I said, smiling. Looking slightly incredulous, the clerk went to a phone and spoke; he came back very affable.

"The No. 2 elevator goes to the roof," he said. "Mr. Albers is expecting you."

When I stepped into No. 2, two other men were in the elevator, and they eyed me narrowly as the car shot upward. It made no stop until the roof was reached. When I stepped out, the two followed. The car door clanged shut.

"Just a minute, buddy," said one of the two. "I'll have to frisk you for a gun. Sorry, but it's orders."

Here was sudden confirmation of everything I had been told. It was not easy to reach Albers, Red Conners had said!

"Go ahead, boys," I said, smiling. "Don't bother the beads in my coat pocket."

Making sure these were "beads," the two began to frisk me. The elevator had deposited us in a rather short, blank hallway. A door was opposite, and another door showed at one end. One of my searchers went to the door opposite, and knocked. It was opened.

"Okay. Here's your man. He's clean."

I went to the door. It was flung wide by a butler, a sharp-eyed, lithe butler with very wide shoulders, who bowed to me and spoke.

"Mr. Barnum, sir? May I have your things? Mr. Albers is in the library."

Doffing my topcoat, I passed through an entrance hall, on through a luxurious and cheerful living-room, and halted in the open doorway of a spacious library, walled half to the ceiling on three sides by books. The fourth side was all window, with drawn blinds at the moment. By day, it must have had a glorious view.

Albers was rising from behind an enormous flat-topped desk.

"Come in, come in!" he said heartily. "Ah, it's Mr. Bolton! I suspected as much, when I heard you were stopping at the Webster hostelry. Glad to meet you."

The words were pleasantly affable; the man was beaming, alive with good humor. A big man, handsome in a leonine and predatory way. A man of something under forty, with powerful lips, his eyes keen under his wide brows, his evening attire fastidious.

And suddenly I recognized him. It was the man who had tried to stop the taxicab on Monday night.

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "You're the chap I nearly ran down the other night!"

"So that was you, eh?" Albers laughed. "Sit down. A liqueur? Cigars on the desk. Make yourself comfortable."

He crossed to a tantalus against the bookcases, and I took a chair before the desk.

He recognized me, eh? I refused to let anything throw me off center, and helped myself to a cigar from the open humidor. Albers came back with two delicate Venetian liqueur-glasses. He handed me one, and took the other to his own chair.

"Here's luck all around!" he exclaimed genially. With a nod, I sipped the fluid. He extended a lighter, and I lit the cigar.

These preliminaries over, we settled back and looked at each other. The wide, masterful lips of Albers twitched, though his eyes remained alert. I caught his thought, and smiled.

"WE'RE mutually surprised—even gratified, eh?" said Albers frankly. "Mr. Bolton, it will be a pleasure to deal with you. Have you really brought those McGuffin pearls?"

I shrugged. "I've brought some pearls, at all events. Never heard of McGuffin."

"They're fabulous, legendary! They vanished at the time of the fire and earthquake—a glorious string of the finest Singhalese pearls. By the way, the safe behind you holds the finest pearl collection in the country. One of my agents bought a marvelous necklace of pink Sunda Straits pearls from your father, five years ago."

"I'm afraid you'll be rather disappointed in these." I fumbled at my pocket. "I'd venture that they came from the Malabar coast, rather than from Ceylon."

A quick light came and went in the eyes of Albers. I wondered anew at the little Professor, and blessed his tip.

"Malabar, I should have said. Of course, the luster is close to that of Ceylon gems," he replied, "but they're infinitely rarer and finer."

I got the string from my pocket and looped it on the desk. Hawklike, the fingers of Albers reached out at the pearls, his face gleaming with unfeigned eagerness. Curious, I reflected, that I was at the brink of life and death with this man, of whom I knew nothing whatever except the bits I had been told; his whole background was unknown to me.

A man might well be murdered for the worth of those gleaming globes of nacre; I had already discounted this peril. Puffing at the cigar, which was superb, I glanced along the polished desk and saw a large, handsomely chased silver frame to the right of Albers; but from where I sat, I could not see whose portrait it held.

"These are the McGuffin pearls, all right." Albers pushed them aside, reached out for a cigar, and bit at it. His eyes probed at me. "I'll not ask where you got 'em. But how on earth did a man like you get mixed up with that Fiddler's Green outfit?"

"The winds of chance blew me into that harbor," I rejoined, smiling.

"Hm! The name is ominous. And the place itself is dangerous in the extreme."

Apparently this was a veiled threat.

"I find it interesting, or briefly so," I rejoined. "From what I've heard, it's a far less dangerous place than this."

Albers grinned faintly. "Meaning that I might take the pearls by force? That stuff might go in a movie, Bolton, but I don't operate that way."

"You prefer a knife?"

Albers lost his smile. For a moment he became hard, polished steel.

"When I'm threatened viciously, I strike out with any weapon at hand," he said in a quiet voice. "You've no doubt been told some queer things about me; in ten minutes I could prove them a pack of lies told by gutter-rats who have inveigled you into handling the sale of the pearls for them."

"You might be making a mistake or two yourself," I rejoined amiably. "By the way, whose face does that handsome silver frame surround?"

He reached out and turned the silver frame, and the eyes of Jerry Peterson, smiling and radiant as I had never beheld them, met my gaze.

"How is she?" Albers demanded.

"Oh, she's doing very well indeed. Fine girl. Do I understand, then, that you don't want these pearls?"

"I want them more than anything else on earth—except one thing." Albers spoke slowly, intently, watching me the while. I did not pretend to misunderstand his words.

"Mind if I examine that picture?"

"Help yourself."

I took the silver-framed portrait from the desk, leaned back in my chair, and examined the reverse side. With my thumbnail I pried up the silver clamps that held the contents in place, and removed the back far enough to see that several documents were held there. Then I put it together again.

ALBERS was watching me in grim silence, and now spoke.

"I see you know what you're after. Who the devil told you they were there?"

I shrugged lightly. "What does it matter? Well, I think you arranged the swap with Red Conners, didn't you? I presume that it still holds good?"

Albers looked incredulous. "A swap?"

"Yes. The pearls for the picture—and contents."

"Damned if I can savvy you, Bolton! What's your interest in this? What do you get out of it?"

"It's a losing game, for me," I said. "My interest ceases as soon as we close the deal."

"You're asking nothing for yourself?"

I looked at him, trying to choke back the words, and could not.

"And nothing for Harper. Your question bears out much that I was told about you."

Albers flushed slightly. "Damned cheeky, aren't you? Well, well, we must avoid all personalities," he added, and became amiable once more. "Shall I wrap up the picture?"

"Thanks, no." I stood up. "I'll take it, and leave you to your conscience."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"You know: Harper, again. Thank God, this time tomorrow I'll be out of here and off to where the winds and the sea are clean! So I'll say goodnight."

I turned toward the entrance hall, scarcely believing that it was all over. Albers came around the desk and walked with me. When the butler appeared, Albers took my topcoat from him.

"You may go, John; I'll see our visitor off," he said. The butler bowed and left. Albers stood holding the coat.

"Do you know, Bolton, I'd like to get better acquainted with you? It's a fact. Might pay us both to reach a better understanding."

"I'm going far," I said. "I've touched the lower edge of the world, and I don't fancy it—any of it."

And yet, beneath the firm, steely look of Albers, I felt unaccountably shaken. I wondered whether, after all, I knew the straight of this entire story; whether this man could possibly be as he had been described to me. Then I remembered the limp figure of Harper against that telephone pole, and it hardened me.

In silence I reached my arms into the coat that Albers held, keeping the silver-framed picture in alternate hands, then buttoned the coat.

"I'll see you into the elevator." Albers opened the door that led into the outer vestibule.

So the game was actually played out; it had finished tamely after all! Until this moment, I had been alert for some sign of trickery; there was none. I relaxed. It had passed off just as things in my own world usually did, with no fury of passion or drama.

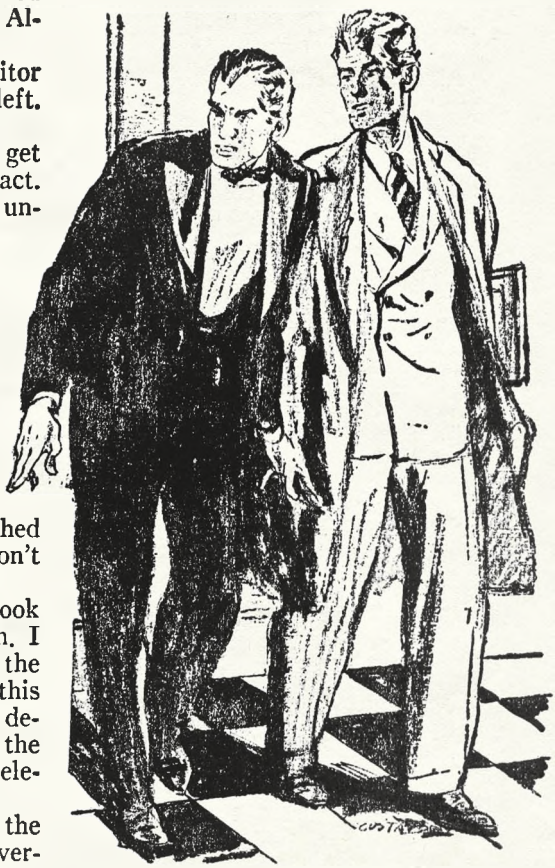
"Nice place you have here," I observed, glancing around, as we headed for the elevator light opposite. I noticed that the door at the end of the hall stood ajar. "Where does that go? To the roof?"

"No, to the stairs and down," replied Albers. "It's usually locked—"

His voice died abruptly, as a figure appeared in that open doorway.

RED CONNERS slid forward a couple of steps, and halted, as Albers reached out for the elevator button.

"Don't do that!" he said. His soft voice held a startling quality. Yet he stood as if empty-handed. He looked small, pathetic, rather helpless, but alert.



"Who the devil let you in, Conners?" "I had to see you; I want a word with you," Red Conners replied.

"Who the devil let you in, Conners?" demanded Albers, his hand withdrawing from the button.

"Oh, I just came. I had to see you; I want a word with you," Red Conners replied. He seemed quite himself, no longer vague and aimless. "Bolton, you go on down the stairs and take a car below. I don't want any elevator here, not yet. I see you got the picture, so go ahead."

Albers gave me a glance. "Slipped one over on me, did you?"

I started. "No! You know better!"

He nodded, laughed, and motioned me to go ahead. Conners was moving toward the open door of the penthouse.

I approached the stair door, uncomfortable under the ugly thought that I might have been used as a tool. Albers, despite his impressive assurance, had the air of having been caught off base. Reaching the door, I glanced back.

"I wouldn't take much of your time," Red Conners was saying, humbly.

Albers nodded.

"Well, come along inside, and I'll give you ten minutes."

"Thanks," said Conners gratefully.

I DISMISSED my uneasiness, and passed down a flight of stairs leading to the hotel corridor below. I left the door open behind me, as I had found it. The stairs brought me down at the side of the elevators. I pressed a down button, and saw by the indicator that the car beside me was on the way to this floor.

Suddenly I swung around, listening. The voice of Albers, uplifted in a furious explosion, pulsed down the stairway.

"You damned little rat! What d'you mean by that?"

"Look out!" The voice of Conners, no longer soft, was almost a shrill scream. "I'm on to your tricks—don't you try it! You won't do me like you did Harper—"

An oath burst from Albers. Then, almost drowned in the opening clang of the elevator doors beside me, a shot. . . . Two more shots.

"Going down!"

Clutching the picture, I forced myself into the car. The operator had heard nothing. The doors clanged shut. The car pitched down and down, halted at the third floor, went on to the lobby.

There was a commotion at the desk. Two men were running, dashing for the roof elevator and calling out something. Its door clanged, and it was gone with them. I turned and passed on out of the hotel. I knew with frightful certainty what they would find when they reached the top floor. They would find Albers, but they would not find Red Conners; that spry little man would be gone.

"Nearest telegraph office," I said, stepping into a taxi. "I want a messenger."

The fog was chill, veiling the street lights. Not the streets, however, but that penthouse scene, held my mental vision. I began to feel more sure, now, that I had been duped, had been made use of; or had I? After all, did it matter? I realized that the taxi had halted.

"Wait," I told the driver, and got out.

Inside, my task was simple. I procured an envelope, and into it put the papers that backed the photograph of Jerry Peterson. I sealed it and addressed it to her. There was no Fiddler's Green in the phone-book, but Ma Webster was listed.

"Deliver this by messenger," I said.

Using the phone-book again, I dialed a number; I got Ferguson at his home.

"Can you put me up tonight?" I asked. "Or until the Clipper leaves tomorrow?"

"It'll be my pleasure," said Ferguson. "Get here on the jump!"

I went out to the taxicab again, still clutching the framed picture of Jerry.

My brain flashed back to the scene before the door of Albers' apartment; there had been three shots. And Red Conners was a champion pistol-shot. He would be gone; if the police looked for anyone, it would be for a man named Barnum.

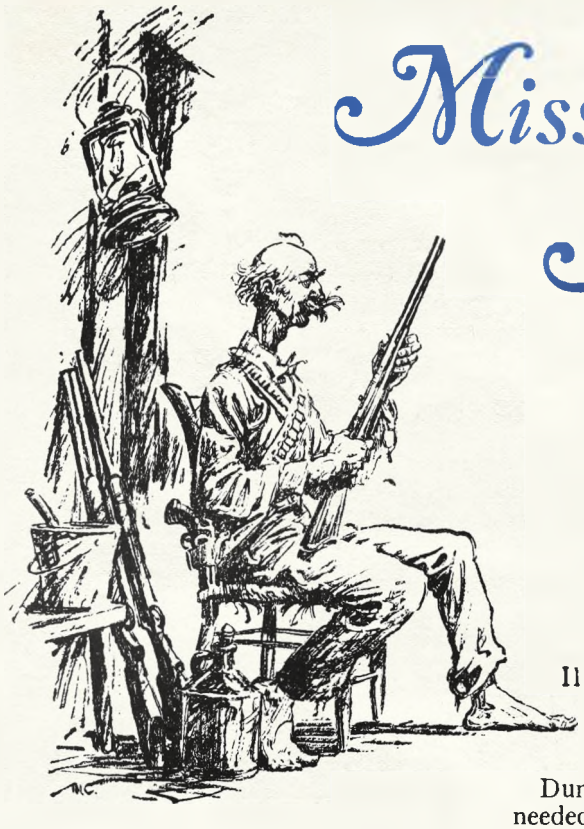
"And," I reflected, "if I'd used my own name, I'd be in the soup tomorrow instead of aboard the Clipper! Had they reckoned on my getting traced and arrested, I wonder? Would I have been just another sucker? Or are all these suspicions unfounded—are they really a pretty swell gang, these people under the lower edge of the world?"

A PASSING glare of light pierced the fog and illumined the silver-framed photograph in my hand. The face of Jerry looked up at me radiantly, assuring me of—what? I broke into a laugh, tossed the picture to the seat beside me.

"Anyhow, I completed the job!" I muttered. "And I'll keep you, Jerry. I'll take you with me to the South Seas—just to remind me of all the things I'll never be sure about!"

But I was sure of what I would read in the morning papers.

THE END.



Mississippi Medicine

A lively and very American tale of life on the great river—by the author of "Mississippi Magic."

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

Illustrated by Monte Crews

NO one noticed Harvey till he was below the forks of the Ohio on Old Mississip', so it wasn't plain whether he came by way of Pittsburgh or from up the "main stem." He passed Putney's Bend eddy without stopping, swung around the big sand-bar and landed against a bluff reef a hundred yards or so from the Tucker boat. Dunk Tucker watched the way the stranger ran out his lines and realized he was kind of a softpaw, unfamiliar with handling a shanty-boat right, so he came over with a pint flask on his hip ready for friendship and business, both.

Harvey was blue-eyed, medium-sized, close to twenty-six years old, smooth-shaven, and he had a kind of soldierly way of standing and a precise way of moving. Dunk sized him up and down. Course, a man can't ever tell for sure, but this man looked genuinely, even pathetically innocent. In his expression was one of those hurt looks which people get to know, associating among the river people. Mostly women have it, far-away, moony and running to sorry memories. That kind don't generally care a damn about anything.

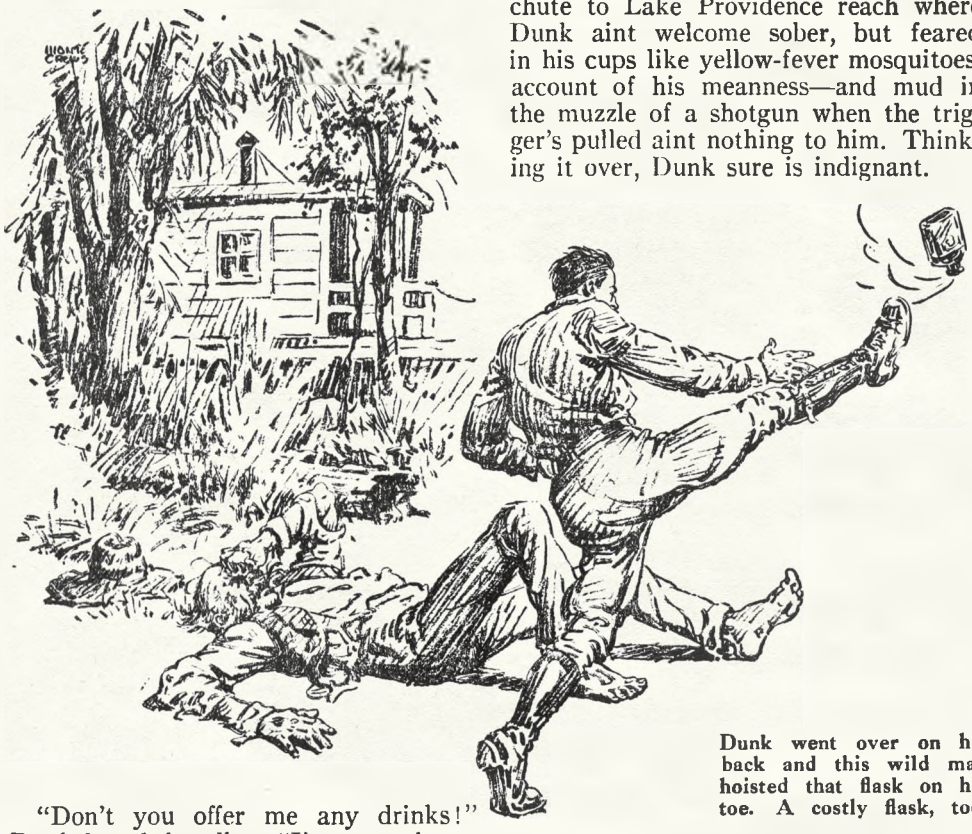
Dunk felt that here was a man who needed cheering up, so after mentioning that the duck flight wasn't good, and that lots of trippers were coming down, he casually pulled his bottle and remarked it was pure white corn, none of that dad-blasted yellow corn they make so much up in Iowa and Illinois bottoms—no, indeed!

Harvey kind of hesitated and mustered himself a bit. Dunk never thought a thing at all. Looking over the outfit of the stranger, close up, it sure seemed like a good customer might have drifted in right where Dunk was sequestering for a few days, having been crowding business pretty hard lately.

Dunk's eyes had begun to twinkle, the way this tripper was coming to it; but all of a sudden, doggoned if Harvey didn't just give Dunk a jab in the jaw, bang him in the left eye and then the right, and double him up with a solar-plexus blow, followed by an upper-cut that straightened him again, all ready to take a devil of a whack square on the point of the chin! Dunk Tucker never even got started, he was so surprised and stunned.

Dunk went over on his back and this wild man hoisted that flask on his toe for a kick that sent it clean over the eddy into the main current—a costly

flask, too, with genuine silver mountings. Dunk had had lots of funny experiences, being a genuine hip-pocket two-bit and half-pint bootlegger, and having been in business down from Cincinnati and St. Louis both—but lying there all sprawled out on his back, this one sure had him guessing.



Dunk went over on his back and this wild man hoisted that flask on his toe. A costly flask, too.

"Don't you offer me any drinks!" Dunk heard dazedly. "I'm not going to drink, understand? Next time you meet Jud Harvey, you keep your damned booze to yourself! Get me?"

And then this tripper unties his boat and starts his outboard, heading right out into the current again. Dunk sat up and got out his automatic pistol, but by this time Harvey was too far for accurate shooting and Dunk Tucker never was a man to waste shells—no, indeed.

Dunk wabbled through the sand, back on board his boat. It was a loose, roily yellow bar—and there isn't any harder walking in the world for a man who feels weak, tired or drunk, than that loose grit. He almost fell off his gangplank getting inside and looking into his hair-parting-and-shaving glass he found he had two shiners for eyes and some of his teeth were loose. If it hadn't been for the way he felt and looked, Dunk just couldn't have believed it, being treated that-a-way just for offering a man a taste, sociable and for nothing!

Dunk never could patronize his own business moderately. He felt so rocky now that he just had to have a medicinal course, and naturally that meant he was fighting it, careless, before night come. There aint a place from Buffalo Island chute to Lake Providence reach where Dunk aint welcome sober, but feared in his cups like yellow-fever mosquitoes, account of his meanness—and mud in the muzzle of a shotgun when the trigger's pulled aint nothing to him. Thinking it over, Dunk sure is indignant.

"I don't have to take that from anybody!" Dunk says, going hunting for Jud Harvey to have it out with him.

Lots of times men and ladies, both, have come down Old Mississip' day and night, meeting calm for Sundays and drizzles for equinoctial line storms, never having no excitement from St. Paul clean down to the Passes. They sure get a funny idea about Old Mississip', that-a-way. Maybe there's somebody sunk in the next bend below—and a lady changing her man in the next bend above—and they don't have any ideas whatever of what is going on. Now probably Jud Harvey'd had that same kind of a peaceable trip himself, if he hadn't banged Dunk Tucker on the jaw. . . .

Dunk pulls out from the eddy about two hours or so after Harvey leaves, according to Dunk's reckoning, and by that

time it's dark. Dunk pulls the corks out of his repeating-rifle and his two shotguns, and makes ready for business. He swings two holsters under his arms and pulls his belt a notch tighter, and he goes tripping down looking for this fellow Jud Harvey, meaning business, and no fooling, either.

AT Fisherman Sweeney's, down below a ways, Dunk yells to ask if they have seen a twenty-four-foot shanty boat with a red hull and green cabin, the windows trimmed with white. They had,—coming down just before dark,—and it went on down with a man floating light on the roof, the outboard throbbing and echoing in the bend.

That looked like Harvey was going to trip all night, and he'd better keep right on going, clear down into the Gulf of Mexico, never stopping nowhere—with Dunk Tucker looking for him, insulted and cleared for action!

Game-fish Sweeney comes down to Columbus in the morning with a catch of fish and he told at the landing about Dunk Tucker going down after this fellow Jud Harvey. He didn't know Jud from the man in the moon, of course, and all he had to go by was what Dunk had told him while he was going by—how all he had done in God's world was offer a fellow tripper a drink of white corn, and took, consequently, the damnedest beating-up he had ever took.

"All I can think of is this fellow's a Yankee," Sweeney tried to figure it out, "and he's insulted because anybody insinuated yellow corn don't make as good liquor as white. Course, every man has a right to his own opinion—"

"You're right he has!" spoke up a quiet-looking, square-shouldered fellow who was standing around the fish-dock. "But don't make any mistake about this matter. My name is Jud Harvey. I'm saying that anyone who offers me a drink is in for it. That goes for yellow corn or white corn or any of those damned kind of things."

Everyone just looked at him. Naturally, he was a stranger there, so everyone had kind of sized him up and wondered about him. He had landed in quite a ways below town on the west side, and come over in his skiff, driven by an outboard. Dunk hadn't dreamed he'd stop within fifty or a hundred miles,—not that night, anyhow,—but here he was, big as life, not twenty miles from where he'd manhandled probably one of the highest-spirited and touchiest men anywhere on Old Mississip', below Cairo—and that means some mighty sensitive people, between the levees!

Seeing as he had handled Dunk, when he looked around just as though he was ready and more than willing to pick up then and there, why, of course it was Dunk's proposition, and everyone was just as indifferent and polite as they could be, hoping he hadn't thought anything personal so far about *them.* Sweeney said afterward he never had passed so dubious an examination and once-over like that Harvey gave him.

"Of course, Mr. Harvey," he said in that palavering way of his, "I was just wondering what ailed Dunk the way he was going by, talking to himself and to me, asking about a red-hulled boat with green cabin and white trimmings. You know, that's an awful conspicuous boat if anyone is looking for you. It isn't a good color to hide out in under!"

That wasn't going to help Sweeney none as regards Dunk Tucker's feelings, of course, for it put a bug in Harvey's ear. He went up to the hardware store and bought some paint. He tore off the labels and nobody knew what color it was. He toted it to his shanty-boat, and cut loose, heading off down the river. That was queer too, if he was trying to keep out of the way. He said afterward that he didn't like the looks of his boat, which was already built when he bought it up the line at Little Klondike, St. Louis. The conversation reminded him he wanted paint, and down to Hickman he remembered to get two brushes so he could cover those cabin colors with standard outdoor white, somewhere below.

EVERYBODY had to laugh. There was Dunk Tucker being liberal for once in his life, offering a man a drink offhand that-a-way, counting on making himself a good customer at small expense—and getting himself all bumped up so't it was two weeks, actually, before his blacked eyes faded out to yellowish.

With his guns ready that-a-way, hell'd sure have been popping if he'd had any luck finding Jud! Dunk had the green cabin with white trimmings on a red hull fixed in his mind. Two-three told him that Jud had painted the whole shebang over—but of course nobody could tell Dunk anything when in his high-lonesome mood. Probably it was just as well.

Dunk come right on down past where Harvey had tied in across from Hick-

man, but he wasn't looking for a cream-colored cabin on a red hull with window framings same as the hull. Lots of times, when anyone is looking for a bad friend that-a-way, or a detector is hunting somebody that's been rewarded, or a husband is trying to catch up with his wife, some little paint-color quirk'll keep them from getting together all the way down for perhaps five hundred miles; and sometimes the seekers never meet, the pursuers never catch up, and the ought-to-joins never do.

At the same time Jud Harvey sure hadn't added any to his prospects of making a quiet, peaceable trip down the Lower Mississip'—no, indeed! The chances sure were favorable for experiences and excitements combined.

And as if this wasn't enough, a lady had to complicate his situation. She also was a stranger on the river, in a nice, well-found motorboat which ran aground on the Island Number Ten sand-bar above New Madrid, with the river falling and a couple of bad actors trailing along keeping track of her, but kind of hesitating to come right out and tackle her.

Harvey was more gentlemanly than discreet, as regards ladies. She was high and dry when he came along down, and she hailed him from the edge of the bar He came across the eddy, anchored off at the stern and she tied him to a snag by the bow-lines. He shoved off his gang-plank and came ashore to look the boat over. The power hull was on a kind of flat, and rested on an even keel.

THERE ought to be some place where women aren't allowed and men could live without any female complications. There isn't any place in the world where men could be more contented and satisfied than down Old Mississip', if it wasn't for the way things are. A single, honorable man starts down, just minding his own business. He don't mix in socially; he ties up in lonesome bends or lands at sand-bars—shooting, fishing, maybe trapping, or just sitting by himself in a plumb peaceable way. That's the way it was with Jud Harvey.

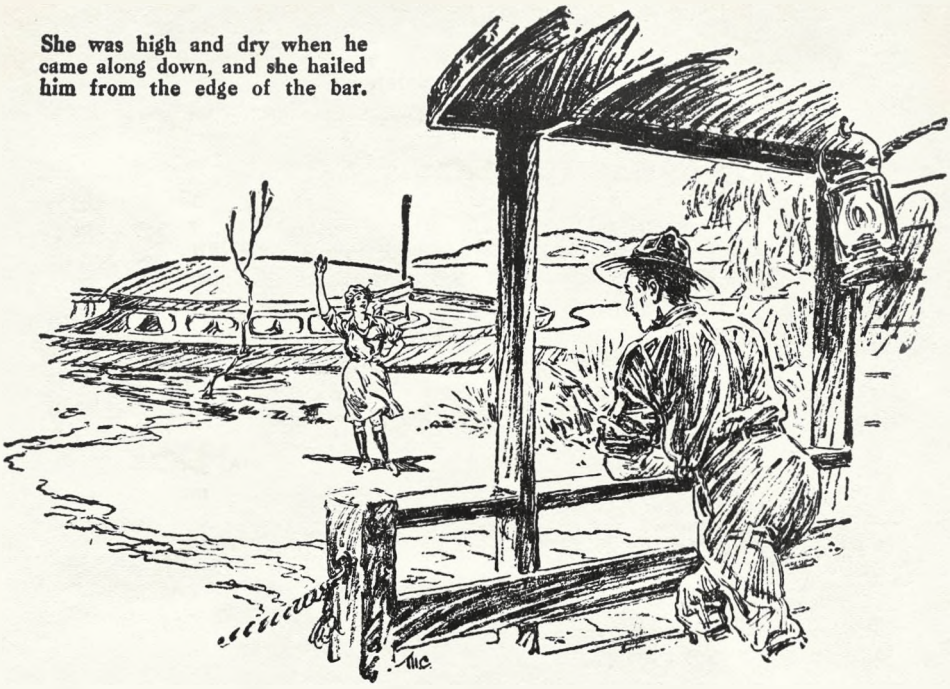
This lady tripper was Blanche Farris, she said, a fair gray-eyed girl with a nice figure and a tongue unusually silent—brown-haired, smiling, and with just enough twitch to her shoulders when she walked, to make those two river rats that had been coming down in her wake hesitate to risk heading right in. She was a stranger on the river but she could sure shoot, and didn't make any bones about it, either. They'd come in on her eddy one misty morning when she steps out with a sixteen-gauge automatic shotgun and pops over three big canvasback ducks,—*one-two-three,*—a-handling that shooting-iron real embarrassing and competent. And then she had a .22 autoloader that clipped the head of a crippled duck at sixty yards, the second shot. When a lady can shoot guns like that, it stood to reason those boys didn't want to take any chances.

They saw her flag in Jud Harvey, who walked around her boat and scratched his head, figuring how to float it off. That kind of a job can be done, of course, but generally speaking a tripper might as well just wait for the tide to turn, and float off on the rise.

BUT women who come down alone are often impatient. They want to be moving up or down, getting somewhere, even if they haven't anywhere in particular to go. So when Blanche Farris, as she called herself, was afloat she'd been going uptown. When she was stuck on a sand-bar, she wanted to float off again. What a woman all lively that-a-way wants to spoil the calm down on Old Mississip' for, nobody can figure out —they just keep coming down, every once in a while one, and naturally some poor devil has to take the consequences. Jud Harvey was new and different, judging by the way he lifted Dunk Tucker from under his hat. So he ties in by this lady, opposite her boat, and if he can't slip her boat into the river, he can sort of hang around there till high water comes again, protecting her real proper, if need be.

Neither one of them knew anything about the quick drops and fast rises. They had good binoculars, both of them, and in clear weather they could see the New Madrid Gauge Board; and if they'd paid any attention they would have seen that the river stage was only five feet, stationary, which meant probably they'd soon put the *R* out, showing the rise was coming.

Harvey goes to work. He drags over a cottonwood pole about fifty feet long, having a handy line and two-sheave tackle-blocks, for snatching. Then he brings in a long four-square beam and sets two automobile jacks under the *Monk's Hood,* as she calls her boat, getting the hull on skids. He did three-four days' work, like that; then even soft-



She was high and dry when he came along down, and she hailed him from the edge of the bar.

paws would notice the tide was on the make, and one morning he wakes up to find the jacks are standing in five inches of water, and he has to let down the boat or he'll lose the screws. The rise was coming about eight or nine inches a day; and, when those two were well acquainted, there comes a twenty-inch jump that floated the *Monk's Hood* all clear.

That plaguey river seemed to have just planned that fall-drop, hanging the girl's boat on the bar and bringing Harvey along down just so's he couldn't pass her by, being accommodating—and of course he couldn't leave her once he'd come to the bank and tied in. Leastwise, not while she was in her predicament that-a-way! Lots of people say it was just a coincidence; that's when they first come onto the river. Afterward, they talk same as the old-timers, and say it was just another of those damned river's tricks.

Now of course, if they'd been ordinary, they'd have tied their boats together and drifted along down, not disputing much the way things had broke. But something ailed them; they were Yankees and instead of leaving their characteristics back home where they started from, they had to bring their ideas tripping down. If just one of them had been a practical shanty-boater, probably everything would have been satisfactory and commonplace. But Old Man River was sure cutting up that autumn, having fun with more queer notionals and the regulars, than hardly anyone ever remembered before. This lady was the most particular and circumspecting anyone could imagine; or anyhow, she claimed to be.

Not but what Jud Harvey needed to meet that kind of a lady, after beating up a man just for offering him a drink. There they were, tripping down together, going up-the-bank to shows—trading, hunting, fishing along, and behaving themselves too. Everybody was making explanations and bets, but any way it's looked at, things like that don't stand to reason. But this damned old river never is twice the same—if a scrapper comes down looking for fighting and trouble, all he can do, more than likely, is punch a bag and exercise with dumbbells. And on the other hand, if he wants to have a quiet, orderly time, off by himself, he ups and feels obliged to punch Dunk Tucker in the snoot, stocking in good and plenty come-back events and episodes for the ensuing winter!

DROPPING down the river together, the trippers landed into Caruthersville. This is one of those towns where anyone can stop and go over the levee and find what he is looking for. If he wants scrapple, sowbelly and brown sugar, there 'tis. And then again if he

wants ribbon-cane molasses, Virginia ham and fresh eggs, why, there they are all ready. And socially it's about the same. I suppose a man could have a two-story house-boat on Old Mississip', same as a two-story house up the bank —rising and falling with the tides. Only the Government has quarter boats like that, and not very many—on account of the cyclone-twisters that like to flop a high boat bottom upwards.

Here come these two into Caruthersville, shopping.

Jud Harvey is wearing a corduroy tan suit with laced hunting-boots and a stiff-brimmed Army hat, besides a gray silk shirt and a clean-shaven face. He looks for all the world like a railroad or Government-works engineer and surveyor. She's dressed scrumptious too—a grayish brown skirt, laced boots, a deep purple silk waist and a jacket to match her skirt, and one of those damned little hats tipped sideways a bit, that gives the rest of her dignity kind of an uncertain and uneasy question-mark.

The two lay in probably two hundred pounds of supplies, both being low in the pantry—canned goods, cornmeal, flour, bacon, sugar, and so on, till they've a good delivery load, which is brought to the Caruthersville eddy and slid down onto his bow deck, all according. Well, there were two delivery-boys, and of course they were short eight or ten cans and a couple of packages, the way those things happen. There's the lists and there's the shortage.

JUD HARVEY takes the list up to the store they'd patronized, heads over to the clerk who had waited on them and starts right in, loud and careless. The proprietor of the store, whose name is Packerly, hears the talk and of course he knows exactly what has happened. He goes out and brings in the two delivery-boys, cuffs them up a bit, and they go out into the delivery-truck and sure enough there is all the absent things just the way Jud Harvey was claiming. The boys claimed they hadn't noticed the things rolled up under some other stuff. So they take the things down to the boat and deliver them.

Caruthersville is one of the good river landings. Shanty-boats like to stop in there. People behind the bank are just as common and nice to anyone off the river as they are to each other, and sometimes nicer, if there's been any hard feelings. Mr. Packerly realizes how his boys' mistakes might make a bad name down the river for his place—shanty-boaters talking a lot among themselves—so he pats this Jud Harvey on the shoulder and takes him into the personal office back of the cashier's den and accounts department.

They went in, closed the door and for a minute or so it is all quiet, same as was to be expected. Then the lady bookkeeper did hear a kind of slight little noise, but she didn't pay any attention. Jud Harvey appears presently, closes the door behind him, and walks out into the street. He goes down to the levee and cuts loose from the eddy with the Farris boat, dropping into Plum Point reach.

SOMETIME later, nobody ever did figure just how long, but perhaps half an hour or so, Rubin Packerly emerges through the doorway of his personal office with his jaw kind of twisted around to one side. He is stumbling and staggering, awry-eyed. He looks so difficult and fuzzled-up that they telephone for a doctor.

The last Packerly remembered he had offered this shanty-boater complainant a drink—the real stuff too, wild grape brandy of the best quality. Something hit him, he didn't know what. He just saw large red circles mixed with a lot of white, blue and other colored ones, and when he came to he was suffering from a sore jaw and a puzzled memory.

The Sheriff and City Marshal were both summoned, and they investigated. Mr. Packerly's memory was corroborated as regards the drinks. On the floor was a broken bottle. From the smell, it had probably contained wild grape brandy as he claimed. He had set out two liberal whisky-glasses, and both of these were also broken in the ruins of the bottle. Packerly admitted that he might possibly have taken a drink, and it had just knocked him endwise. The fact was—and Mr. Packerly was absolutely fair-minded in the matter—he had bought this liquor from another man and not from the bootlegger he was accustomed to patronize—Dunk Tucker not having come along for sometime back, and the bottle being empty.

"I'm afraid we haven't any case, Mr. Packerly," Sheriff Tipton said. "Some of this damned liquor we've been getting mixed in lately acts like that. If you took a drink, and flopped, perhaps you hit your chin in passing by the table or chair-bottoms—you can see how that is."

The Caruthersville *Earthquake* printed an account of the matter, the way Mr. Packerly told it, and some of the natives showed to shanty-boaters what the newspaper printed. None of the river people said anything. Of course, they'd heard Dunk Tucker talking about this same tripper, Jud Harvey, so it wasn't any of their business, even if it was a hell of a note. When back on the river, however, the shanty-boaters talked good and plenty.

Mr. Packerly had done the same as Dunk Tucker. He had offered a drink to Jud Harvey. Packerly couldn't recollect what had happened, the newspaper said, but the indications were plain enough to river people.

Harvey had acted insulted and almost dislocated the storekeeper's jaw. Lots of Queer Dicks have come down Old Mississip'. One can stop at any shanty-boat landing, Cairo, Putney Bend, New Madrid and so on down the line. About every so often somebody odd enough to attract attention will drop in.

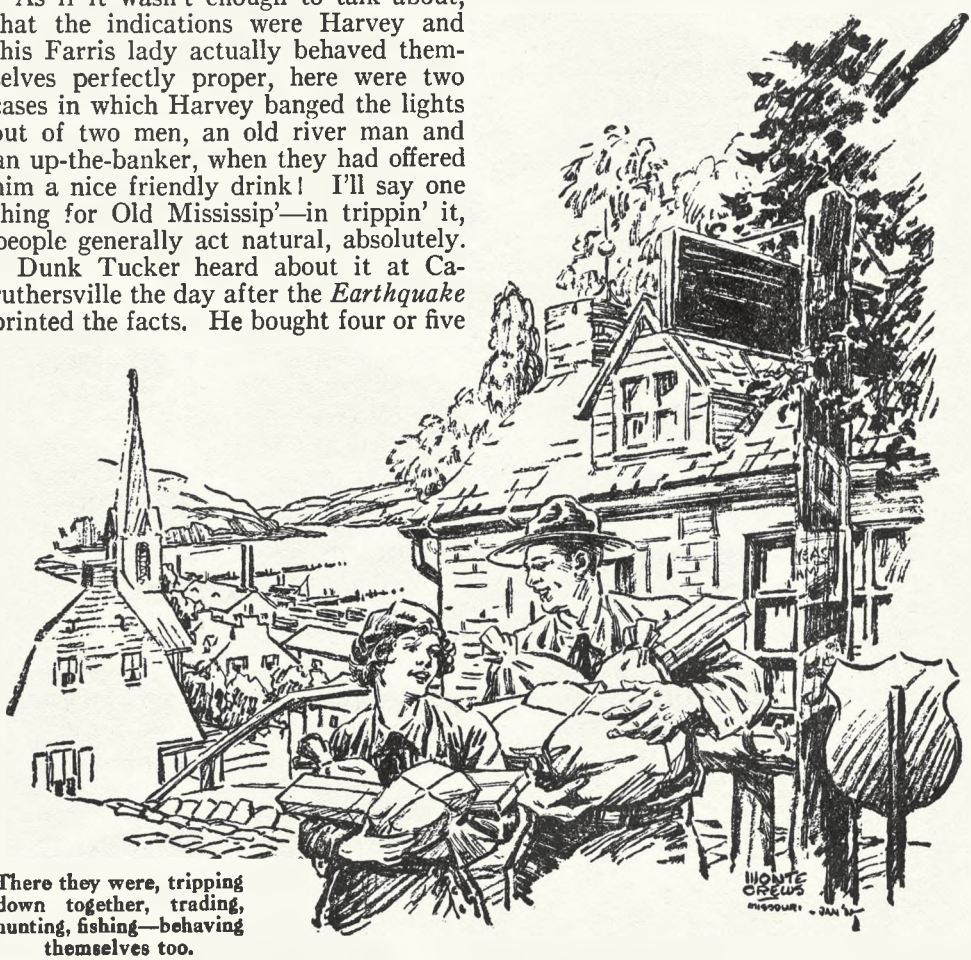
As if it wasn't enough to talk about, that the indications were Harvey and this Farris lady actually behaved themselves perfectly proper, here were two cases in which Harvey banged the lights out of two men, an old river man and an up-the-banker, when they had offered him a nice friendly drink! I'll say one thing for Old Mississip'—in trippin' it, people generally act natural, absolutely.

Dunk Tucker heard about it at Caruthersville the day after the *Earthquake* printed the facts. He bought four or five extra copies so he could always be sure to have one. He wasn't giving any corroborative evidence in the matter, any more than other trippers. If he let on it wasn't a mystery to him, but kind of a regular thing, he knew well enough that Sheriff Tipton would probably slap a witness-bond onto him and make him testify to preliminaries, grand-jury proceedings and the petit-jury trial, to boot.

"I aint any time for that!" Dunk told himself. "And besides I don't give a whoop about Packerly, even if he is one of my clients. This Jud Harvey person is for me to manhandle without no legal interferences."

So Dunk just stocked Packerly up with a private supply, and whatever jugs of regular standards he took for ordinary. Tucker never let on that he had the same kind of jaw as Packerly, though both of them were swelled up like they'd grown hog-fat.

Over at the landing Dunk heard that Harvey was with the motorboat lady, Blanche Farris. He'd heard about the



There they were, tripping down together, trading, hunting, fishing—behaving themselves too.

two being stranded on Island Number Ten, but had arrived there too late to do anything about Harvey. Dunk was probably the worst-provoked man down Old Mississip' in many a day. He had been bunged around before. He had been insulted, exasperated, bothered, same as men usually are. Even when he was sober, he couldn't figure any excuse for this Jud Harvey beating him that-a-way.

"I don't have to take that from any man!" he said, just like that. "The principle of it is what makes me mad!"

LOTS of times a man don't know what to make of Old Mississip'. Any time somebody nice, decent, and honorable is liable to drop down the river, same as to come to California or Florida, or anywhere. This Blanche Farris looked like quality—dignified and indifferent. She wasn't a lady a passer-by would run alongside of, free and easy. About every so often one comes down that is real tempting and dangerous, both. The way things are, on the river, unless a man's awful reckless, he's going to steer clear rather than take a chance of being shot. Circumstances don't restrain a lady's natural inclinations none, if she wants to kill a man. Of course, if it is close by to a town or in some sheriff's actual jurisdiction and he wants to make a reputation, or cover up something else, probably a killing would be investigated and advertised around according to how good-looking a lady is. But if a lady is inclined that-a-way, or feels she has stood about all she is going to, she don't have to run a bluff on a man. Plenty of the boys has been fooled that way, thinking a woman wouldn't shoot, being tender-hearted or something.

One day a line on this Blanche Farris came down the river. Back where she came from, down East, in New England or Pennsylvania,—some place like that,—a lady had turned up missing. The newspapers printed quite a lot about her, for she was mighty pretty. Her picture was printed weekdays, and then on Sunday a life-size natural in brown ink on polished paper give her a big send-off. Funny the way things break, but Tip Ward cut out one of those pictures to tack it on a bare place in his shanty-boat. This was at Pittsburgh, on the Ohio at the upper forks. He had read some piece about her, but he didn't pay particular attention except to keep her picture. Then, one day, he thought about winter coming on, jumped his job and headed off down for a climate to suit his feelings.

So Tip is floating down with the duck flight, killing enough birds to have pot-pies, roasts, and so on. When he reaches Centennial cut-off, he lands in to say howdy to some of the boys, hear the news and find out where everyone is hanging up for the winter. Mrs. Mahna is there with her latest husband, and she comes on board Tip's boat, looks his furniture over and the first thing, her eyes light on that half-page brown picture of a lady.

"Well, great guzzard!" She turns to Tip. "So you're travelin' with a lady's picture now, eh?"

Tip has to laugh and blush, both. He's kind of bashful around the women anyhow, and the wonder was some girl hadn't landed him before this. So he told Mrs. Mahna about how this lady had figured in a pretty prominent triangular case back East somewhere. The funny part of the case was, she had been sued for corresponding, or something like that—one of those technical legalities—with the husband with whom she had been going around.

The man was one of these smart fellows who makes a lot of money in big-time odd-jobbing, building up business and going from place to place—a handsome, polite and flannel-tongued chap with a wife back home and good company whereat he happens to be attending to his business. This last place he came to he meets this lady of the picture. She is probably the nicest proposition in all her home county, let alone her home city. She falls for him, real honorable and good society; the break sure looks like the belle of the community had to go a long way to be satisfied with her prospects—and then the wife, a divorce-lawyer, a detective and a bundle of court literature come to town, tearful, competent and outraged. Then there is hell to pay! The newspapers print it all over and even the current event radio broadcasts make the most of it.

TIP couldn't just remember the name the parties all claimed back where they had their show-down, but anyhow, Mrs. Mahna would have known Blanche Farris if she'd had a dozen aliases. Course, she had took a new name tripping the river, which is advisable if not necessary. The circumstance explained a lot that Mrs. Mahna had tumbled to here and there. Naturally, having had

such an experience in being double-crossed, Blanche Farris, so-called, would just a little rather shoot a man than look at him. Mrs. Mahna agreed with her general attitude, but of course most men didn't think a woman ought to hold it up against every other man, just because she'd found a slick artist at her own first real whack.

Soon as Mrs. Mahna heard that side of it, how come Blanche Farris had turned shanty-boater, it gave her a line on the whole matter. Take a woman anywhere, —down Old Mississip', up-the-bank or off across-country,—and the average is particular and virtuous. This seems to be kind of according to their nature. Every once in a while there's kind of a break in the average, maybe down, maybe up. Nothing extraordinary about it, but just according to the way things happen, it might be said. But this Blanche Farris was just plumb indignant and rambunctious the way she looked at some ideas. And what's more, being able to shoot the way she could, and having plenty of ammunition handy for her respective firearms she had already established her record.

PUTTING this and that together, there were two fellows who drifted into Buckague Landing. They'd been shot with BB's at about thirty-five yards; the gun was strong-shooting, too. They wouldn't talk none, but it was these fellers that had been pursuing that lady's shanty-boat down the river. When they came back afloat they told about their experience. They'd figured Blanche Farris had a nice big boat, and they could navigate it for her, keeping anything from bothering her, and so on. She told them to move, smiling while she spoke.

They mistook that smile. Sometimes youngsters think that when a lady says *no* and smiles, it means *yes*. They picked up their paddles and started toward the boat, and she let them just have it with that plaguey automatic sixteen-gauge of hers. One whack, and both those kids were topics of hospital and river-bottom conversation, sure enough!

Then there was a big fellow with kind of a buzzard-hump to his shoulders, Tockmitt, or some such name as that, a foreigner from off yonder somewhere. He was out of the Ohio, having built him a Volga-boat and saved up some money so he could live across the country. When he gets below Louisville, he just about believes he is clear over the line on the other side in Nowhere. He kills a beef steer on a sand-bar; he picks up a hog anywhere he feels like it; he sees a lot of turkeys on a bottom and thinks they are wild, so he strips down about five to one shot, and a tall, excited woman comes r'aring at him, and he thinks she is an Indian talking broken English, so he laughs and keeps on coming down.

By the time he passes Cairo, at the Ohio forks, he sure has comical ideas about what kind of a country he is cruising in. Anyhow he sees this pretty motorboat lady darning some holes in her stockings as she sits floating in the balmy autumnal sunshine. He has some clothes that need mending too, and he has the real bright idea that if he just had this lady on board his boat, all there would be to it was the question of finding enough to eat. This is pretty late in the afternoon. They are in one of those long wooded bends above or below Columbus, in there somewhere . . . . and when this big foreigner Tockmitt comes out of the reach he is lying face downward in a *rigor-mortis* state of astonishment. Fact! Shot right plumb through the heart! Two men hunting red fox squirrels along there in the hickories happened to see the boats coming in close together with this big dark fellow rowing enthusiastically, and the lady sewing. It was none of their business, and they went on hunting. Afterward they heard about the coroner's inquest some ninety miles below there—it was a falling river, and no wind, so the old scoundrel's boat didn't drift ashore until the breeze sprang up two days later.

Some mathematicians figured that the way Blanche Farris had happened to hang herself on Island Number Ten bar she was excited and mistook a tent-camp lantern over on the west side of Winchester chute for one of the river channel lights and so cut too short in Slough Neck bend. A lady has to have right smart of experience not to be nervous after she's had to shoot somebody, no matter if he did need killing. So Blanche had got stranded.

ONE other matter stirred up a lot of interest; this was the way she treated some night-trippers along through there somewhere. These days it wasn't anything to hear a power-boat going up or down without any running-lights, red or green—not even white. The risk is considerable, but mostly it is the travel-

ers running dark that are in the biggest and most danger. The navigation laws forbid it, but lots of things are forbidden by law which are attractive, or are interferences! Well, these boys were moving fast, heading into the reverse current above Hickman to gain speed by avoiding bucking the main channel bodywater. Anchored away out there in the middle of nowhere in particular is a motorboat and it hasn't any light on it. They had a cut-out wide open, saving some power, and just when they are right on top of that anchored boat they see it. The steersman puts hard over, and they just scrape by—going like the devil, too.

The next they knew five bullets come skittering at them. Before they could do a danged thing, the cased projectiles slatted into the stern, tumbled and flopped through whatever was in their way. One hit the water-pump, and busted it. One went through all clear and cut out the bow plank, making a hole about an inch long and half an inch wide that let water squirt in. Another bullet whanged through the gasoline tank and split the bottom wide open. The next bullet hit metal of some kind,—perhaps the electric system,—and the fire flew—the gasoline exploded and there was nothing to do but jump overboard, letting the boat, afire, go on up the river like a comet, until it finally sunk, over against the opposite bank.

According to all tell down the lower river if anybody is looking for more kinds of difficulties and damnations, all he has to do is get some lady real peevish, and among the cases cited is this Blanche Farris, so-called, just as though she was holding people below the Ohio forks responsible for what had happened to her over the Altoona Divide or back East in the industrial districts.

WHEN Jud Harvey and Blanche Farris drop their lines over each other's cleats and pin-heads they'd already butted in on conditions enough to make bad medicine along with plenty talk. Just how they figured out there oughtn't to be any talk about them, sure beat the arithmetic through by Plum Point reach and on Yankee bar, where they landed in to hunt wild geese, being sociable and self-sufficient.

Kind of a bad element stops in at Plum Point and on toward Fort Pillow bluffs. That place is a long ways from anywhere. Hardly anyone ever is disturbed there, unless the reward is too big on his head. Course, now and again personal difficulties break, if bad friends meet. At the same time those two apparently believed wherever they went they had a right to carry along their own ideas, the lady as regards the attention she had a right not to expect, and Harvey as regards his not being violated in his touchy personal feelings.

Some ladies are reasonable, and being good-looking, a man naturally wonders how much they'll stand for; others are just tempery in that line. But here was Jud Harvey knocking down any one who asked him to have a drink! There was a whisky-boat in the eddy above Fort Pillow bluffs. It was Harvey's own mistake he thought it was a store-boat, selling groceries. He goes on board, and—ho law! The devil and all-get-out had joined hands!

THIS affair of the Fort Pillow eddy boat happened in the middle of the evening, about three o'clock. Jud Harvey comes along in his skiff with an outboard hanging over the stern. A commissary is on the Fort Pillow ridge and his idea is to buy some supplies there. So he sees the Huller cabin-boat, which is about forty foot long and ten foot wide, and cost seven hundred dollars if it cost a cent. Right alongside is a heavy-duty launch for towing. A gangplank is dispensed with in favor of a fast little launch about twenty feet long for bringing aboard customers.

On the side of the boat is a big black announcement—

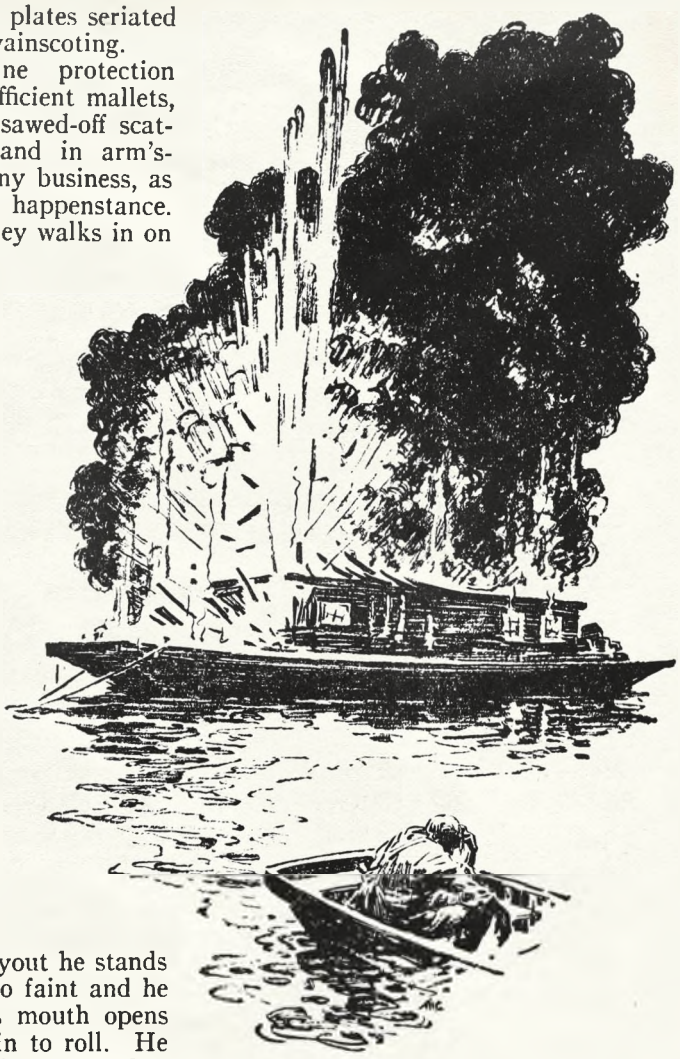
COMMISSARY

Now, of course, Huller had been a store-boater for a long time. He has sold groceries, dry-goods, boat supplies, ammunition and those things, and when he changed his line he hadn't bothered to paint his boat over. Probably, he didn't want to advertise his new business.

Well, anyhow, this Jud Harvey comes alongside, drops a loop over a cleat and walks right in on the bow cabin of the boat. Huller had bought probably the best L-bar of its size from St. Louis to N'Orleans, fifteen foot on one side and six on the other. There aint no inlet from the front to the rear of the boat, on account of Huller discouraging intimacies of his customers with his living quarters, being strictly business that-away. The bar is big, substantial and apparently a genuine protection, extra-high, and bullet-proof down the whole front,

on account of steel boiler plates seriated clear around inside the wainscoting.

Besides this porcupine protection Huller has distributed sufficient mallets, three shotguns, and two sawed-off scatter-guns all convenient and in arm's-length reach, ready for any business, as he believed, that might happenstance. Well, when this Jud Harvey walks in on the Huller whisky-boat layout he stands swaying like he is going to faint and he gulps and swallows. His mouth opens thirstily and his eyes begin to roll. He has all the symptoms of a man that hasn't had a drink for probably six months or so, or anyhow enough time for him to accumulate one gosh-awful demand for a genuine high-lonesome.



This big whisky-boat is burning from bow to stern and the casks in the hold are exploding. The late owner is sitting in his launch in the Fort Pillow eddy, with a dreamy look and two black eyes in his face.

And then he sets himself, squints and begins to bound. Four or five ridge fellers and swamp-angels had been lined up against the bar, having a taste. They looked this fellow over, wondering. He had on one of those yellow corduroy suits and laced boots, like a Government or some kind of a civil engineer. The expression on his face to start with was familiar. Plenty of shanty-boats have been the water-wagons of drinking men trying to escape liquor by keeping away from it—some pitiful and some comical. Huller stands puzzled and dubious; he don't really want to kill a man, without it's necessary. He hesitates; this visitor comes over the bar fist-first, and Huller is knocked clean through his private exit into the back cabin of his boat. Harvey follows him clear over the bar, straightened right out, fist-first.

What follows depends on who tells it. Harvey don't say anything about it. He runs the customers over-side into the ferry-launch and they cut loose. They don't know how to navigate the motor, so they drift down ten miles or so below Chickasaw bluffs, where a fisherman comes out and runs them back up the current to the landing. When they arrive, this big whisky-boat is burning from bow to stern and the casks in the hold are exploding.

Huller, the late owner, is sitting in his heavy-duty launch floating around and around in the Fort Pillow eddy, with a dreamy look and two black eyes in his face. Away up the line toward Yankee bar is the skiff of Jud Harvey, kind of

skittering along in the mirage like a water-bug, and just visible in the sunlit passing of the day. Huller never had any particular recollection of what happened. He sees a man coming at him and forgets to duck in his surprise. Them other fellows is followed out of the boat by a lot of noise and explosions. The next anybody knows the whisky-boat commissary is aflame and past hope.

IN the morning the river through from Plum Point down as far as Centennial cut-off is reasonably peaceable and balmy. News that Huller's boat had met with difficulty traveled fast. The circumstances seeped through in the rumors, and generally speaking it was agreed that Old Mississip' sure had lured a queer proposition into its bends and reaches this time! Whether the interest, novelty and amusement was worth the price, wasn't so easy to decide. Lots of people felt that this Jud Harvey was either crazy or going too far, one or the other, as regards refusing to take a drink. At the same time quite a number of women, like Mrs. Mahna, the Granie girls and so on said that considering the number of men that had been bullied and buffaloed around because they tried to refuse to take or stand a treat, Harvey was sure overdue, the way he was now handling the situation. Course, a man can't argue with women like them—and only some fool softpaw would try it. But from their favorable viewpoint, to Dunk Tucker's active indignation, indicates the wide spread of river opinion.

Down to Mendova past Lost Hope bend and into the Arkansaw Old Mouth district a lot of people buckled on guns for business that hadn't felt obliged to wear self-protectors in many a day. About every so often bad actors show up who bother trippers. Nobody was able to tell where Jud Harvey would come in next, which made some nervous. He and his lady friend was sure a problem in etiquette and commercial affairs. What folks prayed for was that them two would just pass by on yon-side the river without being sociable at all.

News that this lady Blanche Farris, so-called, had reason for being disgusted as regards the ordinary run of men was carried up and down, chiefly by transporters. Nobody could blame her for being peevish the way she'd been cheated by this married man winning her affections back home where she come from. The river ladies all argued that as far as she was concerned, she was perfectly justified in shooting any scoundrel or other man coming in range of her rifle-sights, or anyhow in shotgun range.

"If this Jud Harvey's married, and she ever finds it out, I'd sure hate to be in his boots!" the saying went around, too.

Mutual disappointments had apparently drawn them together in sympathy. Miss Farris as much as told Mrs. Mahna so when they talked together at Friar's Point, where the two landed in after that Fort Pillow excitement. Friar's Point is so doggone dry and respectable that a vinegar-wriggler would die of thirst there, and the ladies is just all quality and absolute. Course, Mrs. Mahna minds her own business awful strict. At the same time, knowing what these two were up against as regards some of those dark bends and Arkansaw Old Mouth sentiments, she just took a chance.

"You can see how 'tis," Mrs. Mahna says. "Everybody along the river is getting so they just absolutely is scairt of their lives, about you two! You just act so awful respectable and tempery that if a man comes along by, he don't know but you'll've mistook a squint for a wink and open up on him. Down this-a-way, ladies can be respectable if it's necessary or desirable, of course, but when virtue gets so doggone aggressive, it upsets the whole river sociability and good-fellowship. It aint only dangerous, but provoking, too."

BLANCHE FARRIS, she just had to laugh. She said she hadn't understood till then that every man who came along wasn't a potential cave-man, and all she had ever really tried to do was make sure not to take any chances as regards any of them. And with Jud Harvey escorting her she really had calmed down right much—not but what she still packed a gun convenient and intended to use it if somebody was disrespectful anywhere in range.

"Well, I draws limits, too," Mrs. Mahna said, and explained her ideas the way women does; and so they came to kind of a mutual understanding.

Of course, that left the problem of Jud Harvey pretty much in the air. Blanche Farris wasn't any hand to talk about the affairs of her friends, but on Harvey's coming aboard from town, Mrs. Mahna asked him if it wouldn't be just as well to explain his viewpoint as regarded his flying off the handle and hell-raising the way he had done.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mrs. Mahna," he said, frank and open as could be. "I was city engineer back home where I came from, in Rockton, New York. I thought I could handle liquor with anybody—drink all I wanted to and no more, take it or leave it. Then one night I went to a stag party. Sometime after midnight I was putting on a one-man parade up and down Main Street. I broke a thousand dollars' worth of plate-glass windows and cleaned up the five active members of the police force—and when I subsided I was a sleeping beauty in the Handsome Conny blind tiger. Luckily, I had influence and income to pay for the damage, and keep my job.

"I tried to lay off drink, but everywhere I went it was 'come and have a drink'—and before I knew it I found if I took a drink I'd take fifty more—and on the way through I'd fight everybody, smash everything and raise hell generally. Then I took to knocking everybody down who offered me a drink. I did that to the chairman of the board of public works and to two members of other boards, and they thought I'd gone crazy. I resigned my job and headed for the Mississippi. I thought down the river I'd be far enough from moonshine, blind tigers, bootleggers and such that I wouldn't hear, smell or see a drink. First thing I knew, a runner name of Dunk Tucker insisted I take a drink. I went hunting on the bottoms and the damned moonshiners said I'd have to buy liquor—and so I just naturally sunk 'em where I found them. Same way with a dirty scoundrel at Fort Pillow—one Huller, pretending to be a store-boat commissary, and really running a whisky-boat!

"If I've got to fight booze, I'll do it!" Jud Harvey said, and he waved a six-gun and a fist, both. "I'll fight it my way, which is sober. Anyone offers me a drink, the way I've got the habit, I've either got to drink it and raise hell—or raise hell and not drink it. That's all there is to it!"

"That's good and plenty," Mrs. Mahna said, with enthusiasm.

SO of course, when everybody down the line understood what ailed Jud Harvey and Blanche Farris, there wasn't any hard feelings at all. Even Dunk Tucker, feeling as mean as he did about taking such an awful and unexpected licking, understood and came around to apologize to Harvey.

"Why, hell, man," Dunk says, "if you'd just told me you was on the water-wagon, trippin' Old Mississip', I'd've been satisfied. If a man don't want to drink, that's his own business."

Now wasn't that comical? Come to find out, Jud Harvey was one of the nicest, peaceablest, sportiest men you ever met. All he had was just kind of an obsession as regards this here liquor problem, that's all. Outside of that he'd do anything for anybody. And same way about this Blanche Farris, so-called.

They had party after party down around Arkansaw Old Mouth—and nobody got killed up, or even the peace disturbed. Of course, if Jud was invited, anybody had better not have liquor even on his breath, on account of him not being able to stand it. And as for Miss Farris, she could dance and laugh and be sociable with anybody, as long as nobody started anything. And naturally, nobody did—knowing how she'd take it and what she'd do, flying off the handle.

And them two dropped out of Arkansaw Old Mouth into the Chaffeli' district below Natchez, hanging along together and getting so they could trust each other more and more, him getting all over his violence as regards being able to see liquor without fighting it, and she loosening up a good deal as regards her antipathy and resentment toward men. One day, they married off in kind of a hurry, and word came back up the line that when they landed at Morgan City below Grande Lake they sold out and went up the bank, both cured complete.

THAT'S all there was to it. There's hardly ever a time when there isn't something interesting, comical, pathetic or serious down Old Mississip'. Everything down this-a-way kind of runs a natural course, just like having measles or mumps—any of those things, from falling into love to having the liquor habit. Course, the way things are, folks and everything scattered out and isolated on the river, it seems like what happens is seen plainer, uncomplicated by other matters. Up-the-bank there's so many folks, ideas, habits, and businesses mixed together that they aint simplified none, and anybody looking on gets distracted every which way. At the same time, being an innocent spectator on Old Mississip' sure has its duties and exercises—yes, indeed! Some folks never do hit what they shoot at — which can be mighty rough on the spectators!

Men

A small-town reporter takes a long chance in this story by the man who wrote "Wings of Destiny" and other noted books.

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

EVER since he could remember, Bart Merrick had liked puzzles. The first ones that he could recall were "How Many Faces Can You Find in This Picture?" Bart had not only found the faces; he had kept the pictures. Hidden animals had followed the faces. Whole zoos were concealed in intricate scenery, but no matter how cunning the camouflage, they soon became so much pie for young Bart.

After the pictorials came manuals. Puzzles in wire, in string, in enigmatic fragments of wood which dovetailed together and made rectangles and spheres. Puzzles with matches, with marbles, with drinking-glasses and coins. Puzzles with handkerchiefs, playing-cards, buttons, spoons. Puzzles in checkers, puzzles in chess. Charades, jig-saws, cross-words, and finally anagrams.

As a matter of fact, Bart was working on an anagram on the evening which was soon to become one of the most memorable dates in his history. He was in his room at Mrs. Wibberley's. Ever since

Like Puzzles

By GEORGE WESTON

Aunt Myra died, Bart had lived at Mrs. Wibberley's. Her boarding-house was on Washington Street near the corner of Phoenix Avenue, and Bart had the room over the front hall.

The anagram was "*A great mist,*" and just as the dinner-bell rang downstairs, Bart found his clue. He tried it. It was right. The answer of course was "*Magistrate.*" Bart quickly pasted puzzle and answer in his Anagrams scrapbook, and hurried downstairs.

In spite of his speed, the other boarders were already at work. The Reverend Walsall, now retired and eking out a shadowy income by selling poultry-conditioners to former members of his flock, was there. So too was Miss Abrams, who had taught the first grade at the Central Elementary School for so many years that she was now beginning to get the grandchildren of her first pupils. And Harry Dowsett, who worked in the bank and was forever trying something new to keep the rest of his hair on the right side of the ledger. And Mrs. Eclair, the librarian, to whom Senator Voorhees had once said, years and years ago: "Mrs. Eclair? How appetizing! Do you mind if I take vanilla?" And finally at the head of the table sat Mrs. Wibberley herself, imperturbably cheerful and looking as if in some pleasant manner she had been poured into the upper part of her dress.

"The old girl's trussed up good tonight," thought Bart, taking his place between Banking and Education. "Must have someone helping in the kitchen."

As if to confirm his judgment, the kitchen door opened and a girl appeared carrying a plate of hot biscuits in one hand and a teapot in the other. Bart looked to see if he knew her; and although he didn't know her, he knew at once that he was glancing at something unusual. Her eyebrows alone would have marked her for distinction. Her eyes were serious, but her nose was inclined to be saucy, and if her mouth was Hebe's mouth, then it was only reasonable to believe that Venus and Minerva were dishing the dessert in the kitchen. This was no regular waitress! His knees following the training which Aunt Myra had given him, Bart arose to his feet and held out his hands for the load.

"No, no, Mr. Merrick," gayly laughed Mrs. Wibberley. "This is my niece Louise, who has come to live with us and help us. Please sit down, Mr. Merrick. Ha-ha! Louise will wait on the table hereafter, for as long as she is with us. As dear old Bishop Wibberley used to say: 'The best way to love well—no, no, no!—I mean, the best way to live well is to work well.' Ha-ha-ha."

Louise and Bart exchanged a glance over the Reverend Walsall's silvery head—he who once thought he had a mission to save mankind, and was now trying to make the hens lay. It was not the shortest possible glance; and before it was over, Bart became dimly conscious of the beginning of the theme-song of a very old and very important broadcast.

THIS prelude wasn't long; it wasn't even distinct. But the Melody in F, Schubert's Serenade and the Echoes of the Viennese Woods all contain a few bars of it. So it isn't altogether surprising that when supper was over and Mrs. Wibberley had gayly rolled away with Mrs. Eclair in the latter's car, Bart found himself headed in the general direction of the kitchen, wondering perhaps if he might hear more of the song.

It was because of such music that Jason the Wise once had himself tied to the mast when passing a certain island—and sailors on the Rhine stuffed their ears with wool if they wished to stay out of the water. . . .

Louise was wearing one of her aunt's aprons—a voluminous affair embroidered with a parrot, the pockets designed to look like cups for Poll's provisions. Another apron hung behind the kitchen door. Bart put it on, Louise watching with her serious glance over her saucy nose. Mrs. Wibberley, seeking cheerfulness wherever

"If you're going to help with these dishes, I shall never forget you."

she could find it, liked pictorial pinafores. The one which Bart now wore was enlivened with a black cat against a background showing a full moon. The cat's back was very high. Its tail was long and bushy.

Louise had already filled the dishpan with hot suds. On the side of the sink was one of those sprawling terraced collections of soiled dishes, glassware, silverware, pots, pans and miscellaneous cooking hardware which are seldom if ever mentioned in the more romantic verses of love-songs or the choruses of tender serenades.

"It's a funny thing," said Bart, taking a towel from the rack, "but only this morning I said to myself: 'What wouldn't I give to wash a few dishes!' And here they are, and here am I. You remember me?"

"If you're going to help with these dishes, I shall never forget you," she told him. "Remember you? Ha! You're the tall, considerate angel who sometimes carries St. Peter's keys, but tonight you wanted to carry biscuits and tea instead. Remember you? He asks me! Would you rather wash or dry?"

He chose the former; and harking back to the years when he had helped Aunt Myra, he started with the glasses, dipping and swishing them so expertly that she had all she could do to keep up with him. And soon, as they worked together, they chatted together, for if one wishes to encourage a flow of confidences, there are few excitants more pow-

erful than helping with the dishes. There are no poses, no false fronts, no efforts for artificial effects over a dishpan. One is simply helping to wash these dishes. So Make-Believe falls down on her silly face, and Truth bobs up from the depths of the nearest well.

HER name was Louise Whitman. She had been two years at State College. She wanted a teacher's certificate first, largely as a policy of economic insurance. And as soon as she had saved enough money, she wanted to act.

"I've been in school plays ever since I was in the sixth grade. *The Little Girl Who Talked to Santa Claus—Peter Pan —Barbara Frietchie—Betsy Ross.*"

After the name of each of these characters she put on a short-order pantomime. *The Little Girl Who Talked to Santa Claus* talked with a lisp and was slightly cross-eyed. *Peter Pan* played the pipes on two dessert-spoons. . . . And so on.

"You're going back to college next month?" asked Bart.

She shook her head. "Dad tried to run a chain of service-stations," she said; "and when he was spread out very thin, a price war came along and turned him into an economic casualty. Now Dad and I are both looking for jobs."

"What can you do best?"

"Laugh if you like, but the answer is probably, 'Act.' At college I was president of the Green Room Club, and last year, I had the title rôle in 'The Little Old Lady in Room 17.'"

Again she gave him a swift depiction, almost as quickly as it can be reported. Her voice quavered, her back bent, her knees tottered as she put the silver away. "I may be waiting on table some night in my white wig," she told him, returning to her normal voice. "I have it upstairs among my souvenirs. And now how about you, Tall Angel? Have you any souvenirs upstairs?"

"Well," he hesitated, "I waste an awful lot of time collecting puzzles."

"Puzzles? You're puzzling *me*. What kind of puzzles?"

"Oh, any kind. Separate the Wires. Put the Pieces Together. Move the Marbles. Jigsaws. I've a trunkful of junk and a shelf filled with scrapbooks upstairs."

"You spend most of your time with them? Like a miser with his gold?"

"No; I spend most of my time hunting up news for the *Beacon*. That's our newspaper here. I do a little bookkeeping and some bill-collecting, but my real job is reporting."

"You'll report me if I don't behave?"

"Well, Mrs. Pelley's pretty lenient. She doesn't like to hurt anybody's feelings."

"Who's Mrs. Pelley?"

"She's owner and editor. Mr. Pelley died three years ago, and Mrs. Pelley's been trying to sell the paper ever since. She's asking twenty thousand dollars, half cash, but that includes the building and two stores. You don't know anybody with ten thousand dollars cash, who'd like to buy a weekly paper, do you?"

"If I knew anybody with ten thousand dollars cash, I'd give you a new puzzle: Find Louise Spencer Whitman. But speaking of puzzles—"

"Yes?"

"Do you think girls are puzzles?" she innocently asked him.

They were standing side by side with their backs to the sink, each drying a pan, when that came out. As he turned his face to look at her, the cat on his apron seemed to be both startled and alarmed as it stared at the parrot, and the parrot seemed to be right on the point of bursting out with a peal of raucous laughter.

"At least," said Bart, "I've never tried to solve one yet."

Whereupon she went into one of those provocative silences which every young man has to translate for himself as best he can.

"It never struck me that way before," thought Bart, "but, yes, they are something like puzzles. This one is, at any rate. It's hard to tell what she's thinking, or what she'll say next, or whether she means it when she says it. Perhaps she's like those puzzles where a lot of extra things are put in just to make them hard—or to make them look hard. But sometimes they're easy enough. . . . Maybe. . . . I don't know—"

Not long after that they hung up their aprons together.

"I've a funny little car outside," said Bart, who had been growing more and more thoughtful. "How would you like to ride downtown and see if we can find an ice-cream soda or a movie?"

ON his way to the office next morning Bart made his usual stops, gathering a little oil here and a little oil there, so the *Beacon's* light might not be too dull when the time came for its weekly illumination.

His last stop was the courthouse, where jury trials could sometimes be reported without offence to too many readers. In the basement of the courthouse was police headquarters, where Chief Holloway sat like a round-backed spider in the center of a web, waiting for foolish human insects to give the signal that they had tangled themselves in the tenuous sticky filament of the law.

Bart's father and Chief Holloway had been the local Damon and Pythias; and after Damon, with quiet dignity, had headed one of the longest funeral processions ever seen in Eastredge, the Chief had recollected that he was young Bartholomew's godfather and had made it a point to help him whenever he could.

AS the young man walked into headquarters that morning, the old man looked around from what he was doing and said: "Morning, son. They tell me there's a new girl in town, and you were stepping out with her last night."

"Mrs. Wibberley's niece," nodded Bart. "Staying with her aunt awhile. Nice girl."

"I judged so when I heard you were out with her."

The Chief turned and went on with his job of thumb-tacking a new "Wanted" circular on the "blackbird" blackboard.

"Foxy Forensky," he said over his shoulder. "They want him in New York for a string of murders, and one by one the State's witnesses are being killed off. That's why they're giving such a fat reward. If he's loose much longer, there won't be any witnesses left."

"'Fifteen thousand dollars—dead or alive,'" read Bart aloud. "'Distinguishing marks: Snakes tattooed around both forearms. Last heard from in northern New Jersey.' Getting pretty close to home."

"That's why they sent me this."

"You knew he was around here?"

"Yes. Come in. I guess I can tell you about it now." He led the way into his private office. "Remember, now," he said, "this is only for your own information. It isn't for the *Beacon* or any other paper."

"Off the record. I understand you."

"All right. Then the last information that New York had about Forensky was this: He mailed two letters from Chanford."

"Only five miles from Eastredge," said Bart, staring. "Of course New York ran down that clue."

"They ran it so hard, I think they scared their man away. Though of course his girl may have warned him not to write again."

"He was writing to his girl from Chanford?"

"Yes."

Bart turned that over in his mind, a puzzle which might not have interested him twenty-four hours earlier.

"She turned his letters over to the police?" he finally asked.

"No," said the Chief, and dryly added: "They found them in her room one day when she was out. She had apparently been writing Foxy for money, because he wrote back that he couldn't send her much—that he was pretty well broke himself. So he may be around here yet. But keep this quiet, son, as I told you before. For all I know, New York may still be working around Chanford."

Bart studied the face in the "Wanted" circular, as he might have studied the arrangement of letters in a new anagram.

At first there was nothing particularly noticeable either in full face or profile. No scars, no broken nose, no snarling mouth like a wolf at bay. But Bart, the expert puzzle-solver, finally found two points which he thought were worth remembering: a small, prim mouth and a catlike sleepy watchfulness which reminded him of *Mr. Wimpy* scheming against *Pop-eye* for hamburgers.

"A lot of those foreigners in the hill country back of Chanford," said the Chief, who had been watching the young man in front of the blackboard. "Most of them more or less related. Good section to stay away from, especially at night. Just as glad it's not in my district."

"Fifteen thousand dollars," thought Bart. "Not a bad prize for solving a puzzle."

He remembered then why the prize was so large—perceived that Mr. Forensky was also engaged in the solution of a problem which must be requiring increasingly close study and quickness of action.

"He's certainly had a lot of practice," thought Bart. "But all the same—say, what couldn't I do with fifteen thousand dollars!"

Some of the possibilities may have been in his mind when he went home for dinner and asked Louise if she'd like to go with him to a dance which the P.T.A. was putting on that night in the high-school gymnasium.

"Oh, I'll be seeing you there," said Lou brightly. "I'm going with Mr. Dowsett."

Bart couldn't remember when a more disturbing wave of foreboding swept over him.

"Dowsett," he thought. "I wonder what she thinks she sees in an adding-machine like Dowsett."

Bart awoke in the middle of the night, suddenly alert and listening. He didn't know it, but his subconscious mind had aroused him, knocking on the walls of its hidden, mysterious chamber, shouting: "Wake up, Slug-abed! While you've been sleeping, I've been working! Listen; I've something to tell you!"

So Bart listened, and this is the message he heard: "Instead of hunting Foxy Forensky in that wild country back of Chanford, how about laying a trap that will bring him to Eastredge if he's still in this part of the country?"

"Laying a trap? How?" asked Bart.

There was no response to that; but in the ensuing inner silence Bart knew that he had just gone a long step forward toward the solution of his puzzle.

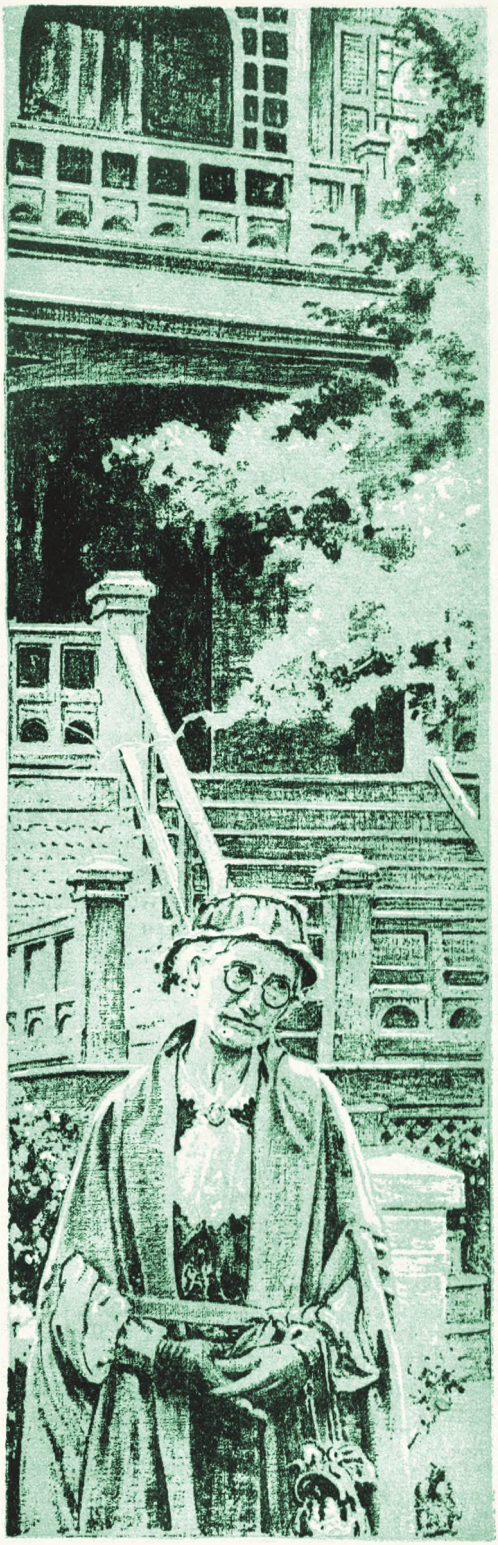
"Foxy," he thought. "All right, let's say he's foxy. Now how would a farmer lay a trap for a fox? Why, he'd put a hen where a fox could get her if he was very clever. The clever fox sneaks toward the hen, and tiptoes into the trap. . . . A fox—a hen—and a trap," he thought, beginning to rearrange his pillows. "I ought to be able to work that one out in the morning." And just before he fell asleep: "Dowsett—the Human Hair-restorer. . . . I wonder if she's sorry now that she didn't go with me."

LIKE every other town of its size and age, Eastredge had its quota of fine old houses in declining neighborhoods—houses which had been built by those generations which could hire their help as easily as they could kiss their hands, houses rich in wooden filigree-work and stained glass, but poverty-stricken in bathrooms, closets, heating, plumbing, and ceilings less than fifteen feet from the floors.

The old Dalrymple place at 21 Maple Avenue was such a house. For over a year a sign on its veranda had read:

For Rent—Furnished
Augustus W. Cutler, Administrator

And then one day soon after Bart Merrick had waked up in the night, Cutler appeared and took the sign off the post.



Bart had asked her: "Why do you carry so much money around, Mrs. Vanderhoof?"

"Young man, I prefer to keep my money where I can watch it," she replied.

"Look!" Bart whispered. "See? I think he's here already!"

That same afternoon, at sixteen minutes to five, a little old lady was driven to the house in Tom Frost's taxi. She had hailed Tom at the bus terminal—a fussy little old lady with two suitcases and various parcels which included a bird-cage wrapped around with a piece of old-fashioned checked gingham. Each piece of baggage bore an address tag: *"Mrs. Beryl A. Vanderhoof, 21 Maple Avenue, Eastredge."*

"Stop in front of the house, driver," she said to Tom in a quavering voice. "I'm going to have that gateway closed and locked.... There! That will do! How much do I owe you?"

"Fifty cents is the fare," said Tom, getting down and opening the door. He lifted out the suitcases and other parcels, placing them on the strip of grass between the curb and sidewalk.

"There," she said again, carefully following her belongings. "That will do."

She gave him the precise fare, and Tom drove off with corresponding precision. Perhaps she had expected that he would help her with her baggage up the steps and into the house. At any rate, she seemed a bit uncertain how best to handle it. She looked up the street and down the street over the tops of her glasses. Half a block away, the choir-boys were just coming out of St. Peter's Parish House, where they had been having their regular Wednesday-afternoon rehearsal, a session which always ended promptly at a quarter to five. To see them churning and wheeling as they reached the street, you would never have guessed that they had just been practicing Stainer's "Nunc Dimittis." Whatever else they were doing, they were certainly not departing in peace.

The little old lady hurriedly picked up her baggage and tottered up the steps that led to the house. The door opened, and she disappeared inside as the advance guard of choristers came charging along in front of the house.

IT was Steve Hincks, the soloist of St. Peter's and best known to his fellows as Stincks, who saw the small rattan suitcase by the side of the maple. He stopped. There was a tag on the suitcase. He read it. *"Mrs. Beryl A. Vanderhoof, 21 Maple Avenue—"* Master Stephen looked at the old Dalrymple house and saw the number "21" on the door. The next moment he had picked up the suitcase, and fighting himself loose from those who would have shared his glory, he ran up the steps and rang the bell.

The door opened, and a tremulous voice said:

"Come in, young man! Come in."

"I found this suitcase out by the road," said Steve as the door closed behind him.

"What? My rattan suitcase? Out by the road? This way, young man! We'll have to look into this. We'll have to look into this very, very carefully."

She led the way into the darkened parlor, sighing a little as if with the infirmities of old age, and steadying herself by resting her hands on the furniture that she passed.

"Now," she said, sinking into a chair and opening the suitcase, "let's see if everything's here."

Master Hinck's young eyes had probably never opened any wider than when the little old lady took a package of money out of the suitcase: a package which was about as thick as a building brick and had *"$1,000"* in large black figures printed on its paper wrapper. She laid it on the table by her side and lifted another one just like it out of the suitcase. And another—and another—

"Five—six—seven. . . . Thirteen—fourteen—fifteen. . . . Eighteen—nineteen—twenty. . . . And one hundred dollars. And forty dollars. $20,140. All here, I see, and you're an honest young man. Now let me see if I can find you something for being such an honest young man."

She disappeared, and Steve thought to himself, "More than twenty thousand dollars! Ought to be a good reward for that!" In a flash of clairvoyance he suddenly and clearly saw a pony of which he had sometimes vaguely dreamed—a calico pony with dark brown mane and tail, proudly galloping around the streets of Eastredge with Master Stephen Hincks upon his back.

The little old lady returned to the room with her worn purse in her hand. She put something in Steve's hand and closed his fingers over it as an old lady will.

"You're not to look," she whispered, "till you get outside."

His fellow-choristers were waiting for him in a body. They couldn't help but see the air of bewilderment with which their soloist came out of Number 21, to say nothing of the disappointment and disgust in his eyes as he opened his hand and looked at something in it.

"Whatta matter, Stincks?" they eagerly called out.

"Aw, that old suitcase I found had more than twenty thousand dollars in it, and all she gave me was this darned old nickel!"

For the last ten minutes Bart Merrick's puddle-jumper had been parked in the alley back of Number 21, but now it turned the corner and came cruising along Maple Avenue. Seeing the excited gathering on the sidewalk, Bart stopped and opened his door.

"What's the matter, boys?" he asked. "What's the trouble, Steve? Anything I can do to help any of you?"

THE *Beacon* went to press every Thursday afternoon. Local subscribers and those in the surrounding villages received their papers through the mail on the first delivery Friday morning, while the news-stands obtained their supplies through Tex's Dime Express Service. These also were delivered on Friday morning.

Ordinarily the *Beacon* shone its light in a subdued manner, each week's illumination being so much like the last that no one noticed it much: Meeting of Woman's Club, Chamber of Commerce Banquet, Real Estate Transfers, Perfect School Attendance. But in the *Beacon* which appeared on the Friday morning after young Master Hincks had found the rattan suitcase, there was a story which soon had the whole town buzzing: "RETURNS $20,140. RECEIVES 5c REWARD."

Bart had spread himself in reporting the various angles of that one-sided transaction: Interview with young Stephen J. Hincks, with picture in choir vestments. Comments by Steve's young companions. Statement by taxi-driver Thomas G. Frost. Picture of 21 Maple Avenue. And finally an interview with the little old lady herself, with her opinion that if people were only honest nowadays because they expected cash rewards for it, the world had come to a pretty sad state of affairs.

Bart had asked her:

"Why do you carry so much money around with you, Mrs. Vanderhoof? Don't you think it would be safer in a bank?"

"Young man, the most money I ever lost was in a bank. Since then I prefer to keep my money where I can watch it," she had replied. . . .

Louise read the story first in the proof on Thursday and then in the *Beacon* on Friday morning. She could hardly wait for the other boarders to leave the breakfast-table.

"If Foxy's still around here, I'll bet you he'll turn up soon," she said as soon as they were alone. "I'm just as glad that I only had to play the *Little Old Lady* for half an hour on Wednesday

afternoon. I wouldn't want to sleep in that house for quite a while now."

"I'm going to stop there on my way to the office, and make plans for tonight," said Bart.

"Will you wait till I stack these breakfast dishes, and let me come with you? I saw the house for only such a little while on Wednesday. And I'd love to see what kind of a reception you're arranging for Foxy."

BART helped her carry and stack the dishes, and it didn't take her long to change her dress. Instead of walking straight for Maple Avenue, they slipped into the delivery alley which ran along to the rear of Number 21.

"Too many people on Maple Avenue," explained Bart. "They might start wondering if they saw us unlocking the front door." But the alley was deserted, the back door screened by a hedge of barberry, unpruned for years.

Bart unlocked the door. They stepped inside, and heard the night-lock click when the door closed behind them.

"This land slopes back, so the alley's quite a lot lower than the street," said Bart. "The help used to have this floor. Basement kitchen—laundry—sitting-room. And here are the stairs."

He led the way to the family rooms above. At the top of the stairs a green-baize-covered door swung out into the hall. Together they looked through the rooms on the street floor: at the plaster decorations on the ceilings, the wall mirrors, the French windows through which Mr. Barnum's giants could have walked without ducking, the elaborate gas chandeliers and massive furniture.

"Some trap," said Louise. "The Fox ought to feel honored."

"If he doesn't come, I've certainly lost a month's rent," said Bart. "But I think he'll come. And when he does come, I think it'll be through the alley." They walked toward the back of the house to the dining-room, which was over the alley entrance. "The front of the house is too open. Cars pass at all hours. But back here, everything's snug and quiet."

"I like the way you cut that paper, and printed those one-thousand-dollar wrappers at the office," said Lou. "The money couldn't have looked more real."

"It would have been better if there had been a five-dollar bill instead of a one-dollar bill on the top and bottom of each package," said Bart, "but I didn't have money enough.... And anyhow, the room was dark and the boy was young. —Yes, sir," he broke off, "I think he'll come through the alley, and I think that he'll come tonight. The *Beacon* has thirty-seven subscribers around Chanford, and the news-stand there takes another twenty-five. Which means that he's pretty sure to have seen the story this morning, if he's still around. So I'll ask Chief Holloway if he can spare me a couple of men tonight, and—"

As he talked, Bart had been glancing now and then through the curtained window of the dining-room into the alley below. At first he hardly noticed the man with the gray shirt and badge who had a large report-book in his hand and was apparently making notes of the condition of the electric poles and wires. The man drew closer to the barberry hedge below, and finally looked up at the wires that stretched from the nearest pole to the Dalrymple residence. Bart noticed then the small prim mouth and the expression of sleepy watchfulness.

A thrill ran up and down Bart's back, and he felt a sensation as if the hair was trying to rise on the top of his head.

"Look!" he urgently whispered. "See? I think he's here already! You slip out of the front door and get to police headquarters as fast as the Lord will let you, and ask the Chief to hurry over with all the help he can spare! I'll leave the lock off the front door, so they can get in. Quick now—before he's in the house and hears the front door opening!"

"But you? What about you?"

He took a heavy candlestick from the sideboard—a lethal weapon, with length and weight and sharp-cornered base. Lou nodded and quickly picked up a pepper-shaker, unscrewing the top and making sure it was well filled. She didn't replace the top.

"Hold this in your other hand and keep your thumb over the opening," she whispered. "If he needs it, move your thumb and let him have the pepper right in the face. That's one I learned at college."

IN growing excitement she threw her arms over his shoulders and kissed him. "That's for good luck—for both of us," she whispered in his ear. "Don't forget that I'm to have a thousand of the reward if you catch him!"

Their feet made no noise on the padded, carpeted floors. Silence still favoring them, he let her out of the front door, making sure that it wasn't locked when he closed it after her.

"I wonder if he's in yet," he thought as he picked up his candlestick again. The sound of a brisk knocking on the alley door came up the stairs, and on second thoughts, Bart picked up the pepper-pot too. He cautiously made his way to the end of the hall and concealed himself behind the open door at the top of the basement stairs.

"If that's Foxy knocking," he thought, "he'll come in when nobody answers. He probably has a pinch-bar in his pocket, and he'll come in through the window by the side of the door. I wonder where Lou is now. She ought to be nearly up to Coghlan's Paint Shop."

HE listened so hard that he began to hear noises all over the house—drawers opening, floors creaking, the sound of someone breathing on the other side of the door behind which he was hiding. Then all at once without any doubt he knew what he was hearing: a firm, assured step coming up the basement stairs.

"Still checking for the electric-light company, if he meets anybody," thought Bart. "I'll bet he still has his pad in his hand."

A shadow passed the edge of the door, and then all sound and movement came to a breathless stop. "He saw something through the crack of the door," thought Bart, and at the same moment became conscious that this door, behind which he had believed he was hidden, was slowly being swung open away from him!

Instead of waiting to see what would happen, he instinctively seized the offensive, hastening the movement of the door with a vigorous thrust of his foot, the candlestick raised for instant action. Down it came, aimed for the head which was just beyond the sweep of the door. The head moved quickly toward him, so that only his wrist struck it, and two shots echoed briskly up the stair-well. Bart felt his right arm go out of commission, but with his left hand he flung the contents of the pepper-shaker into the other's face. The effect was immediate, spectacular, explosive and profane.

"Shame on you!" said Bart, and took advantage of his opportunity by picking up the candlestick with his left hand and swinging it into action again.

It wasn't exactly a gentle swing, and for the second time all sound and movement in the house came to a breathless stop.

"*'Dead or Alive,'*" thought Bart. "I doubt if you're dead, Mr. Forensky, but I do know this: that *I* want very much to stay alive. I've such a lot of things to do—"

His first task was to make sure of his captive's identity. He pushed up a gray shirt-sleeve, and nodded with satisfaction when he came to the spotted adder which had been tattooed around the other's forearm.

"Thought I'd solve it," he said with simple pride.

His next problem was to place a tourniquet upon his own right arm: a minor puzzle and quickly worked out. For a band he used his necktie. His fountain-pen served as turnbuckle.

Yes, he certainly had a lot of things to do—and would soon have the power to do them, too. He could buy the *Beacon* from Mrs. Pelley and turn it into a regular paper—even into a daily, as soon as he could figure out how to make the change.

"I'll get the answer, all right," he told himself, his confidence growing like that of a big-game hunter who stands with his foot on the head of his first tiger.

Then there was Lou. Would Lou go back to college when she got her thousand dollars? Or would she stay in Eastredge now? And keep on going out with Harry Dowsett?

Before he could answer that one, the front door opened and Chief Holloway came hurrying in, followed by Lou and Mike Carroll.

"GOOD work, son," said the Chief, looking down at what was waiting for him on the hall floor.

"You sure had your nerve, playing with that bird," said Mike.

But Lou cried: "Bart! Your arm! He shot you! He—he might have—"

"She's crying," thought Bart with the baffled look of a puzzle-addict who has just found something important but doesn't know what to do with it. "Is she scared? Excited? Sorry? There. Now she's stopped. And now she's laughing. She's laughing and crying together. That's silly. One contradicts the other!"

In despair of ever solving so unstable a set of equations, he made a gesture of helplessness, but nevertheless quickly followed when she left the room and seemed to be waiting for him in the hall.

Something told him that no matter what puzzles he might be able to solve and lay aside in days to come, here was one that could always keep him guessing.

The Fingers

By **H. BEDFORD-JONES**

PICCADILLY, on a warm evening of August, and a bizarre figure striding through the throng—a figure gaunt and tall, hat jammed over eyes, collar turned up, hiding the lower part of his face as though in fear of recognition.

Street lights were dim and few, in 1833. The little that could be seen of the man's features was pallid and cadaverous; his dress, however, was eloquent of wealth and fashion, with a foreign touch of color, of glinting gold.

This man, pausing to let carriages pass, was approached by a whining beggar. He fumbled in a pocket, found nothing, uttered words of pity in Italian, whereupon the beggar heartily cursed him. With a careless wave of the hand, he strode on. Suddenly he halted!

In an alley entrance sat a blind man, squeakily playing an old fiddle. It was the theater hour and many people were passing, but none dropped coins into the beggar's hat. His music was excruciating, and but drove his listeners on still faster.

"There," muttered the gaunt man in Italian, "there were my own destiny, except God kept me from it!"

# of Satan

This fifteenth story of "The World Was Their Stage" deals with one of the strangest public figures of the last century.

Illustrated by Merritt Berger

He felt again in his pocket; and again found nothing. He hesitated; then, impulsively, went to the beggar, stooped over, touched the man's arm. Gently taking the squeaky fiddle and dirty bow, he twisted the tuning pegs and then cuddled the fiddle under a strangely jutting chin. The greasy bow swept across the strings.

A gasp escaped the blind beggar. A few people paused, in astonishment; more began to gather. The fiddle no longer squeaked. Under those agile, enormous hands it became alive with exquisite voices. The gaunt man was playing a few bars from the "Magic Flute," over and over but never twice alike, ever with new variations. Now the melody was haunting, tender; now it became a fast and furious jig of mirth; now it was satiric, mocking, jeering.

The throng increased. A carriage halted at the curb, then another. The beggar sat staring upward, all agape. The player, with his foot, prodded the beggar's hat toward the circle. A sudden savage discord rang out; he kicked again at the empty hat.

The hint was taken. A few coins came tumbling down, more clattered on the

Not even death, it was whispered, could still those fingers in which Satan abode: and so it seemed at this moment.

stones. As though in reward, the Mozart melody swung into an almost human voice of poignant sweetness. It melted into an angelic chorus of double-stopped notes, as the hat was passed back to the carriages and returned weighted with coin.

"Lor' lumme! It's 'im!" A sharp, strident voice burst upon the hushed obscurity. "It's 'im, the devil's fiddler! There's the Old Nick standin' at 'is bloody elbow, mates—"

The player thrust fiddle and bow into the blind man's hands and turned to depart; he was too late. From the crowd erupted a burst of voices, angry, applauding, threatening. A surge forward, and hands were tearing at him. The voices became frenzied. His hat was knocked off; a new howl arose at sight of his features, framed in long black hair—cavernous, craggy features with a huge jutting nose and huge jutting chin. Applause was drowned by hysterical mob-fury. Another surge; the beggar was overturned and sent sprawling with pitiful helpless babblings.

The gutter always tries to destroy what it cannot comprehend. The gaunt man was famous; all London had been talking of him, telling fantastic and terrible things about him. Now the gutter had him, and get away he could not. Dim figures pressed in upon him, pinching and bawling, striking, shoving.

"Nicolo!" A woman's voice, almost at his side, lifted in Italian. "This way, Nicolo. Come quickly!"

A momentary opening showed. He hurled himself at it, his tall, stooping figure gaining place. A woman's hand caught his. He burst through the crowd and was guided into the alley mouth. A woman, running with him, led him along the dark, tortuous maze, and after them poured the shouting, howling throng.

"The devil's fiddler!" Yawping cries shrilled up. "Satan 'imself—fetch 'im down! Stop un, lads!"

Stones and brickbats clattered. Things had taken an ugly, vicious turn.

SPATTERED in filth at every step, ducking alertly, the gaunt man felt himself pulled to a halt and drawn into a doorway. He followed blindly, gasping for breath. A door slammed behind them. The woman's hand jerked him on. Up a rickety stairway, then into a room where a tallow candle guttered upon a table. The door closed.

They were alone. The sounds of pursuit died away. Panting, the man sank

into a chair before the table. He stared at his rescuer, his black eyes enormous in those pallid features.

She was not pretty. She was, indeed, of appalling ugliness; a young woman, swarthy, ill-dressed, emaciated like himself, a tattered shawl about her head. As she surveyed him, a smile that was like a repulsive grimace distorted her lips, yet her dark eyes were alight and dancing and glorious.

"Nicolo, Nicolo! The fiddler who made King William pay double to hear him!" she exclaimed in Italian. "The man who's in league with Satan! Some of these English worship you, others try to tear you apart. You assist a blind beggar; when they recognize you, they suddenly see the devil at your elbow!"

His shaggy brows drew down and he stared at her.

"Who are you, woman?"

Her laugh broke harshly. "Oh, I've heard what they say about you! Sold yourself to the devil; murderer, criminal, imprisoned for years and only released to give a concert; an inhuman person, a corpse-body inhabited by Satan! No wonder the mob nearly murdered you after your first concert here. But I, alone in all England, know the truth. Think back across the years, Nicolo! You can't remember?"

Still breathless, he shook his head silently, intently. She smiled again.

"Think! A boy, a young man already aged, kept in a room behind the shop on the Genoa wharves; tortured, beaten, starved by his beast of a father, made to slave endlessly at music. Whipped, kept like an animal by that brute Antonio, that later he might make money for the brute. A boy, reaching through his barred window, pitifully, for the grapes and oranges, the crusts of bread, sneaked to him by the little girl next door—"

The gaunt man swept to his feet, arms flung wide.

"God in heaven!" he burst out. "The little angel, Graciella!"

He enfolded her in those long arms with sobs, with laughter, embracing her while tears coursed down his sunken cheeks. Then he held her off, staring.

"You, my little angel! Do you know that I searched Italy for you in vain, year after year? I found your people had gone to Marseille. I searched there, searched the coast, all the south of France, vainly; you could not be found. You, the one person to whom Nicolo Paganini owed a supreme debt! You, the one unselfish creature in all his wretched life! And tonight I find you —once more a rescuing angel."

He embraced her anew, in torrential emotion. She gently drew away, forced him back into his chair, and drew up a stool for herself.

"Yes, you've found me. You, the great virtuoso, the rich and famous Paganini, the man who owns all earth and heaven —you've found your little Graciella, the daughter of the fish-merchant."

THE acrid mockery of her voice plucked at his senses. He asked:

"Why did you never get word to me? Where have you been? How did you get to England?"

"As a dancer, my Nicolo; of all things, a dancer! Look at me, regard me well; I'm no more beautiful than yourself, and a woman. A woman, ugly as sin and damned by her ugliness. That's the end of all my dreams and ambition. Now, by working in the downstairs shop, I get this attic room and some scraps of food. I'm forced to virtue. The good God was so intent upon preserving my virtue that I was given no choice in the matter."

The bitter, fleering words drew a shiver from him.

Oddly enough he was a man of impulse, not of intelligence; in many ways he was not intelligent at all. Almost totally lacking in education, tormented over long periods by virulent illness, he

knew only one thing, but that supremely —his violin. The years of suffering which had warped his body, had left his mental faculties equally warped, in a solitary magnificence of spirit. He saw nothing with the perception of other men, did nothing after their accustomed fashion.

"Ugly? Yes, yes. What of it?" he said vaguely. He leaned forward; his eyes warmed. "You weren't hard and bitter in those days, Graciella! A little child like an angel. How I used to listen for your voice! It was the one beautiful thing my accursed life knew. Do you remember what you used to call me?"

She smiled again. A smile heightens the beauty of most women; but with this woman, a smile intensified her ugliness.

"Poveretto Nicoletto!" she answered softly. "I felt so sorry for you, little Nicolo! Sometimes I could hear you sobbing, sobbing half the night. And sometimes when you were ill and fevered, you would babble queer things about angels. I was afraid your father would find out about how I brought things to you—"

She broke off abruptly, with a gesture of warning. A door had slammed, feet sounded on the stairs. She looked up and nodded.

"The padrone, owner of the shop below. He has been in England many years; a violent, terrible man, who has committed many murders. But he pitied me. He lives in the next room."

Her voice died. Paganini was paying no attention, had scarcely heard the words. A long breath escaped him. He leaned back and his somber features cleared.

"It's like a dream! Well, I've found you at last. I can give you all you desire; it will make me happy. Money? I have abundance."

"I care little." She shrugged. "Strange, how some of us would sell our very souls for money, like the padrone! Yet, to some of us, how little it means! Ah, Nicolo, you've come too late to help me. Once I had great ambitions, great visions; all dead now. I hope merely to keep alive, and some day to crawl back like a dog to die in the sunlight of Italy."

He was watching her intently, plucking with his long fingers at his full widely curved underlip. He frowned, trying to comprehend her words.

"Visions? I don't know; I have none," he said. "I know only friends and enemies—many enemies. People hear things and hate me. A man in Paris tried to stab me, because Satan was in me. Bah! I'm no beauty, as you say, but I bewitch them all with my violin. Pretty women, great gentlemen, bitter enemies—I bewitch them all!" He touched the red ribbon in his lapel. "They give me medals, honors, money, love. Why? Because I scorn them, yet my music compels them! My violin is power!"

"Very true. But I have no violin; only this, as ugly as my face."

She stood up swiftly, held her shabby dress tightly about her body in scornful display. It was no more beautiful than her features; it looked ill-shaped and awkward, with powerful flanks and legs.

SUDDENLY she moved, turned, pirouetted, did a few steps across the room and back. The whole impression of ugliness vanished, lost in an epitome of flowing graceful motion. With a shrug that expressed much, she resumed her stool.

"Tell me," demanded Paganini, "what one thing you most desire, Graciella."

She stared, a singular expression in her face.

"Queer you should ask that! I've heard for years of your greatness. I love music, Nicolo; with all my heart I've longed to hear you play. I could never buy a ticket for your concerts. But tonight, on the street, I gained my supreme wish. I heard you!"

"That? Nonsense!" he burst in disdainfully. "An absurdity, a scratchy caricature of music! You shall hear real music from my Stradivarius, and that's not all. Hm! Tomorrow morning I'm going with my manager Laporte, to meet Alfredo Bunn, the Englishman who manages Drury Lane Theatre. I'll make him give a concert for you. If I, Nicolo Paganini, say you're a great danseuse, all London will be at your feet."

She shook her head, with melancholy finality.

"No, my poor Nicolo. These English won't look twice at me. They won't have lessons from me; no one will. They turn their eyes away, as from some hideous animal. When I try to get chorus-work, they look at my wretched body and wave me away before I do a step. Besides, you can't affirm that I'm a good dancer. You've not seen me dance—"

"Be quiet, be quiet!" broke in Paganini, with gusty vehemence. "Could I play second fiddle in some orchestra? No. It's the same with you. I just saw you take a few steps; I know all about you.

Two bars of music, two steps—I need no more to tell if genius is at work! You have the truest beauty; sureness and grace of movement. Did you ever see Taglioni without her costume and lights? *Pouf!* A peasant girl! But on the stage, divine! And, Graciella, you're like your name, the essence of grace. In many ways, you're like me. We're akin, you and I."

"Like you?" she murmured.

He leaned forward with earnest assent.

"Like me, but more fortunate. I'm a man accursed. You've mentioned the wild stories, but you don't know half the calumny and lies that surround me. Here!" He stretched out his left hand and flexed the fingers. "Look at them: set wide apart, the knuckles big and long from pulling them each day, each hour! But people say Satan gave me those fingers. They accuse me of murder; they say I spent years in prison. They cover me with lies. But what's the truth?"

He paused for breath, and touched his right side.

"I scarcely know a well day, Graciella! I have sudden seizures. Any food I take causes frightful pains; I live chiefly on liquids. Sometimes, even in concert, I am gripped by intolerable agony and can hardly stagger off the stage before I faint. I must spend weeks and months in complete rest; then new calumny overtakes me—they say I have gone back to prison!

"When I toured in Ireland last year, no one happened to see me arrive, so all Dublin believed that Satan had flown me there overnight. . . . Everywhere the same; calumny, hatred, scorn, envy! Worship and praise and adulation, yes; but it does not make up for the other. People turn their eyes away from me in horror, as they do from you. Therefore, I shall help you."

She started to speak. He cut her short with peremptory words.

"Keep your mouth shut! I have an idea; let me think. There's a trick to everything. I have secrets. In three days' time I can make an ordinary violinist into a virtuoso. Money? *Pouf!* As you say, that's the least of all things. I owe you a greater debt. I shall pay it. These English are queer, but they have kind hearts. They love mystery."

Enthused, his faculties wakened and animated, the whole man was transfigured. A flame leaped in the large black eyes. He was concentrated, tense, engaged in what for him was the hardest labor—thought.

Then, abruptly, Paganini flung back his head in a burst of mirth; harsh, raucous mirth, for laughter lay interred with his lost youth.

"*Corpo di Baccho!* You shall dance for me, and I shall play for you! Is it agreed? Then swear it, here and now!"

The woman assented in wondering astonishment. He rose, shaking back his hair. Then he grimaced.

"This damp English air has spoiled my coiffure; I must get it recurled tomorrow. Well, write down where to reach you—this address. Write in English. You'll hear from me in the morning, and shall leave this vile hole forever. Remember, you're sworn to do as I say! I'll provide costume, stage, everything. You shall do two dances—what music do you wish?"

Writing, she glanced up and shrugged. "Cherubini—no! Two movements from Gardel's ballet, if you like."

"Set down the titles in English. I don't know a word of the language."

She obeyed. He seized the paper, folded it, tucked it into his waistcoat pocket—and became rigid. His hand seemed glued to his side; he caught his breath sharply. Into his face there came a livid, frightful pallor, and his eyes dilated.

A choking word escaped him. He took two staggering steps, collapsed against a chair, and came to the floor with a resounding crash. He lay senseless, one hand pressed to his side, coat open; in the candlelight, the golden seals of his fob glittered.

CAME a rush of hasty steps. Into the room burst the padrone, a hairy fellow reeking of garlic and cheap wine.

Graciella, kneeling in panic beside the fallen man, looked up.

"Help me, Antonio!"

"So you've had luck at last—a miracle!" bawled Antonio with coarse laughter. Then he leaned forward. "Ha! Gold! Here's a bird worth plucking! Did you knife him?"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Graciella. "He's a friend of mine. Look at his face—the great Paganini! He became suddenly ill."

"Paganini? Tell that to the pigeons, you slut! Paganini? The King of England, perhaps! Gold, eh? Rings on his hand—here, get away from your fine gentleman! I'll make sure of him, then we can strip him and heave him out into the street."

His hand flicked out a stiletto, a thin and pointed Corsican blade. With a cry of protest and horror, Graciella caught his arm. At this moment the eyes of Paganini opened. He looked up, perfectly conscious yet incapable of any motion; his contorted features were bedewed by a sweat of agony.

"Stop, Antonio, stop!" cried the young woman. "He's a friend of mine, I tell you!"

With a furious blow across the face, Antonio sent her sprawling.

"Remember your place, you slut," he sneered, and dropped on one knee. A cry of rage and surprise escaped him. "Hello! The rascal's awake! Take this, you rogue, to shut your mouth for ever—"

He drove down a blow. Graciella, writhing half erect, caught the hairy arm and deflected its aim. The point of the stiletto scratched her wrist and arm; she clung on, with frantic cries. They were abruptly silenced when the free hand of Antonio struck her across the face, again and again. Still on one knee, he lashed her with his fist.

She struggled desperately. A moan of utter despair broke from her; still clinging to the black-limned arm and wrist, she sank down. Antonio struck her again, and this time knocked her clear and broke her hold. But he himself, still on one knee, lost balance, and with a torrent of hot Italian curses, toppled over and fell full length.

It so happened that he fell half across the outflung left arm of Paganini; and, instead of scrambling up again, he stayed as he was.

The guttering candle flickered upon a singularly inactive scene where nothing seemed to happen: The woman, dazed, half senseless, wiping blood and tears from her face and moaning piteously. Paganini lying asprawl, one hand still pressed to his side, but his large black eyes aflame with a wild burning light. And the bulky, hairy Antonio lying there as though held down by some invisible force; his brutal features empurpled, his breath gurgling, his eyes rolling wildly and bulging out with every instant. He made ineffectual motions as though trying to tear something from his throat, and could not.

SPASMODIC fury shook him. He writhed and twisted half around, and shuddered. Then the light fell upon something gripped to his throat. As he came down, the left hand of Paganini had fastened there; those long, demoniac fingers, steel-thewed from constant work on the fingerboard, sank in with inexorable clutch. Not even death, it was whispered, could still those terrible fingers in which Satan abode; and so it seemed at this moment.

Presently Antonio shuddered again and beat at the air with clawing hands, and then went limp. The gripping left hand spurned him, let him go, and his body fell half under the table as it rolled aside. Paganini moved, gasped with pain, came to one knee and then rose. He went to the moaning Graciella, caught her arm and lifted her.

"Come! Wipe the blood from your face. Help me; I'll help you," he said, still agasp with the inward agony that half doubled him. "You must leave here now, instead of tomorrow."

He pressed out the candle-flame. In the darkness, their scuffling feet sounded, then the slam of the door.

NEXT morning, in his ornate office at the new Drury Lane Theatre, Alfred Bunn sat in a rather uncomfortable discussion. The impresario was plump and prosperous; in another three years, indeed, he was to guarantee the great danseuse Taglioni thirty thousand dollars for an engagement. Just now, however, he was dealing with someone who had an even sharper eye on the shekels.

This was Laporte, the interpreter, friend and manager of the great violinist. Laporte announced his terms, and budged not. Paganini, who did not understand a word of what was going on, sprawled in a chair in front of the empty fireplace. Mr. Bunn, who was doing his best to get better terms, shook a newspaper at the imperturbable Laporte.

"Look at this article!" he exclaimed. "Look at these calculations—three thousand guineas is what you make from a single performance, at the prices you charge! You rent the house from me for a miserable hundred pounds, put the tickets at outrageous prices, and become rich!"

"That," said Laporte, comfortably taking a pinch of snuff, "is the whole point of our engagement, Mr. Bunn. It would be odd if we desired only to make you rich! A hundred quid is the usual price for your house; we pay it, or take Covent Garden or another."

Out on the empty stage floated the white vision, to sink gracefully in obeisance, then lift like a soaring bird. "I knew it, I knew it!" muttered Paganini.

Paganini, aware of dispute, leaned forward and spoke.

"Tell him," he snapped in Italian, "to sign this moment, or we leave. Also, I have a further piece of business to settle with him. Then I have an engagement with the Marchesa di Genova, so there's no time to waste in talking."

His burning eyes gripped the impresario. Poor Bunn emitted a gasp, received the ultimatum, and with a sigh approved the contract for the 5th. Then Paganini tapped the arm of Laporte.

"Now, tell him that I want his theater on Thursday night, the 8th."

"Eh?" Laporte gaped at him. "But, maestro, you've just decided on the 5th for the concert! People won't come again, three days later. They're already saying that you've given too many concerts this season."

"Shut up, imbecile! Do as I say," snarled Paganini grimly. "This has nothing to do with you; it's my own affair. Tell him! He's to make a contract with me personally, not with you, for the use of the house on the 8th. Tell him! I'll pay the same figure; tell the shoulder of mutton quickly!"

Laporte obeyed. Mr. Bunn, happily unaware of the names Paganini applied to him, heard the good news with reviving heart. A hundred pounds was, after all, a hundred pounds, and as long as he got the artist down in black and white, he was content.

"This day week, eh? Very well." He drew up paper and dipped a quill. "But, Mr. Laporte, he must find his own performers. I cannot engage artists at the price—"

Assured no artists were to be engaged, he nodded and went on writing. Presently Laporte picked up the agreement, sanded it, and translated it to Paganini.

> "I agree to give One Hundred Pounds for the use of Drury Lane Theatre, for a concert, for One Night (Thursday, 8th August). Mr. Bunn to find Servants, Lights, Printing, Advertisements, and the usual Band, with all the expenses of the Theatre, except Performers.
>
> "Dated August 1, 1833."

With a nod of approval, Paganini spread out the paper, took the proffered quill, and affixed his painful sprawling signature, adding the date in Italian. Then he leaned back and handed a scribbled, dirty scrap of paper to Laporte, who was obviously mystified by the whole affair but dared not protest.

"Tell him the orchestra—or band, as he calls it; good God, what a name for honest musicians!—is to play these two

selections only. The Marchesa di Genova is to dance to the music; when she is through dancing, the orchestra may leave. Understood?"

Not at once. This departure from program usage horrified Mr. Bunn, who liked to do everything just as it had been done at Drury Lane for the past century. Laporte, fingering the paper curiously, gave it a second look and then glanced at Paganini.

"Strange, maestro!" he observed. "This paper seems to have been smeared with blood!"

A mirthless, terrible laugh shook the violinist. He held out his left hand and flexed it in the air.

"Why not?" he said, with a ghastly ironic smile. "Does not Satan reside in these long fingers? I was sacrificing to the devil last night, my dear Laporte. Have you not heard the morning's rumors about some rascal who was found strangled to death?"

"For God's sake don't joke about such things!" exclaimed Laporte, horrified. "If anyone understood your words, there would be fresh calumnies in the papers."

He turned to Mr. Bunn, who wanted to know about the Marchesa di Genova. Laporte had never heard of her. Paganini, however, enlightened them; he told much that was not true, in fact, and hinted at marvelous things, and at romance. The unknown Marchesa began to assume mystery and therefore importance, in Bunn's agile mind.

"Now," pursued Paganini cheerfully, pulling at his underlip, "tell the side of beef that no one is to be admitted to see the Marchesa dance; after her dance, I myself will play, but no tickets are to be issued, no advertisements are to be given the newspapers."

Laporte was positively horrified at this whimsy of casting good money to the winds. He protested; whereat Paganini uprose with a roar of curses that speedily set him on the right track. Bunn, who was already convinced that this gaunt violinist was a madman, shrugged and assented. Besides, Mr. Bunn was thinking about something else.

The Marchesa was a noble Italian gentlewoman in distress; she always danced masked and never showed her features, even to her pupils—ha! The press was full of stories about the gallantries and romantic escapades of Paganini, usually giving them a much coarser name, and Mr. Bunn was already licking his lips when the gaunt violinist took his departure.

Relieved of that Satanic presence, Mr. Bunn eagerly pressed queries upon Laporte, who concealed his worried ignorance with a show of very becoming reticence. The upshot was that Mr. Bunn still licked his lips, and was like to burst with secrets repressed. Not the wildest of wild horses could have kept him, and certain of his noble patrons, out of Drury Lane Theatre on the following Thursday night.

IT was a drizzling night, swirling with fog from the river. The front of the theater was dark, the hoardings were empty; inside, it was different. Here, all was a glow of light, upon a cavernous empty house, except for the orchestra pit, where a dozen musicians strummed and pitched into tune.

In the dressing-room of the Marchesa, a masked woman held out her hands to the lean grasp of Nicolo Paganini. He, as usual, was in his eternal black, a high white stock contrasting with his long curled locks; but she was in a glitter of gauze, with paste gems shimmering, and about her throat a necklace of glorious blood-red coral.

"Nicolo! It is like a dream, a dream!" Her voice, from beneath the mask, was vibrant and musical, rich with tremulous emotion. "See, how cold my hands! I

am afraid; I'm no longer young, Nicolo. Perhaps I've forgotten all I knew."

"Fear not," said he gravely, and bent his lips to her fingers, very courteously. "Genius like ours, little angel, has no youth or age; it is immortal."

"Are there many people in the house?" she demanded.

"Don't think of that; think only that whispers have spread all through London about the mysterious danseuse, the masked Marchesa di Genova. Come! The orchestra is ready. Allow me to escort you to the entrance."

AS he led her to the wings, he ignored gawking servants and stagehands, made a gesture to the waiting Laporte, and the music swept up. Out on the empty stage, before the footlights and the reflectors, floated the white vision, to sink down gracefully in low obeisance and then lift like a soaring bird.

"I knew it, I knew it!" muttered Paganini, as he watched. His hand gripped the arm of Laporte. "Look at her, man! Behold true grace, the ecstasy of motion that comes only with inborn genius! Where is that side of beef, that shoulder of mutton?"

"Signor Bunn?" Laporte gestured at the yawning emptiness of the theater. "Out there, somewhere; I think some fine gentlemen were with him."

Paganini watched keenly, intently; the number was nearly over when he saw her startled realization, saw her eyes, incredulous, focus on the empty seats. To the concluding strains, she tripped into the wings and nearly fell into his arms with a swift outbreak of words.

"Nicolo! What does it mean? The house is empty, empty!"

"Little angel, it is on the contrary full to the doors!" he exclaimed with sonorous assurance. "It is full of old memories of the Genoa wharves, of whispers in the night, of a boy's sobs, of a voice saying: *'Poveretto Nicoletto!'* Listen! Do you hear them? That is the applause other ears cannot hear, for those sounds are echoes from the heart, little Graciella. Now! There is the cue. You're dancing divinely—encore!"

Her second number ran its course. When it finished, half a dozen voices burst forth from the recesses of the boxes—acclaiming and vociferous voices, ringing with enthusiastic plaudits. Graciella curtsied low, then left the stage.

Paganini was not in the wings. Instead, Laporte was waiting with a huge

"Poveretto Nicoletto!" Her gasp was like a moan.

dark cloak; he flung it about her shoulders, uttering excited words.

"The maestro was right; you're divine, signora! These English have seen something this night! But come; he ordered me to escort you to a box."

The musicians, disgruntled and muttering, were leaving. He escorted Graciella, who was radiant but bewildered, to a box above the stage.

Into the glow of the lights came Paganini, violin in hand—suddenly, with that long gliding step which men said was borrowed from the devil. He settled the instrument between jutting chin and the apparently malformed left shoulder; and then he played.

None of his tricks here. None of his string-breaking, his fantastic striving for effect, none of his bewildering pyrotechnics; but, under those white fingers, the ruddy Stradivarius sang.

The cloaked figure in the box leaned forward, intent, absorbed. Through the hushed darkness lifted no melody, but an improvisation more wonderful than any melody, holding a multitude of things which only one listener could recognize. The choked treble sobbing of a boy, the lilting chants of fishermen about the wharves, the strident clangor of church-bells, the lift and surge of waves; the tremulous sobbing again, and upon it the

soft angelic voice that recurred and recurred in golden liquid notes, until it evoked one startled gasp from the figure in the box.

"Poveretto Nicoletto!" Her gasp was like a moan.

Paganini glanced up, smiled; suddenly the music shook with life and laughter, in an ecstatic swinging dance that fairly swirled with intoxicating rhythm.

Laporte, though he had listened unmoved to concert after concert, stood in the wings, lost in utter amazement; sweat streamed on his face and he stared like a man bemused. On and on rose that swaying, rippling flood of music, ever lifting and lifting until it swung into a great triumphant pæan that swelled almost intolerably—and was ended, abruptly, upon one crashing organ-chord from all four strings. And then the strong white fingers plucked at the strings and broke them asunder, with a jarring clang. Paganini bowed to the box, and was gone.

GRACIELLA found him in his dressing-room, limply sprawled in a chair, head drooping in exhaustion, while Laporte carefully wrapped the violin.

She came to Paganini with hands outstretched, with tears glittering below the edge of her mask, with voice heart-filled and unsteady.

"Nicolo, ah, Nicolo! Now I understand. It was beautiful and glorious, beyond all words! How can I ever thank you? How can I ever repay you?"

He rose and bowed above her fingers.

"By dancing for others as you danced for me; by remembering my one urgent advice—never remove your mask. By advancing the opportunities now before you. Repay me, little angel? Never! The debt was all mine."

He broke off, to look over her shoulder at the figures crowding in the passage. A laugh shook him.

"But there; leave me, Marchesa, and go to those who await you. I think the worthy Signor Bunn has offers for you. His noble patrons will be at your feet, too."

"Nicolo!" She caught at him. "Listen to me! You speak as though we weren't to meet again!"

"Dear Marchesa," he said gravely, "in half an hour I leave by the Dover coach. I must be in Paris for a concert three days from now. Farewell, and may you ever remember gently the man who is so like to you in many ways—and so far beneath you. *Addio!*"

He took the arm of Laporte and together they passed out to the street. But Laporte, as the swirls and eddies of fog closed around them, was lamenting the three thousand golden guineas lost that night. The fog swallowed them. They vanished from sight. Across the half-lit, shrouded stage echoed the ghastly croaking laugh of Paganini. . . . The play was over, and the curtain fell.

THE lights in the room were switched on, and Dr. Haberlin turned his smiling countenance to me.

I sighed a little, and broke from the enchantment of the past, to accept the cigar he offered.

"A good touch, that final laugh from the fog!" he exclaimed, complacently. "How did you like my sound effects and voices?"

"How the devil did you get them?" I demanded. "I've meant to ask you before this how you handled the illusion. You did it with a phonograph?"

He shook with hearty laughter, and wagged his forefinger at me.

"No, no, my boy! That's my secret, and remains my secret until it's safely patented! You can't screw that out of me. But how did you like the little drama?"

"Your notions of drama," I said tactfully, "are rarely original. Tell me one thing, Karl; was there any truth in that ghastly strangling episode?"

He pulled at his cigar, eyes a-twinkle behind his thick lenses.

"My boy, no one to this day can tell you the truth about Nicolo Paganini!" he said at length. "The man remains an enigma, a composite of legend and mystery and deep sadness; a fascinating orchestral theme, for those who desire to play upon it."

"But the Marchesa—little Graciella?" I demanded.

He reached around to a table on which were piled all manner of documents and theatrical records. From the pile, he took a strip of white satin and passed it to me, silently.

It was a playbill of 1835, printed on satin as the custom was for benefits and exceptional engagements. It announced the farewell appearance, before her departure to Italy, of the famed danseuse and teacher, Marchesa di Genova—the dancer who had never removed her mask.

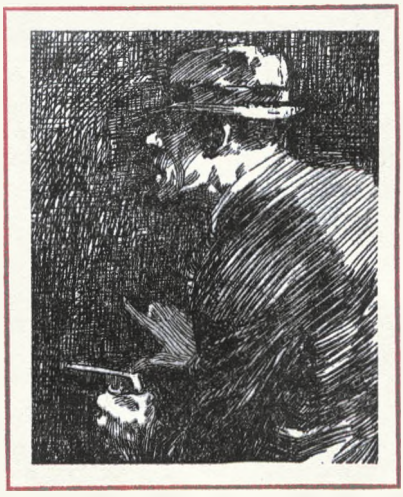
Another story in this series will appear in the next—the September—issue.

A SHORT NOVEL

REPORTER AT LARGE

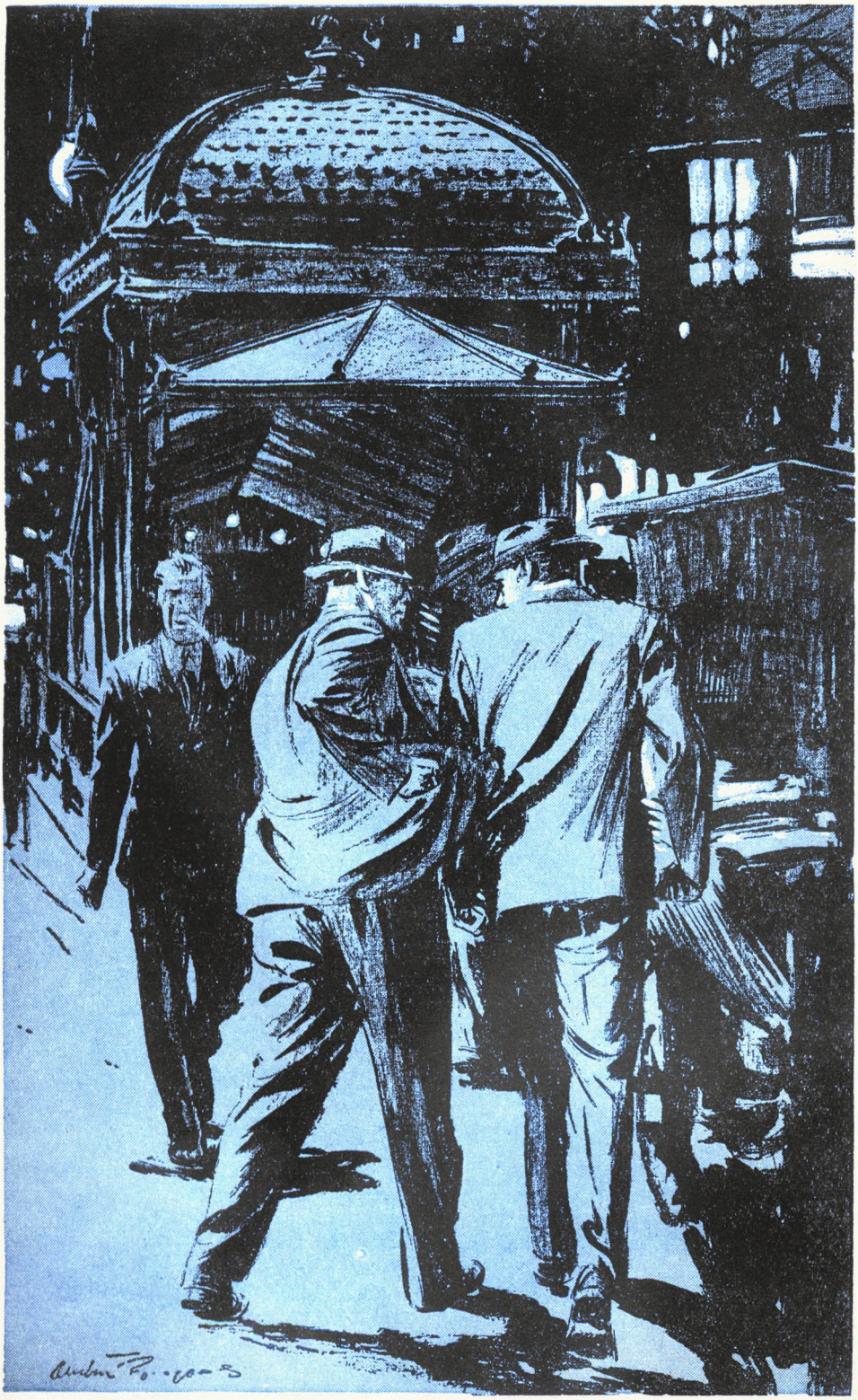
By RICHARD WORMSER

Illustrated by Austin Briggs



NEW TIMES, NEW CRIMES! IN THIS SWIFT-PACED DRAMA THE MAN WHO WROTE "COPPER THE BET" AND "UNDER THE CROOKED CROSS" GIVES US A TYPICAL AND FASCINATING STORY.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



Roddy prodded the man with the point of his gun. "Don't try it, bud! I mean diving down those subway stairs."

REPORTER AT LARGE

By RICHARD WORMSER

Who wrote "Under the Crooked Cross" and "Horse Money."

MAYBE you've seen the ads in the "Classified" columns of your newspaper, and wondered what they were all about: "Editorial Writers," they say, or sometimes "Reporters" or just "Writers." "Writers wanted. Good income, your own hours. Box 83."

It seems funny to see them, when you know there are only a few newspapers in town, and you guess that any unemployed newspaper man could see all the papers in one day and know about any jobs available.

And "your own hours"? Don't reporters have deadlines, or editions or something?

These are not newspapers. They are not magazines, though they turn out something that looks like a magazine. These are the "puff sheets," the "vanity pubs," the "varnish papers."

And they are the last resort, the final call for coffee-money, of the competent reporter who has somehow mismanaged his career. . . .

The glass door said:

DISTINGUISHED
A Magazine of Visitors to New York

Inside, there were two long trestle tables, with six typewriters on each; beside each typewriter was a telephone, with a headset replacing the usual earpiece. The place was well supplied with newspapers.

John Roddy sat at one of the typewriters, and perused a clipping from the morning paper. It said, in two sticks of bald prose, that a man later identified as Congressman Haley McMaylan had been picked up by the police shortly after midnight for disturbing the peace.

The magistrate in night court had charged Representative McMaylan ten dollars for being drunk and disorderly, and had returned him to his hotel, the St. Mark.

John Roddy ran a hand through his heavy dark hair, and shoved a sheet of yellow paper into the typewriter with his right hand; his left hand shoved a cigarette into the corner of his mouth and struck a match to light it, all in one movement. John Roddy had been pushing a typewriter for twelve years, since he was eighteen, and all this had become unconscious, almost instinctive for him.

Two fingers, well-calloused at the tips, beat out the story:

> Local police were embarrassed this week by the philanthropic error of Haley McMaylan, the visiting Congressman whose trenchant thoughts and witty remarks have so enlivened Gotham's intellectual circles.
>
> Representative McMaylan, on his way to the night session of the Congress to Study America's Financial Position, was accosted by one of the panhandlers so common in the midtown area. Absorbed in the discussions at the Congress, it was not till the session adjourned that Mr. McMaylan found the pitiful beggar had lifted his wallet.
>
> Meanwhile, the thief had liquidated his ill-gotten gains—liquidated them into whisky at the nearest bar. Picked up as a drunk, the panhandler was identified as Representative McMaylan by the papers in the stolen wallet, and booked that way.
>
> When police returned the drunk to the Hotel St. Mark, the night clerk identified him as an impostor. Police apolo-

gies were not slow in going to the Congressman, as a reporter at night court had already sent the story to the press.

Once again, Congressman McMaylan proved his good nature; he requested the editor of the paper that printed the story, and the captain of the policeman who made the false booking, to forget the incident.

Roddy squinted at his story with smoke pouring up his lean cheek. The corner of his mouth that did not hold the cigarette twisted into the gesture of a man spitting; but he reached for the phone, settled the headset over his ears, and dialed the St. Mark.

"McMaylan—Haley McMaylan."

RODDY glanced up at the clock that the owner of *Distinguished* provided. Quarter past ten in the morning. The good Congressman ought to be—

The voice that answered was not the whisky-blurred tone of a Representative with a hangover. It was a girl's voice. Oh, Congressman, Congressman!

"This is Howard Stirling," announced John Roddy, going into his act, "the editor of *Distinguished*. One of my reporters just turned in a story on Congressman McMaylan, and I want to read it to him before I send it down to the printer."

"I'm sorry," the girl said. She had a nice voice, but it was a little cold now. "My father"—(Oh, yeah?)—"isn't feeling very well this morning."

"I think he'd like to know what we're printing," John Roddy said. "We make a policy here on *Distinguished* of being pretty careful what we print. If he doesn't approve, I'll kill the story."

"Oh." The girl sounded puzzled. "Maybe you'd better read it to me."

John Roddy took the cigarette out of his mouth, and squeezed it out in the saucer at the edge of his space. Next to him a man named Gaines was giving the works to a woman who had opened a dress shop on Upper Broadway: "Well, Madame Svelte, you'll want five hundred reprints of my article to send out to your clientele?"

John shook his head and started reading into the phone. All in the day's work. A Congressman might be good for a thousand reprints at a quarter each—or two hundred and fifty smackers. The writer's cut was fifty per cent. A nice touch to the day's take. As he read the story, part of his mind was on what he could do with a hundred and a quarter, and part of it was on Gaines' slick voice: "Well, then, a hundred reprints, Madame Svelte?" Haley McMaylan owed him more than a hundred and a quarter!

He finished reading. "That's the story, Miss McMaylan." Give the dame the benefit of her own lie. "You think the Congressman will put his initials on it?"

The girl's voice was breathless, puzzled. "Oh, yes. Of course. I— What did you say the name of your magazine was?"

"*Distinguished,*" John Roddy said, patiently. He'd ruined good sales his first day here—yesterday—by not giving the customer time to grasp the implications.

Miss McMaylan—if she *was* Miss McMaylan—said: "I don't think I've heard of your magazine, but—"

"We don't have much circulation outside of New York," John told her. It was the one true thing he got to say all day. "The point is, though, that we go to press in an hour. I'll have to have Mr. McMaylan's O.K., or we can't use the story."

"Oh. I'm sure he'll approve."

John Roddy braced himself for the kill. "Then I'll send a man around with the copy to be initialed. And by the way, Miss McMaylan—as long as we're going to press—do you think your father would be interested in ordering some extra copies to send home? Make a nice memento of his trip, to give some of his supporters."

"Why, yes," the girl said. "That's a very good idea."

Fast now, before she weakened! "You see, our circulation is so exclusive, we don't have many extra copies each issue. But I could send word down when I put the paper to bed, and have the press room run off an extra couple of thousand for you. They'd be ready this afternoon."

Miss McMaylan said: "That's awfully kind, Mr.—"

"Stirling," John Roddy supplied. "All right, then. I'll send a boy over with the story to be initialed, and an order for two thousand copies. Mr. McMaylan can pay for them when they're delivered to his hotel this afternoon."

Now was the time when they jibed. Two thousand copies was five hundred dollars.

"All right," the girl said. "I'll give your boy a check when he comes. How much is it a copy?"

"Twenty-five cents," John had the weird feeling that he'd stopped selling, and was being sold.

"I'll have a check ready for five hundred dollars," the girl said. "Made out to *Distinguished*. That right?"

"Yeah," Roddy said inelegantly. He floundered. "Look, Miss McMaylan: I'll send the reporter who wrote the story over himself—in case your father or you want any changes made. Accuracy is our —our watchword here on *Distinguished*."

He squeezed the arm of the phone to break the connection, and took off his headset.

"Half an hour's work for a lousy ten-dollar order," Gaines said, next to him. "Hey, boy! Catch a subway up to 147th on the West Side and—"

John was retrieving his coat from the back of his chair. *Distinguished* did not provide any frills for its reporters, like hatracks.

Carefully he folded the story he had written, put it in his inside coat pocket. He put a copy of *Distinguished* in the outside pocket. It was a good-looking magazine. Two thirds of it was made up of stock articles, used in every issue. The rest consisted of each day's stories. *Distinguished* was only printed when an order was received over the phone and in writing. Some days the cheap job press downtown ran off as many as ten thousand copies of the changeable sheets, which were tipped into the regular magazine and stamped with a cheap binder.

John Roddy went out into the hall, down in the creaking elevator, and out to the street. If this was on the level—

CHAPTER TWO

THE deal was still on when he got to the McMaylans' suite near the top of the St. Mark and was admitted to the living-room; but he'd been wrong about one thing. This girl who held out her hand to him was no playboy's traveling companion.

"I'm Sara McMaylan," she said. "Mr. Stirling said you were coming. You're Mr.—"

"Roddy," he said. "John Roddy."

She said: "Let me have the story. My father's in bed. He— I'll take the story to him."

John Roddy extracted it from his inner pocket, and handed it over. There was something phony here, and he couldn't put his finger on it. It was phony enough to make him forget the two hundred and fifty dollars he was trying to make. And that *was* something!

Sara McMaylan disappeared through the door with the sheet of yellow paper. Instantly she was back. "Would you like a drink?"

"No, thanks. Little early in the day."

"Yes, but I thought one always offered newspaper men a drink."

"Are you your father's hostess in Washington?"

The girl nodded. Her mind was not on John Roddy. "Yes, but you know first-term Congressmen don't have press conferences."

"I know. I used to be in a bureau in Washington." ("I used to be a lot of other places too. But I couldn't keep my mouth shut.")

The girl hadn't heard him. She had her head turned a little, as though listening for some noise in the bedroom. John Roddy felt acutely uncomfortable, and the worst of it was that he didn't know why. He cleared his throat. "After you've been in Washington a couple of terms, you'll find it more interesting—when seniority gets your father on some committees."

"He isn't very likely to be reëlected," Sara McMaylan said. "Pardon me, Mr. Roddy; I'll go see if he's read the story."

She stood up; and at that moment, Haley McMaylan came out of the bedroom.

He was a tall man, almost gaunt, in a gray raw-silk dressing-gown. He clung for a moment to the door-jamb, swaying a little. There was a towel wrapped around his head.

"What a hangover!" thought John Roddy—and didn't believe it. This man didn't look like a drunk. His eyes were bloodshot, and his steps uncertain, and a towel on the head is for a headache; but still this man didn't look like a drunk with a hangover. His thin lips under a black mustache were too firm, his nose too sharply hooked. This was no guy to forget himself and get drunk in some bar.

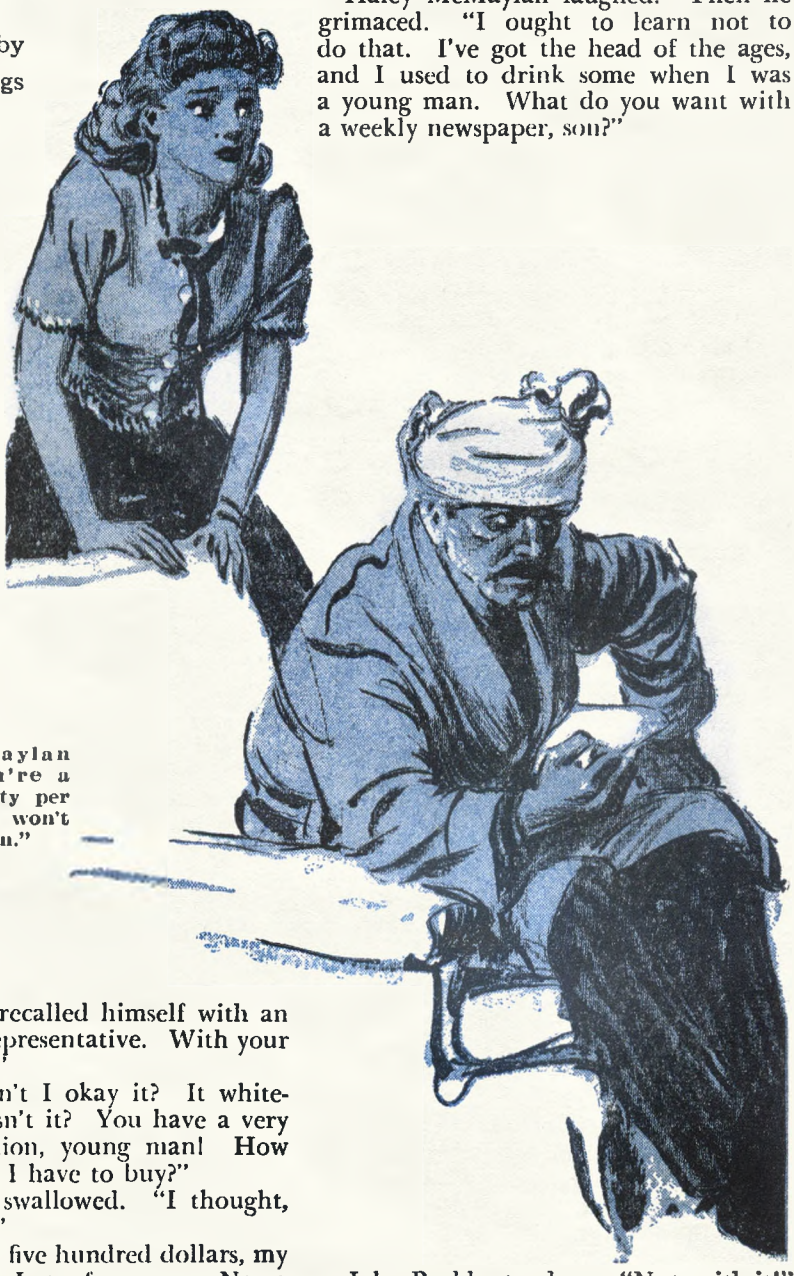
"Father," Sara McMaylan said, "you shouldn't get up. You—"

He said: "Help me to a chair." Sara leaped forward, and John Roddy found himself leaping too. They settled the tall man into one of the hotel's dinky

armchairs. The yellow sheet of copy-paper was still clutched in his hand.

Haley McMaylan looked up. "You write this story?" He waited for John Roddy's nod, then went on: "What's your name—Roddy, eh? Fine story you got here. Going to print it?"

Illustrated by Austin Briggs



Haley McMaylan jeered: "You're a fool. My forty per cent of stock won't vote you in."

John Roddy recalled himself with an effort. "Yes, Representative. With your okay, of course."

"Why shouldn't I okay it? It whitewashes me, doesn't it? You have a very fertile imagination, young man! How many copies do I have to buy?"

John Roddy swallowed. "I thought, two thousand—"

"Yes? That's five hundred dollars, my daughter says. Lot of money. Never heard of your paper, of course—"

John Roddy reached for his side pocket. "I have a copy here—"

Haley McMaylan roared: "Hell with it! I've seen puff magazines before. I'm a newspaper man, son!"

("And there goes the two-fifty!")

McMaylan said: "What were you going to do with the money, Roddy?"

"Make a down payment," John Roddy said, "on a weekly newspaper up in New England." He said it without a smile, with a perfectly straight face.

Haley McMaylan laughed. Then he grimaced. "I ought to learn not to do that. I've got the head of the ages, and I used to drink some when I was a young man. What do you want with a weekly newspaper, son?"

John Roddy stood up. "Nuts with it!" he said. "I'm dead-broke, Mr. McMaylan. I took this job yesterday, and made five dollars. I need money. I'm going back to the office and work. And thanks for the buggy-ride, both of you." He took three steps toward the slick gray

door to the hall, then whirled. "There's nothing illegal about a vanity sheet," he said. "There may be prettier ways of making a living, but a man has to eat. It may be very funny to you two—with the Government paying out ten grand a year to sit in the House—to get a man over here to laugh at him, but it isn't very funny to me. I've got enough money for lunch and dinner, and then I'm broke again. Thanks a lot, an awful lot, for the buggy-ride, Miss McMaylan, and you too, Congressman. I hope the wire-services pick up the story about you being drunk and disorderly. I hope—"

Sara McMaylan came after him. "Get out of here," she said. Her voice was low, and intense, and fierce. "Shouting around a sick man's room! You rude, uncouth—"

"'Sick,'" said John Roddy. "A hangover never killed anyone! Give him a drink, and he'll feel fine again. Haven't you heard of the hair of the dog that bit you?"

"Mr. Roddy! Stop it! And Sara! It doesn't do my headache any good to have two people screaming instead of one."

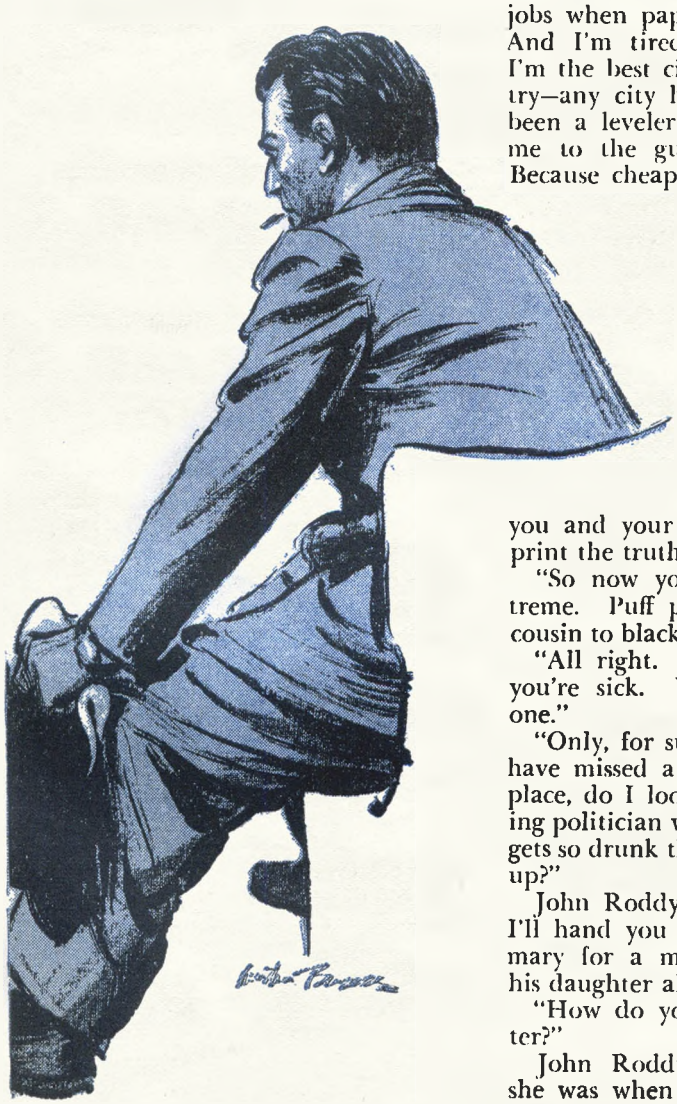
Instantly the two younger people were quiet. John Roddy went on toward the door, glad he had been stopped before he slapped the girl's face. The man's voice halted him.

"Do you think I was drunk last night, Mr. Roddy?"

John said: "Sure. What else?"

"But you were willing to print that wild story in order to make money?"

"I've been on the level all my life," John Roddy said, turning. "Written 'em as I've seen them, and thrown up good jobs when papers wouldn't print them. And I'm tired of being on the level. I'm the best city hall man in the country—any city hall, any place. And I've been a leveler, and all it did was level me to the gutter and the breadlines. Because cheap, drunken politicians like you and your kind don't want men to print the truth."



"It will when I get through with your brothers," said Roddy. "How about it?"

"So now you're going the other extreme. Puff publishing is only a legal cousin to blackmail."

"All right. You're an old man, and you're sick. You get away with that one."

"Only, for such a smart reporter, you have missed a few things. In the first place, do I look like the sort of junketing politician who goes to New York and gets so drunk the police have to pick him up?"

John Roddy said: "No. You don't. I'll hand you that. And it isn't customary for a man on a bender to take his daughter along."

"How do you know she's my daughter?"

John Roddy said: "I didn't think she was when I talked to her over the

phone. I hadn't met her then. Now I have. I've been around. This kid's on the level."

McMaylan looked at him. "You'll do, Roddy," he said. "You don't know it, but you've just got a job. Want to call up *Virtuosity,* or whatever that puff sheet is, and resign?"

John stood in the doorway a minute. Then he heaved the copy of *Distinguished* at a wastepaper basket. "No," he said. "There's no need to quit. I wasn't getting a salary. What'll I do for?"

Congressman McMaylan said: "To get the dope on the dirty rats who had me slugged over the head last night. Who have had me successively kicked upstairs from being a managing editor to being a mayor, and from being a mayor to being a Congressman. To get the dope on them, and if possible, to send them to the penitentiary."

"Got any idea who they are?"

"Sure," Haley McMaylan said. "They are my brothers Drew and George. . . . Sit down, Roddy."

JOHN RODDY sat down carefully. He chose a little straight chair that was supposed to fit under a desk; and he sat upright in it. He could see the window from where he sat, and the pallid New York sunlight creeping across the front of the New York Central building, down the street. The room faced west, over Park Avenue, and no morning sun penetrated this room. He wondered what Sara McMaylan's hair would look like in the sunlight.

"Shoot," he said. "And make it good."

"Why should I bother to make it good," McMaylan inquired, "for you? You're a down-and-out newspaper man. You just got through saying you'd do anything for money. Why tell you anything at all except how much I'll pay you?"

John Roddy grinned. "No soap," he said. "You got one rise out of me. You know there's a difference between varnishing a drunk for the benefit of the people back home, and—writing a lot of things that will hurt people, cover up genuine crooks."

McMaylan laughed. "Sure. I'm just trying to size you up. I know your type. You play bullfight with the sacred cows on every paper that hires you, and they kick you out into the streets. I don't have to ask why; I'm the same way myself. Well, listen: My father, James McMaylan, owned a paper out in— I see you've heard of him."

John Roddy nodded. "Sure. Yeah. Every good newspaper man's heard of Fightin' Jimmy."

"All right. My father landed from Ireland, and he'd made the boat out of the Old Country one jump ahead of the troops. A rebel Irishman. He landed here, and he came down fighting. When he hit our town out West, it was a sprawling prairie city, just growing up from being an outfitting station for wagon-trains. Fightin' Jimmy started a weekly paper with an old hand-press he won in a poker game. It grew up with the city; and by the time he died, it was one of the twenty most important dailies in the United States. And it never—for the governor, the advertisers or the circulation department—stopped fighting to make the city and the State a place where a cattle-man or a miner could come and spend his money and not get slugged over the head for his pains."

John Roddy said: "Times are different. There's no market left for Fightin' Jimmys."

Sara McMaylan stood up. She went over and looked down at John Roddy. Then she sniffed, contemptuously, and walked away, opened the door to her father's bedroom, and disappeared.

"I wish I could laugh," Haley McMaylan said, "but it hurts my head. All right, Roddy. Jimmy McMaylan married twice. My mother was a local girl, a minister's daughter. She died when I was ten." He stopped, stared at the floor. "Dad didn't remarry for five years. And in that time he'd changed, some. His next wife was a society gal, though her father'd made his money cheating drunken fur-trappers— Skip that. When Dad died, he left forty per cent of the paper to me, and thirty per cent to each of my half-brothers."

The lean man paused. He put his hand up to the towel that covered his head. With a movement that was half instinctive, he snatched the towel away, disclosing smooth gray hair. He ran his hand over this, then fumbled in his dressing-gown pocket, and took out a little box of pills.

John Roddy got him a glass of water from a carafe in the corner. The older man swallowed his pills, made a face. "That may do some good," he said. "I doubt it." He stood up, took a few experimental steps around the room. "I haven't had a headache like this since I left college," he said. "And those were more pleasant to get."

John Roddy said: "You stopped your story just when it was getting interesting."

Haley McMaylan walked to the window. "The rest of it's not so pretty. I took over the paper. Our city has a tendency to revert to its wildcat days. For one thing, there's a Federal pen near us, and released prisoners have a trick of coming to town to get a stake. And there are other things. We have a huge trading area; hundreds of miles of wheat and cattle, and mining-land, all focus on us. We've always had a crime problem. When I took over the paper, ten years ago, we still had Prohibition. But when that went, I started out to clean up our police department. . . . Crime had high connections in our town. My brothers—half-brothers—begged me to lay off. I was striking at their friends, at people they were connected with through their mother."

"And they own sixty per cent of your paper," John Roddy said.

McMaylan laughed. "You think that would stop me? Well, it did. They couldn't get rid of me. But they could see that I didn't have any good men under me. I fought them for six years, that way. But I never wanted to make an open break. After all, my brothers— I suppose I could have quit and started another paper. But—"

John Roddy said: "Say it. Your daughter was growing up; you were used to money—and it was the paper your father had founded."

McMAYLAN turned, his hands outspread. "Yes. I was weak. When you get to be my age, you'll understand. Finally, when I'd had enough, four years ago, they offered a compromise. They would back me for mayor. I could conduct a clean-up from the mayor's office, and leave them out of it. I took it."

"And when you got to city hall," John Roddy said, "you found your hands worse tied than ever."

Haley McMaylan growled: "If I were in better shape, I'd throw you out of here. You could learn to be politer."

"Why should I be?"

"Get out of here," McMaylan said. "Go on. I've changed my mind. I won't need you."

They had raised their voices. Sara McMaylan came back into the room, fast, looking from one to the other of them anxiously.

"It's all right," John Roddy told her. "I don't hit sick old men who've lost their nerve. I'd be ashamed to hit a man who'd let himself get socked on the head and then turn the other cheek. If you'll pardon my metaphors."

Sara went to the hall door, opened it. "Get out," she said. "Dad, you can hire plenty of men—"

John Roddy followed her, scooping up his hat in passing. "Sure. Men who'll do a halfway job. The kind of halfway job your father's always done. Half a publisher of half a paper, and half a mayor of half the town—the respectable half. And finally a Congressman—half statesman and half vote-getter. I know the type."

Haley McMaylan said: "You're not that type?"

"If I were, I wouldn't be in the gutter," John Roddy said. "You see, I'm smarter than you. I never married. I haven't got any family to worry about, any money to protect. If you hire me, it's on my own terms."

Haley McMaylan said: "You don't even know what I wanted to hire you for."

"Sure. To find out who hit you."

"Well, yes. Close that hall door. No use in letting the whole hotel know our business. And try to show a few better manners."

John Roddy closed the door, and leaned against it. "Shoot."

"Why I took the nomination for Congress is not worth going into, now. At the time I thought it was my duty. At any rate, things have got worse at home. There's a new racket in crime. . . . A man who wants to change his name, his identity, had trouble. He can get a new social security card only with difficulty, and—if he's under thirty-five—he can't get a draft card at all. . . . The local boards in our city have been doing a very pretty trade in identity cards."

"Got any proof? Those things are Federal matters. As a Congressman, you could have the G-men in there in a minute if you believed that."

"It was to get the proof that I came to New York. I received a letter—any-

way, I met a man in a rooming-house over on the West Side last night—a man who could tell me the whole story, for money. He was willing to go to prison, if I'd take care of his family."

"The old story," John Roddy said.

"Oh, of course. So old it sounded convincing. We had a drink together. I was anxious to keep him at his ease. The next thing I knew, I was in the drunk tank at the station."

John Roddy said: "Either of you got a cigarette?"

Sara found one in a box on a table, brought it to him. He lit it, and held the match for her to smoke too. She stood in front of him, squinting up at him boyishly. "You don't believe my father, do you?"

He said: "Sure. I believe him. That part's easy. What I don't believe is that he'll back me all the way down the line. He'll let me get started, and then ditch me."

"You don't know him."

"I know his record—from his own lips. That's why I'm going to make my terms what I'm going to make them."

Haley McMaylan said: "Money is no object."

"Nor to me," John Roddy said. "Here are my terms. I will go out and get the guy or guys who slugged you. I will get the story out of them. I will get proof. I will do all this on two hundred dollars expense money, which you will presently furnish. And upon doing all this—"

"Yes?"

"I will get the vote of your forty per cent of stock to be managing editor and publisher of your paper—without strings—on a five-year contract."

Haley McMaylan jeered: "You're a fool. My forty per cent of stock won't vote you in."

"It will when I get through with your brothers," John Roddy said. "How about it?"

"I can't lose," McMaylan said.

John Roddy let out his breath in a long sigh. "All right, then. I'm sure you have a typewriter here. Get it, to type out our agreement. Get me the two hundred, in smallish bills. And—you're an A.P. paper, aren't you?—get the A.P. to get me a New York Police Department pistol permit."

Sara said: "Father—"

The gray-haired man spread his hands out in that politician's gesture he had used before.

"Get the typewriter, Sara."

The girl went to the hall door which John Roddy had been leaning against. She said something about the typewriter being across the hall in her room.

John Roddy said: "Let me show my breeding. Which room?"

The girl smiled. "1922, across the hall. It's unlocked."

Roddy went out, and crossed the hall. Alone, he stood still a moment, pressing his fingertips up against his cheekbones, as though his eyes were tired. Then he saw a man coming down the corridor from the elevators, and straightened up. Room 1922 was unlocked.

He saw the typewriter-case as soon as he opened the door, and went for it. He was careful not to poke around the room; a Chinese silk robe like her father's was the most intimate possession the girl had left out.

WITH the black case in his hand, he started back. The man he had seen was still coming toward him; John Roddy grinned as he saw the fellow tack from wall to wall. "Even the rich have their troubles, brother," Roddy said, and stepped behind the man to open the door to the McMaylan suite.

But the man veered, and came back as John Roddy opened the door. He lunged at the half-open door, and Roddy let go of the knob to catch the man.

"Hi! That's not your room."

The reporter instinctively held the typewriter from dropping, and the man was an armful, his dead weight full on Roddy's arm. Roddy called into the room: "I'm sorry; I seem to have a liquor problem here," and Sara McMaylan came through the door.

She screamed.

John Roddy said, "He's just drunk," and let the man go because he thought the girl was going to faint. The man lurched forward a step, two steps, half falling, half stumbling; and it was then that John Roddy saw, for the first time, that the back of the man's gray topcoat was red.

Sara McMaylan screamed again, but Roddy had the door closed by now. He bent over. "Dead," he said. Shuddering slightly, he turned the man on his back. "Know him?"

Haley McMaylan said: "No."

"This could be coincidence," John Roddy said. "But then, I could be the little man who isn't here." He stood up wiping his finger tips with his handkerchief. "In fact, I will be."

"I'll let you have this room for four-fifty, if I don't have to climb to the roof."

"Oh, don't," Sara said. Her face had the fine pallor of expensive bond paper. "Don't try to be funny."

"I'm not," John Roddy said. His cold hand still held the handkerchief; he wiped the cigarette-box with it. "I'll get along without the police permit, McMaylan. Give me a gun and what money you have on you."

Afterward, when McMaylan had done this, he said: "Give me a few minutes, and then call the police. You don't know anything."

"It's the truth!" Haley McMaylan said. "Oh, Sara, I'm sorry—I swear, I never saw this man before. Go after them, Roddy. Pull them down, get them!"

"So long," John Roddy said, and went out. He wiped both sides of the doorknob, and held the handkerchief over his finger as he rang for the elevator.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE old brownstone, high-stoop house had had a long, varied history. Built on some speculator's guess that the far West Forties would be the "tony" part of Manhattan—that was the adjective in the '80s—the line of identical dwellings had never paid out. It was in this very house that the builder had turned on the newly connected gas, and called it a day.

The house, with the two on either side, had gone to an Irish labor-broker next. He had used it to shelter his paddies before he shipped them off to the ditch-digging gangs and the railroad beds of the West. Through a lucky break, the same man had held the house for ten years; toward the end, he'd been providing Polacks and Hunkies for Pennsylvania's steel mills.

When the theatrical district moved up from Herald to Times Square, this forgotten financial genius had given the house a coat of fresh paint, removed the church statues from the niches on the stairways, and sold the place, outright, to a couple who had retired from the circus to try their luck at a theatrical boarding house. Character actors spending their old age in Hollywood still remembered the house, but not with love.

Thereafter, changes had come fast and often. A gambling syndicate had once filled the big old rooms with green baize tables; then the downhill drift of the district caught hold, and the house was little better than a tenement when two smart Italians gave it its second coat of paint in forty-five years, and opened the Bella Corsica Club—admission by card, wink or nod—drinks seventy-five cents.

But Repeal had blasted the West Forties once again, and now the big rooms had two and three wallboard partitions in their middle, and a lady of dubious years, race and background rented it from the bank which held the mortgage, to use as a rooming-house.

In token of which, there was a metal sign by the basement door, *Manager,* and a cardboard sign on the parlor window, *Rooms for Rent.*

John Roddy pressed the bell by the metal sign.

It was getting dark along the windswept, dirty street. Down at one end, there was a glimpse of a red sunset over New Jersey's factories and swamps and highways; but not much showed through past the Elevated Highway, the tall sheds on the wharves and the nearer Ninth Avenue L.

John shifted his suitcase from one hand to the other, and waited.

AFTER a while a fat woman came to the iron grille, and peered through the peephole left over from the speakeasy. "Yeah?"

A wave of accumulated cooked cabbage odor swept past her out into the street; but the house could spare it. Cabbage had, apparently, been the sole food of the house's inhabitants for fifty years.

"Got a cheap room?"

The woman's eyes pushed wrinkles in her fat cheeks as she looked John Roddy over. "Actor?"

"No. Cash in advance."

The woman grunted, and possibly smiled. "Room near the bath for five bucks. 'Nother one on th' top floor." She blew her nose on her apron. "Three bucks."

"Where's the bath?"

"Second floor."

John Roddy glanced up. A four-story building.

"Let me see the bath. I could save money, or not."

The woman made no move to let him in or to come out herself. "Outa work?"

"Yes and no."

"C'mon." She came outside, slamming the gate behind her. Laboriously she pounded across the dirty areaway, and climbed to the street level. Her hand clung to the sandstone balustrade as she hoisted herself up the stoop; John Roddy stayed a little behind her until she got to the top. Then he held the storm door until they were both in the vestibule; she opened the front door with a key from a ring in her apron pocket.

At the foot of the inside stairs she turned to him. "You c'n pay five bucks?"

"Yeah." John Roddy let her see the flash of a ten-dollar bill.

Satisfied, she puffed up the steps. One flight up, she pounded on a door. A woman's screechy voice yelled: "Keep yer shirt on."

"That's the bathroom," the landlady said. She trudged to the back of the house, opened another door with her keys. "This is the five-dollar room."

John Roddy peered in with indifference. Wooden bedstead, too big for the room; a heavy oak cabinet to hang clothes in; a peeling plywood table and a straight chair. Through the window the budding branches of an ailanthus tree did not hide a view of endless other windows just like this one.

"Not bad," John Roddy said. "But those wooden beds—"

"Not in my house," the lady said. "See!" Triumphantly she pulled out of her pocket a receipt from an exterminator company for six months' service.

"Good," John said. The number tacked on the door of this room was 27. It had been Room 23 for which Haley McMaylan had been sent a key. "Let's see the other one."

The landlady looked at the stairs without love. "Tell ya what. Them steps just kill me. I'll let you have this one for four-fifty, if I don't have to climb to the roof."

John Roddy turned his back, pretended to count the money in his pocket. "Oke," he said, finally. "I'll only want it a couple of weeks." He handed over a five-spot.

"C'mon down to my room," the woman said. "I'll give you your change. You a salesman?"

"No," John Roddy said.

This time they went down through the interior of the house; there was a dark, dank flight of steep treads between the first floor and the basement. "I can't get up these steps," the lady said, "but I c'n go down 'em fine."

THE basement was the very center, the home, the birthplace, of the cabbage odors. The lady let him through a sliding door, into the front room. It was dark outside now, and the light of a street lamp shone in the areaway outside her windows. As she switched on the light, an alley cat outside jumped off her windowsill.

The woman used keys to open a heavy tin box. From this she extracted a cloth sack of coins and a heavy, cheap book with oilcloth covers. "Sign the register," she said.

She turned her back to get the fifty cents change out of the sack. John Roddy bent over the register, the pen the woman had given him ready. Room 23 was not on the last page. He looked at the top of the sheet; the page went back two weeks. Why, the man who had met Haley McMaylan must be a bigger fool than John Roddy planned to play; he'd been here days before writing to the Congressman, was still here. The woman would have said if the room was vacant, when asked about her rooms.

"WELL," she said, "can't you think of your name?" A cackle marked this as wit.

"Sure," John Roddy said. He wrote: *"John McSmith, Washington, D.C.,"* and held out his hand for his change.

The woman put the fifty cents in it, squinted at the book. "Washington? I had a fella from Washington oncet. He wasn't a construction man, like you, though."

"I'm not a construction man," John Roddy said. He pocketed the fifty cents, and the two keys the woman gave him—front door and room door. Either of them could have been duplicated at any dime store.

"Want a drink?" the fat lady asked.

"Any time."

John Roddy leaned against the wall while the woman extracted a bottle of cheap California muscatel from a cupboard. She wiped two Pullman company glasses on her apron, and filled them with the oily, sweet stuff.

"Gesundheit."

"Your health," John said. He sipped. "Good. . . . Who else is on my floor?"

The fat lady gulped at her wine. "There's a lady in the front room. You take my advice, an' leave her alone. She aint no better than she is, like." A ponderous sigh was born in the cavern of the landlady's bosom, came out through her nose. "I wouldn't take her kind in, only times's bad. But it's a nice quiet house; I don't allow no monkeyshines inside *my* doors. What they do outside's none of my business."

A truck rumbled in the street. John Roddy waited till it was past. "Who else? On the second floor, I mean."

"All nice quiet people. All been with me a long time. You'll like it here."

"I'm sure I will. . . . Who's in 23, for instance?"

The piggy eyes glared. "You work fer a collection agency?"

"I'm not a skip-chaser," John Roddy said. He drained his glass, looked at it expectantly. But the fat woman put the cork in the bottle, and hit it with the heel of her hand. She put the bottle back in the cupboard.

John Roddy said, "Well, thanks," but the woman was no longer aware of his presence. Sleep seemed to have claimed her; the thick lips moved in and out rhythmically under her tiny nose. John shrugged, and went out through the inside door, and up the steep black stairs to the room where he had left his suitcase.

It was a light fiber suitcase of the kind sold in drugstores, and it was brand new. He opened it and dumped the contents on the bed. There were two telephone-books, a tube of printer's ink and a copy of the latest issue of a magazine. He tore the cover off a phone book, and made a shade for the single electric-light bulb that dangled from the ceiling.

This made it possible to read sitting up in the straight chair. It also made it impossible to see the part of the splintered floor just inside the hall door. Roddy blackened that already black patch of floorboard with the printer's ink, and then propped his feet on the table, leaned back in the chair, and opened the magazine.

CHAPTER FIVE

RODDY was in the middle of the second story—a charming yarn in which the hero was in the middle of a swamp pursued by bloodhounds—when the house shook to the weight of the landlady coming up the steps.

He looked up from his story long enough to remark that if the landlady shook the swinging light to the degree of 10, the passing L trains down the block could be said to give the light an impulse of 8, and a passing truck about 6.5. Ordinary traffic had a force of approximately 1. He went back to his story.

By the time he had finished it, there had been no descending force applied to the light globe; the landlady was still on the second floor, probably in Room 23.

John Roddy put on his hat, and left the magazine on the bed. He opened

the hall door and stepped over the smear of printer's ink; he slammed the door, and walked briskly, clipping his heels down, to the top of the stairs. Then he trotted down the stairs, slammed the front door, and walked more slowly down the stoop.

On the chance that the landlady was not in 23, but in the front of the house, he went up the block past the first street-light. In the shadows on the other side, he crossed over and walked down the middle of the street, ducking lights, until he was just opposite the house.

There was a street-light on either side of the house, perhaps a hundred feet apart. He sat down on an areaway wall, and waited.

After a while the door of the house opened, and two men came out. They came down the stoop, a tall man and a short one in the shadows; the faint glow of white shirt bosoms under unbuttoned topcoats marked them as probably musicians or waiters on the way to work.

John Roddy stood up, and watched, as they walked under the eastern of the two lights. The taller one was telling some sort of story, his hands moving wildly; but Roddy kept his eyes on their feet. A faint gabble of Italian reached him.

He sat down again.

But he was on his feet in another instant, as the door opened once more. This time it was a woman—the lady from the second floor front?—who turned west, toward the river. Roddy kept his eyes on her feet too, and what he saw made him sit down again.

The chill of the sandstone on which he sat had him shivering before the door opened a third time. This figure was tall, and burly in the shadows. Something swung from its hand, and as it passed under the eastern light, Roddy saw that the man carried a suitcase.

But this was not so interesting as the faint black marks left upon the walk by the big man's shoes.

Roddy stood up and touched his hat-brim in farewell to the house. He drifted along the street on the opposite side to the man, moving easily.

The man crossed Ninth and continued east. Halfway to Eighth, Roddy crossed the street to be on the same side; foot traffic was thickening. But the man he followed was tall, tall as Roddy, and it was easy to keep him in sight. He went south on Eighth, and now Roddy was only a few feet behind him.

On Forty-second, the man again turned east, and Roddy closed down the distance. At the bus terminal, he could reach out and touch his man; he did so.

"We want to see you over at the station, buddy."

The man had a red face, red hair, and brown eyes that had a reddish, wild glow behind them. "Who, me? I aint done—"

"All right, Mac. If you haven't done anything, then you can come right back here."

"Mister, I gotta catch a bus."

RODDY said: "There's a bus every hour." He dangled a chain from the fingers of his left hand; it was a nickel chain that he had bought at a hardware store, the kind used to fasten night latches to front doors, but it looked like police nippers.

"Okay, Mister. I c'n prove who I am."

"Then come on." John Roddy showed the man his gun, in the side pocket of his suit; it was a bank's .32, not large enough to bulk the cloth. "Walk along, buddy."

They turned west again. "You guys!" Roddy said. "Why didn't you leave town last night?"

"Why not the night before?" the man asked. "Or last Christmas—to spend the happy holidays with my dear old aunt?"

"Humorist, aren't you?"

"Why not? You'll turn me loose as soon as you get me to the station. I got connections. I got a mouthpiece."

"You got rhythm," John Roddy said, "and you also got a horse on you. I'm not taking you to the station."

The man stopped dead. They were nearly to the corner of Eighth Avenue now. Roddy prodded the big man with the point of his gun. "Don't try it, bud! I mean diving down those subway stairs. . . . I'm taking you over to a cellar I know on Ninth Avenue. They used to use it for storing things. There

won't anybody hear a word out of that cellar, and—"

"Listen, Mister!" The big man was sweating now, though the spring night was not warm. He stood in the middle of the movie-hour crowd surging toward Times Square, and sweat ran down his red face. "You can't do that to me. This aint Russia. I know you are one of those big shots from Washington, but I tell you, you can't do this—"

"Why not? You've got such terrific connections. You can get my job—after. And my pal's."

"Listen, Mister—"

"The next thing is to try and bribe me. There's no use skipping any of the acts."

"Naw." A red paw came out, caught John Roddy's coat. Roddy twisted loose. They were beginning to attract attention.

"Let's walk," John Roddy said. "And keep on talking."

"I wouldn't try and bribe you. I know how you guys are. I know you G-men."

"How do you know I'm a G-man?"

"The name you signed to that register. The—"

"Ah!"

"See?" the big man pleaded. "I'm talkin'! I didn't know the guy was a Congressman till I saw the papers today. I tell ya, I wouldn't of touched a Fed, and then I was afraid you was watchin' the house. I was gonna leave as soon as it got dark. An'—"

"Yes," John Roddy said. "I've got the picture. You were right, too. With all the bus stations watched, and the railroad stations, and the tunnels. You couldn't get off Manhattan. Your best bet was to make us think you didn't think you were being watched, and wait till we got careless. I can see you're smart. . . . Listen: You're just a little guy, and I want big guys. Do you want to talk now, or after you see that cellar? I'm a right guy. I'll give you your choice."

"I'll talk."

"There's a bar here. Buy me a drink. See? Bribery."

A smile came over the big face under the curly red hair. The man brought out a clean-enough handkerchief, and wiped his face. "I knew you was a right guy. C'mon."

The bar was crowded, noisy. Somebody was playing a loud, nasal record, and two men in a corner were singing an entirely different song. There was an imitation bowling alley in one corner, and balls thudded up it regularly, to go flying in the air and land in or out of numbered holes with a thundering crash. Occasionally the air was musical with the bells of pinball machines.

They sat in a high-backed booth, facing each other, their knees nearly touching under the table. John Roddy nursed his drink with one hand and held the gun with the other. "Talk."

The red-haired fellow took a swallow of his chaser. "It's the old story, see? This guy got the boss in—"

"What guy, and what boss?"

The man gulped. "This McMaylan. He got the boss in to raise dough, and—"

"What boss?"

The other man took a swallow of his rye. His eyes stayed on the table.

"You've got to decide," John Roddy said, "whether you are more afraid of me or of the boss."

There was still a little island of silence at their table.

Finally the man said: "Okay, pal. Let's go see what your cellar is like."

John Roddy raised his chin. "You have nerve."

"Naw. I'm scairt—just scairt. See, I'm tough, an' so on. But not that tough."

"I'll let it go. I like a man who can make up his own mind. Put a name on yourself so I'll have something to call you."

"Joe."

"All right, Joe. McMaylan called the boss in to raise dough."

"An' we raised dough, see, and got him out his hole. And then—"

"What hole?"

A third voice said, calmly: "The hole in you, stranger, if you open your mouth and yell." A man slid in beside John Roddy. Roddy couldn't see him well, because he didn't want to turn his head; but he got an impression of a small, taut body, of neat blue clothes.

HE got more than an impression of the gun that dug his ribs, of the hand that slid into his pocket and took the .32 away from him. "He's no G-man, Joe," the new man said. "Or he would have sat with his right hand to the wall. . . . I came in as soon as I could. I saw him pick you up at the bus-station."

"Cheest, Tex, I was afraid you were gonna miss us."

"You mean because I'm too small to follow you lugs through a crowd?"

"Ya know I don' mean that, Tex."

"Okay," Tex said. "The drinks paid for?"

Joe said: "I paid for 'em."

"Then let's go."

CHAPTER SIX

YES, Tex *was* small; and there was every reason to suppose he was sensitive about it. John Roddy sat between him and the big Joe, and it seemed to him that he had seen both men before. They were in a taxicab, heading south. The passing street-lights would flash through their cab, and then there would be just the glow from the driver's license; then the street-light again.

John Roddy said: "You from Texas?"

"No."

"You talk a little like a Texan."

"That's how I got the name. I lived there awhile, but I'm from Idaho."

"I used to work on a paper in Texas. I've never been in Idaho, though, not even to pass through on a train."

"It's a big State—Texas."

"Good one, too. Joe, you ever been there?"

"On my way to California, oncet. Stopped off at El Paso, and went acrost the border." The burly man grinned. "Hot stuff. Jew-are-ez, they called it."

"Mexicali's a good town," John Roddy said. "And Tijuana's all right. But you ought to really go into Mexico sometime. Tex, you ever been to a town called Taxco?"

"I've heard of it," Tex said. "Yeah. But I never been there. I was down in Mexico City one time, and I wanted to go to Taxco, but I never made it. Acapulco, though. That's where I want to go. I'm a sucker for that deep-sea fishing."

"Nuts wit' Mexico!" Joe said. "Me for South America when I get my stake. Rio, an' B.A. Y'know, I even read books about those places."

John Roddy said: "I've placed you boys now. Tex, you used to be a jockey. And Joe's a wrestler. I covered sports for a while in New England."

The taxicab was going south, toward Greenwich Village. It passed the Fourteenth Street subway station, and it passed the Sheridan Square station, and it passed the remodeled house where John Roddy had called on a girl every night when he was twenty. It passed the restaurant where he and that girl had often eaten dinner, and the movie he had taken that girl to, and the real-estate office that had sold liquor to them during prohibition.

John Roddy said: "We're all alike. All three of us, and ten thousand other poor guys in the country. We want to travel; we want to see things; and we pick out a trade that lets us travel. Me, a reporter; and Joe a wrestler; and you, Tex, a jockey. But if you stick to one trade long enough, you get to the point where you have to settle down. I could have been a managing editor, with a house and a garden. And you, Tex?"

Tex said, in his slow, easy drawl: "A fellow wanted me to run a hoss ranch."

"Like that," John Roddy said. "And Joe could have been a citizen, too."

"Wit' a bar," Joe said, "an' a sort of steak-house. In Wilkes-Barre. They're crazy about wrasslers in them steel-an'-coal towns. But I don't get it, buddy."

"I do," Tex said. "What's your name, brother?"

"John Roddy."

"Yeah, I think I remember it from back when I used to keep a clipping-book. I did that when I was a kid. I think you wrote that I was a rough rider, but always trying."

"We all are," John Roddy said. "I've been trying all my life, but I rode too rough, and I'm about to fall and break my neck."

"That's about the size of it, Roddy," Tex said.

"You guys give me the creeps," Joe cried. "D'ya know what you're talking about?"

"Life," John Roddy answered. "And death."

"You got guts," Tex said. "Joe thought you were a G-man. That's funny, Roddy."

"Not so very. Maybe they have itching feet too."

"If they're good, and they stick at it, some day they're given an office to take charge of," Tex said. "If I'd run that horse ranch, maybe I would've joined the Rotary Club in the town. I know all about Rotary Clubs. I made a speech to one, once."

The taxicab stopped, and Tex was brisk again. "You get out first, Joe. Stand close to the door."

The ex-wrestler got out and stood by the right-hand door, on the curb. The

taxi-man was punching up his clock, taking the little cash slip out of it. A New York hack-driver has little or no curiosity about his fares.

Tex prodded John Roddy with his pocket. The outlines of a gun could be felt through it.

"Walk over to Joe now."

They were in front of a house just south of Greenwich Village. It was one of those weird streets you find in New York; a street of old, old dwellings that had never deteriorated, though the neighborhood all around had had two hundred years of downhill going. You find them near Columbia, and near the hospitals and the other colleges. Professors and doctors live in them, to be near their work.

The house they were in front of was three stories, with a three-step stoop of white marble, like Baltimore. But it had window-boxes of geraniums, like Philadelphia. And the wrought-iron railing looked like Boston.

"Well, come on," Tex said.

"Like hell," said John Roddy. He raised his voice. "Hackie, did you know you were carrying a celebrity?"

The gun prodded his ribs, and the unshaven face of the hack-driver was a study in unplumbed stupidity. "Nine-five cents," the driver said.

"Pay him, Tex," John Roddy said. "Driver, this is Tex Milo, the jockey. Pay up, Tex, and I'll take the cab back uptown."

The gun prodded his ribs, and Tex's thin face was white. His teeth nibbled at his thin upper lip.

Abruptly the cab-driver hit his horn three times. "Ninety-five cents," he said. "An' no nonsense! There's a cop on the way."

"Pay up, Tex," John Roddy said again. "And get out." He was safe now, because Tex had not shot him at the first resistance.

"You rat!" the small man said. "You dirty—"

"I kept you talking," John Roddy said. "so you wouldn't think. If you'd stopped the cab a few blocks away, you could have croaked me and the driver too. But you came right to the door. Sucker!"

"This isn't the end," Tex said. He crawled past John Roddy's knees, and his heels dug into John Roddy's toes as he passed. He was wearing high heels.

The cab-driver hit the horn three times more, and a blue-coated cop drifted around the corner. Tex got out fast.

John Roddy's fingers were cold as he dug up a dollar bill and shoved it through the window. "Okay," he said. "Okay, driver. The St. Mark, uptown, and get going."

The driver plucked the dollar bill, and flipped the flag up again. The car ground into gear, and they pulled away from Tex and Joe, and crawled past the cop on the corner; the hackie waved his bill at the policeman.

It was only then that John Roddy began to shake. He had heard about, had even written about cold sweat, but it was the first time in his life that he had ever felt it; felt it start crawling down his back, between his shoulder-blades, felt it springing out on his palms, and even on the backs of his hands.

"Some day," he said, "I'm going to get careless and forget to think about everything."

The driver didn't answer. He was only interested in whether his fares could pay or not.

THE lobby of the St. Mark looked just as it had that morning; that is, if you didn't take a second look. But there were two changes if you knew what to look for, one plus and one minus. On the plus side were a number of gents who came just short of wearing derbies, having flat feet, and chewing black cigars. And on the minus side was the news-stand, which had no evening papers on it.

Hotels do not give display space to headlines concerning corpses that fall into their guests' rooms.

John Roddy walked across the lobby, and he kept his chin up, and didn't look to right or left. He headed straight for the battery of house phones, and picked one up, tilting his hat back on his head a little. "Miss McMaylan. Miss Sara McMaylan."

A buzzer sounded behind the glass partition in front of him. One of the lounging men in the lobby got up and went into a phone-booth, and a male voice sounded in John Roddy's ear. "Hullo?"

"Mr. McMaylan?" John asked cheerfully. "Is Sara there? This is John Roddy, a friend of hers from Washington."

"Who'd you say it was?"

"John Roddy. I just got in from Washington."

The man at the other end said: "I don't think I know you, Roddy."

"No sir, we never met. I work for one of the news bureaus there; I met your daughter at a tea in Dupont Circle."

"Just a minute," the man at the other end said. "I'll get Miss McMaylan."

The cheerful note was sustained with an effort. "Isn't this Mr. McMaylan? Have I the wrong—"

The buzzer sounded again behind the partition, and then Sara McMaylan was on the phone.

"Sara, this is John Roddy. Will told me you'd be stopping here, and I thought maybe you'd come downstairs and have a drink with me."

"Well, John—" the girl was faltering, but she sounded game enough. "I—my father's been sick, and—"

"Ah, come on. I'm just passing through town, and it's just the right time for a highball."

"Just for a minute, then."

"Don't bother with a hat; we'll just go in the bar here."

He hung up the phone, fished in his pockets, and then strolled to the newsstand, and bought a package of cigarettes. He lit one, and took his hat off, carried it in his hand as he went to take up his post in front of the elevators. He was supremely oblivious of the men all over the lobby who watched him.

THE third car down produced Sara McMaylan. The girl was still pretty, but she was very pale; rouge and lipstick only served to accentuate it.

John Roddy tossed the cigarette into a jar of sand, and stepped forward, put his hands on her shoulders before she had time to think. She looked up at him inquiringly, and he put his lips against hers and said, quickly: "We walk toward the cocktail lounge, right front in the lobby, and then we walk right through it and out the street door. Get it?"

She said, "Yes," and her lips flattened against his.

"Smile," he said, releasing her. Then: "This job is all right in spots. One spot, the last one. We must do this more often, as the café society folks say."

She tucked her arm into his, and they walked through the lobby toward the red neon sign that said: *"Cocktail Lounge."* They passed under the raking gaze of the cops, and she said: "Oh, John, we've had the most awful time. Some man, a gangster or something, mistook our room, and the police have been in there, and Father—you know Father—has a—you'll die, dear—a hang-over, and with one thing and another—"

They went through the door into the cocktail lounge, the bell-boy on the door bowing to them; a *maître d'hôtel* came forward, and bowed. John shook his head. "We're going to get out of this," he told the servant. "Miss McMaylan's been bothered enough."

The *maître* looked relieved, as though he hadn't much wanted Miss McMaylan in his bar, anyway. He showed them through the bar, and to the street door, and he even produced a whistle and called a cab. John Roddy gave him one of the Congressman's dollar bills, and shoved the girl into the cab. "Go east," he told the driver.

AT First Avenue he paid the cab off, and they stood on the curb. A wind, coming across town, whipped the girl's skirt against him. He held her elbow, and another cab cruised by, and he signaled it. "We'd like to find some nice quiet bar that overlooks the River," he told the driver.

They sat back in opposite corners of the cab, not talking. The cab-driver whipped north, then east again, and turned them over to a doorman dressed like a pirate. The sign said *"Corsair Club,"* and the river could be seen through the railings that marked the end of the street.

There was a little bar with a piano-player and a number of black-topped tables, and a lot of people drinking. But John Roddy told the head waiter: "We'd like a bottle of champagne and a view of the river and a lot of quiet."

The head waiter was not the type that bowed, but the night-club species that grins. He grinned. "I was young once myself, sir. I'll let you into the luncheon-room." He went ahead of them and switched on a light, and they were in a long room with a glass wall on the river side. Not all the lights were on, and piled-up tables bulked in a corner.

But the head waiter found them a table and chairs, and a waiter appeared magically with a silvered bucket, and then they were alone.

"You're frightfully competent," the girl said.

"With money, you can get anything you want," John Roddy said. "And this

is your father's money. You can even buy privacy with it."

"Was it money that made you take on this job?" Sara asked. "I don't think so."

"No. You're right. They identify the man yet?"

Sara said: "Yes. One of those sort of shadowy men with dozens of aliases that you read about in papers."

"What did he used to be?" John Roddy asked. "What with one thing and another, I haven't been able to read the papers."

"They haven't given it out to the papers yet," she said. "What do you mean? He used to be all kinds of awful things."

"I mean what sport? Baseball, or a boxer, or was he a pool-player or—"

"You're funny, John Roddy. What difference does that make? I don't remember. He was a pari-mutuel clerk once, and the police wanted to know if father or I had won a lot of money at the track." She laughed. "They were peculiar about our just having three dollars with us, when we're—well off—but father being picked up for a drunk made that seem right."

"Racing," Roddy mused. "Yeah, that would fit in. Sure. Racing. The sport of kings. . . . Drink your champagne, Sara. Your father's paying for it, you know."

"All right. Here's to us! I've never met anyone like you, John Roddy. And I know newspaper men, in Washington. Not a bit like you."

"Journalists," John Roddy said. He laughed. "Pink tea, cutaway journalists."

"And I've known reporters back home, on Dad's paper."

"Journalists," John Roddy said again. "College-boy journalists."

"Newspaper men hate that word, don't they? Are you the only real newspaper man left?"

"Sure. The last of the crusaders. Pulitzer and me. But we didn't come here to discuss my ethical standards. Or did we?"

"No," the girl said. "My father hired you to—to do something about dispelling this awful fog of crime and murder and violence that's been hanging over us. When you called, I thought maybe you'd learned something, and Dad thought so too—I had a chance to talk to him a minute while I was making up my face; but we don't see how you would, here in New York. The—the powers that are threatening Dad aren't here. They're back home. Dad said to tell you to get out there, and get to work. He sent you this."

She fumbled in the frivolous little bag she carried, and got out a check. It was made out to cash, and it was signed Haley McMaylan, and it was for five hundred dollars. "Dad said to cash this when you got home, and write him when you needed more."

"Sometimes," John Roddy said, "I'm almost convinced your father is on the level."

"Why, of course he— What did you say, John Roddy?"

"Stop calling me by that name," he said. "And have some more wine." He poured. "Why, my name isn't Roddy. It's Gates, John Roderick Gates. I was city editor of your dad's paper, the last job I had. But he never came home, being occupied in the sacred Halls of Congress. He's never seen me."

"Old Mr. Van Wie must have hired you."

"That's right, toots," John Roddy said. "The aged Van Wie, managing editor when he can find his spectacles to see what he's printing. Yes ma'am. And one day old Mr. Van Wie was home with a cold, or a touch of leprosy or something, and I ran the wrong story. And out I went."

The girl reached across the table and put her hand on his. It was a nice hand, firm, but smooth too. "I'm sorry, John Roddy. And that's why you came after us with that puff story. You wanted a chance to get my uncles out of the paper, out of the city, too."

HE raised his hand, and hers fell off. It might have been an accident. "Sure," John Roddy said. "Your uncles. I forgot your uncles. Well, it's whipped. I've got the story. A little more detail, and I'm on my way to press."

"No! You mean it's all here in New York? Not at home at all? But that can't be. Why, the McMaylans, Dad's political influence and my uncle's money and the paper, all those things don't count for a thing here in New York. Not a ripple. Why, that's what I've always liked about New York. Nobody knows who I am, or cares what I do, and—"

"That's right," John Roddy said. "And the wine's gone. And I'm on my way. Tell your father I'm just putting the final licks on my story. That's all he needs to know."

"But—but aren't you going to tell me anything about it?"

He stared out the window. "Why," he said, "that's what I went and got you for. I was going to— But let it go, now. Just give your father the message. I'll file with the A.P. sometime after two, and make it an afternoon story."

Across the river, some sort of factory had a blast furnace going. It sent up a sheet of red flame from the chimney now, and John Roddy stared at it. The water was moving fast up the East River in that red light; then the draft was shut down, the flame was gone, and you couldn't see the river. A tugboat hooted.

"What were you going to do, John Roddy?" Her hand was back on his.

"I can't," he said. "That's the trouble. I lined this up, so pretty. I don't think anybody ever got a story neater, with less breaks, and with less to go on. But then, I suppose nobody ever used my method much."

He tried to move his hand, but she clung to it. "John Roddy, I can't tell what you're talking about, but you're talking in riddles. And it makes me sad and afraid for you—and I don't know why."

He wrested his hand back. "Ah, hell." His fingers were cold and clumsy in his pocket. He fumbled the check out and shoved it at her. "Take it back, and give it to your old man, and tell him the deal's off." He laughed. "John R. Gates—newspaper man. Thirty years old, and tough as a boot—you know how I spent my day?"

"No."

"Going every place I could find where they would kill a man if they knew what he was looking for, and telling them, letting them know, that I was looking for it."

"OH!" said Sara. "But you're still talking riddles."

"No more," he said. "No more. I'm washed up. I'm going to tell you two things, and then you're going to take that check back to your father and— The first thing. Sometime this morning—maybe over the phone, maybe when I was talking to you, maybe when I saw your little, young, scared face when that stiff tumbled into the room—sometime, God help me, I fell in love with you. A laugh, a scream! Fell in love with you the way you read about, so that I wanted to take care of you and see that nothing ever happened to you, and—"

"Don't cry, John Roddy. It's going to be all right."

"Cry? Me, cry? Why, I'm too tough for that. I called you out to kill that love—smash it, bust it up—because I'm a wise guy, and I know things like that don't happen. Love at first sight and hand-holding by the river. . . . All right. Called you up to hit you as hard as I could, and watch your face then, and know that it was just a passing something this morning."

"WHAT were you going to hit me with, John Roddy?" She laughed. "I'll always call you John Roddy."

"Always? Always isn't long. All right. It's not your uncles who are in the racket, the mess. It's your father. Congressman Haley McMaylan. Why, you put the last nail in his coffin a few minutes ago, Sara. When you said it wasn't your father's influence, your uncles' money—They've got the money, haven't they?"

"Yes. Grandfather left the paper control to Dad, the department-store to them. He had got it through his second wife, their mother, and it seemed fair enough."

"Sure. And I suppose all his life, Haley McMaylan's been sore because he was the poor brother, and they were the rich brothers. A *Cinderella* in the newsroom."

"Don't be so bitter, John Roddy. Order another half-bottle and don't be so bitter."

He said: "All right. You're game, Sara. You're wonderful. That's the worst of it—" He tinkled in his glass with a swizzle-stick. "And your chin's still up."

The waiter came in, and John Roddy said: "A half-bottle, of the same."

"A demi-liter, yes sir."

They were still as the waiter went away with the order. John Roddy took his free hand and laid it over hers. He felt his lips twist into what was meant for a smile; it wasn't very successful. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," he said. "In the words of Gene Tunney."

"Well, then, kiss me, John Roddy."

He shook his head. "I'll finish up first." But they kept their hands together while the waiter turned the champagne-bottle upside down in the cooler, and twisted the fresh little bottle. John Roddy said: "There's one size even smaller than that."

"It's called a split," Sara said, "John Roddy, dear."

The man went south on Eighth, and now Roddy was only a few feet behind him.

LUCIUS MacREIN

"I don't know much about champagne."

"A journalist's drink," the girl said. "Except on special occasions. Like when you get engaged."

The waiter poured the first few drops into John Roddy's glass, then filled both their glasses, and went away, beaming.

The girl said: "Hang on to my hands, John Roddy, and tell me the rest. And keep your eyes on my face; I want you to see how well I can take it. I want you to see I'm not a journalist."

But he didn't laugh. He watched the bubbles rise and explode in his glass of wine. He didn't feel like talking, and he didn't feel like drinking.

He said: "All right. It's a little melodramatic, but not too much to be believed. There is a definite organized underworld in this country. I don't mean with a president and a congress, but with a pretty good idea of itself. A man in trouble, a man on the lam, can make what they call connections. The surface agents are certain bookies, certain pool-hall proprietors, certain slot-machine men—you know?"

"Well, yes."

"This—well, call it a kingdom, though it's more a corporation—has its own bail-bond men, its fences, its green-goods—counterfeit—pushers, its lawyers, and so on. This all came to the surface during Prohibition, and people said that Prohibition caused it—but it didn't. It fed it, and it made it more apparent, but it was there before; it'll be there again. Well, this organization needs a city. Or several cities. A place where a man can change his identity, can be tried and dismissed on a charge so he can later claim double jeopardy. Where—oh, you can see, Sara, that owning a city might be a very useful, profitable thing."

"Yes. That was all the trouble in Kansas City, wasn't it?"

"A form of it," John Roddy said. "Sure. But every city's had its turn. Hot Springs had a spell, and one of the Twin Cities. Cicero, of course, was famous for a while."

She said: "Oh!"

"I don't have to draw up a blueprint, do I?" He opened his hands, and she took hers away. John Roddy felt as though he had chewed up a wineglass and swallowed it.

"But things," John Roddy said, "have gone farther. There's a demand for fresh Federal papers—draft-cards, Social Security cards. And when you get into Federal territory, you are no longer a city, a little island of the law; you're just—a crook to be arrested, as Capone was for not paying his income tax."

"And you—"

"I," John Roddy said, "have found out who the contact man is for the underworld end. By putting a lot of things together. Little things, like what you said about your uncles' wealth."

SARA closed her handbag and started to rise.

"But—what happens to Dad?"

"What happened to Tom Pendergast of Kansas City?" John Roddy asked.

"Oh!" Sara McMaylan was on her feet, stumbling toward the door into the bright barroom. As she opened the door, a burst of music came out from the piano.

John Roddy ran his hands over his hair, and stood up. She had left the check on the table, the check made out for five hundred dollars. He put it in his inside pocket.

The waiter came in, with his face averted; he had seen true love leaving in a hurry. John Roddy laid some money down, and picked up his hat and left.

On the table, the two glasses of champagne bubbled away. They had never touched the second little bottle.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was past midnight now, but the street-lamps still showed white-marble steps, the brick front, the wrought-iron banisters of the little house below Greenwich Village.

John Roddy dismissed the cab, and climbed the three white steps. New York's hard-coal grit ground under his soles against the marble as he pressed the doorbell.

A bell rang somewhere deep in the house. There had been not a light showing when he drove up, but a dim glow came through the fanlight now; someone had been on the alert. Steps sounded in the hall, and the door opened as far as a chain would let it.

The face that peered out was lower than John Roddy's. He said: "All right, Tex; it's me."

"Well, I'll be damned, Roddy!"

"All right, Tex. I'm alone, and unarmed, as we say. Let me in—it's blowing up cold."

"What are you trying, Roddy? What's the game?"

"There's none, Tex. I want to see your boss. I'll raise my hands if it'll help."

"T'hell with it!" the little horse-man drawled. "C'mon in." The chain rattled, and then the door was open, and John Roddy walked in.

Light from a single bulb way back in the pine hall was reflected on the gun in Tex Milo's hand. The jockey stepped behind John Roddy, and his small hands were busy for a moment, searching for a gun. Then he stepped back. "All right, Roddy. But I don't get it."

John Roddy said: "I want to cash a check. You can't always find cash at this late hour."

Tex blinked. "One of us is crazy! Y'know, I damn' near blasted you before, in the cab. If you hadn't yelled my name to the cab-driver, that way. Fool thing, when I haven't used that name for five years."

"I've got a good memory." John Roddy reached into his inside pocket for the check, and Tex's gun was ready. "I'm not heeled. You just searched me."

"'At's right." The check was passed over. Tex looked at it, and then gulped and nodded. "You're smart," he said. "I didn't think you'd do it, but it's smart of you. The boss was going to send your name out, and you wouldn't have had a chance. This way—"

"This way I'm ratting on the man who's paying me, and the boss—as you call Mr. MacRein—will let me go for giving him the dope, the handle. And he'll think I'm a rat, which I am."

"You sure don't let yourself off anything, do you?" Tex asked. "I wouldn't put such a tough name on it. Call it playing it safe, call it getting smarted up. What do you want to call yourself a rat for? Did you know all along it was MacRein?"

"No. You told me."

The little man stepped away from him, his thin face tilted up. His back was to the hall light, putting his dark eyes in shadow; faint thin hairs could be seen along his cheekbones and his flat jaws, as though he were too young to shave. "Roddy," Tex said, "I don't get you. I didn't mention MacRein's name, and Joe didn't. We have much better sense than that. But I'm satisfied if you go and tell MacRein we did, you can start something."

John Roddy said: "You told me when you said you were a jockey. And Joe was a wrestler. And the man who fell over in McMaylan's room was an ex-racetrack man. That's when you told me. Who's in New York who was ever big in the rackets and sports too? MacRein. So that's how you told me."

"That's what I mean," Tex said. "You always put the worst name on everything. Saying I told you, trying to start a mix between me and the boss." His white teeth gleamed in the shadows again, nibbling his lip. "But hell, with this check, I've got to go tell him you're here."

"Sure." John Roddy held himself perfectly still. "And I've no gun."

Tex laughed. "You with a gun! That long tongue of yours is worse than a rod." He turned, and his heels tapped as he trotted up the stairs. John Roddy was left standing in the hall alone.

DOORS opened and shut above him. Feet moved on the upper floor, and the one above it, and some man ran downstairs, but not as far as John Roddy. More doors, and then Tex's somewhat nasal voice: "C'mon up here."

John Roddy walked up the stairs, very quietly, very firmly. He kept a moder-

ate, even pace, neither hurrying nor dragging his feet. The fact that those feet wanted to turn and run out of the house could not be told from watching the way they walked; but Roddy knew.

Tex was standing against the wall at the top of the stairs. Two other men—big men, slick-haired men—were standing at the other end of the landing, also with their backs against the wall. They watched John Roddy without interest.

Tex flicked a finger at a door, and John Roddy nodded and put his hand on the silvered glass knob.

THE room inside was done in Early American style, light hunting-print wallpaper, maple furniture, chintz hangings. A single bookcase held about forty books, all in pastel bindings.

The man behind the maple desk was middle-aged, and run to fat, but he had that faint Texan-cowboy look of many sports promoters and Congressmen. He raised a manicured hand off the desk a few inches. "Have a seat, Mr. Roddy. . . . I think I knew you when you were writing sports in Philadelphia."

"I wrote sports in Philadelphia once, but not under the name of Roddy. My name's Gates, John R. Gates. And I didn't stick at it long."

"So. I imagine you're the sort of man who doesn't stick to things."

"I was talking to Tex about that today. He and I decided we were both the drifting type."

Mr. Lucius MacRein said: "Very common in sports and journalism. Well, I was that way myself, once."

"But it's hard to make any money, drifting."

The agate blue eyes widened a little. "That is quite the truth. Though you don't seem to be doing badly." The hand lifted the check. "By the way, I'll cash this for you." The other hand went into a desk drawer, brought out an oblong tin box. "Small bills?"

"No difference. And no hurry."

Both hands were still now. The eyes were level on John Roddy's. "You wanted to see me about something else?"

John Roddy said: "Of course. I had to get the check cashed, but there were a dozen places where I could have done that. No, I wanted to talk to you. Of course, I know who you are."

Neither hand, nor the eyes, acknowledged this.

"One of the top dozen sports promoters of the country. Sure. And a guy who has been around a great many places, including Atlanta, Georgia."

"I was framed."

John Roddy laughed. "I'm glad you said that. It makes you sound human. Listen, MacRein, quit kidding. I've put some hard work in on this proposition. I've been at it since ten this morning—yesterday morning—sixteen hours. That's a lot of time."

"You want to be recompensed for your time? I—"

"MacRein, MacRein, this is the showdown. It comes to all of you. Rothstein—he was a friend of yours—got his from some other friends. And some of you boys get it one way and another. You're lucky. The G-men will take care of you, and that is likely to be less uncomfortable—and final—than a break in the organization. Now listen: Haley McMaylan has been dealing with you over a period of years. His daughter is grown up, and he doesn't need money as badly as he did. And they're talking of him for the Senate. He wants to break it up. You won't let him out of it."

Lucius MacRein said: "I don't know what you're talking about."

John Roddy looked at the hooked rug on the floor. "There are no witnesses, MacRein. Let's not waste time. You know your men tried to kill me today. One of them slugged McMaylan last night. It doesn't seem the time to kid each other."

"Then talk," the sportsman said. "Talk." His right hand moved across the desk, found a button. "Will you have a drink of any sort? I take milk myself."

"Ginger ale would be fine."

A FAT man in a white coat popped his head in the door. Lucius MacRein gave the order. The door closed, and John Roddy said: "McMaylan is a little naïve. You don't go into crime for a day or a week. You leave it alone, or you don't. If he breaks with you, a great many very tough specimens are going to show up in his city, looking for help; and when they don't get it, there will be trouble. A great many of his local aides—politicos, cops, and so on—are going to be mad about the loss of an income they grew to count on. No, he can't break away."

"He retained you to come and tell me this?"

"No," John Roddy said. "He was hiring me to frame his half-brothers for the

things he had done. He had finished Act One, which was for the benefit of his daughter, and was going into Act Two when this racetrack tout of yours—I can't remember his name, if he had one—dropped in. Act Two, I think, would have been on the level. But you see, McMaylan had given me a dirty double cross once, and I was out for him."

The hands on the desk relaxed, and for the first time Lucius MacRein moved more than his hands or his eyes. He bent his arms, and pushed his chair back from the desk, and crossed his knees. He said: "Hell, man, now you're cooking with gas. McMaylan is too yellow to ever face anything he's done. I've got to hold him in line."

John Roddy said: "I know you do. How come that man to be shot?"

MacREIN grinned. "I know it only by hearsay. McMaylan—the dope—mistook a contact man of mine for an executive. He tried to bribe him. My man was loyal, and so on, but he made the mistake of telling his pal."

"And the pal started out to collect the money McMaylan had offered Joe?"

"Yea. Joe's not much of a gunman—you found that out; but he sent a slug after Rheinie, and it was one of those bullets that stay in a fellow and keep on working. . . . You mentioned Rothstein. Remember, he went out into the hall, got in an elevator, and walked out to the street under his own steam before he fell."

John Roddy said: "Academic."

The fat man came back with the milk for his boss, ginger ale for the visitor. He said: "It's pale ginger ale; I'm sorry there isn't any gold. The pale's good for mixing, but the golden's better for drinking straight."

"That'll be all, Nat."

"Sure, boss."

Again John Roddy was alone with Lucius MacRein. But the air was not as tense as it was. MacRein said: "Well, Gates, there's no out. McMaylan can't quit us. There's money, and connections and all kinds of things tied up in his not quitting us. If it means his giving up the Senate, that's too bad."

John Roddy wished they would get to the end of this, but he couldn't help asking the next question: "How about you backing him for the Senate?"

The cool man flared up. "A crook like that in the United States Senate? What do you think I am?"

John Roddy hid the answer in his own face by lighting a cigarette. Then he said: "Well, where do we go from here?"

"I guess the answer is to start grooming another man to take Haley McMaylan's place back home," said Lucius MacRein. "To hold the machine for him. He can live in Miami or something. And I guess that's what you're here for. With what you know, and what I can do for you, we can make you publisher of McMaylan's paper. That makes you a local big shot. How about it, Gates? You ready to swallow the anchor?"

John Roddy said: "You'd do that, wouldn't you? Take McMaylan's paper away, too. But that wasn't what I came here for. I came to tell you that I'm going to force McMaylan to go straight—to tell what he knows and what part in it he's had, and take the consequences."

They had come back to where they had started. MacRein's hands were frozen again, flat on the desk, and the only sign he gave of life was a slight widening or narrowing of his eyes.

He said: "Why?"

"There are a couple of reasons: Maybe it's for the same reason you wouldn't want to see McMaylan in the Senate. Maybe because the way he's going isn't so hot for his daughter."

("Oh, God! My tongue slipped there! Should have gone to bed and taken a rest. I've known all along that I was running too hot today. I'd out-thought everybody all day, and sooner or later I had to slip.")

JOHN RODDY sat and watched those china-blue eyes expand.

"All right," MacRein said. "I know where I stand now. It was decent of you to come and warn me. This is war, then."

"That's too dramatic," John Roddy said. "It's a pinch; it's the rap; it's all those things: but it isn't a war. A war can come out two ways, and there's only one possible outcome to this mess. Now, I'm leaving. I am quite aware that Tex, or any of those mugs outside can stop me. But killing me is no answer. You kill me, and you only convince McMaylan that he'd better break clean from you, only scare him worse than he is. Only get the cops down here, because you can't be sure who knew I was coming here."

"Who did?"

John Roddy laughed, and put on his hat. He tilted it carefully to one side. "So long, MacRein. Be seein' you."

"With bells on!" The steady right hand pressed a button, and Tex opened the door, and John Roddy walked out. He did not look at Tex, and he did not look at the gunmen on the other end of the hall; he walked downstairs, and the fat man in the white jacket opened the front door for him. He walked out, and did not look back even then; but kept his back squarely to the house, walked north to the corner, and then turned east and was out of sight.

He kept on walking steadily for a block after that, his leather heels coming down sharply on the pavement, and echoing off the walls of the warehouses that made this street dark and bleak. It seemed to him that the inky shadows between street-lights were wider and darker here than on residential streets.

But that would be just imagination.

And John Roddy could not afford to use his imagination. Not since his tongue had slipped that one time, and he had let MacRein know that the safety and happiness of Sara McMaylan was considerably more important to John Roddy than was life itself.

CHAPTER NINE

THE St. Mark was a nice hotel, and if you entered its lobby at three in the morning and walked to an elevator, you would not know that the night clerk and the hotel detective and the night manager were all interested in finding out what room you went to.

But John Roddy knew they were, because it was John Roddy's business to know about these things. ("I know so much. I am such a wise guy. So competent and tough.")

He went up in the elevator and walked to the door of the Congressman's suite.

He had pushed the button twice when McMaylan himself opened the door. He was dressed in gray flannel trousers and a lounging-jacket; the towel that had adorned his head that morning was missing. He said: "Oh, it's you."

"Yeah. You had better call the desk and tell them it's all right. They're worrying."

Haley McMaylan smiled. "Let them worry."

"You got rid of the cops?"

"I began to get indignant. They finally left me alone. It's been a terrible experience. To think that my own brothers—"

"Didn't Sara give you my message?"

"Sara? No, my daughter hasn't mentioned you. I knew you phoned, and I sent her down with a check for you."

"I gather," John Roddy said, "that you don't consider an unemployed newspaper man proper society for Miss McMaylan. Why, Congressman, I took Sara out earlier and bought her a bottle of wine. On your expense-account, of course. In a way, I wish she'd reported my conversation, but it doesn't much matter now. I wanted to tell you that you didn't fool me this morning; that I knew it was you, and not your brothers, who were tied up with the rackets; and that my name is Gates."

Haley McMaylan passed a bony hand down his long face. "Yes, Gates. You worked for the paper, didn't you? I never had the pleasure of—"

"You fired me by wire. I ran a story about the downtown pool-rooms."

"I see. Then this morning—"

"I took the job on the puff magazine to get enough money to get out of town on the cushions and look for a job. When I saw the mess you were in, I came up here to see what I could do to make it worse."

Haley McMaylan said: "That's enough. You're making unfounded charges, and insulting remarks, and I see no reason to sit here and listen to them. The police are satisfied that I am the innocent victim of some sort of extortion plan, and I have no further use for your services. Therefore—"

"O.K.," said Roddy. "Here's your five hundred back. I cashed the check."

Haley McMaylan said: "I'm glad to see you have changed your mind. I should hate to put a man of your attainments in prison. Now—"

"I cashed the check with Lucius MacRein," John Roddy said. The reaction on Haley McMaylan's face was satisfying. John Roddy stood up. "Well, so long. I hope the check was good. MacRein's a guy who hates to be crossed." He started for the door.

"You—you know MacRein? Isn't he a rather—well, shady customer?"

"Is he? You ought to know. He told me you and he had been partners for

He fired at the tires, the gas tank—any spot low enough to miss Sara.

years." John Roddy put his hand on the doorknob.

"What did you tell him?" Sara's father blustered. "That he was crazy?"

"I told him your suite up here was full of cops, that you had decided to blow the lid off him and tell the Federals everything you—"

"Good God, man!" Haley McMaylan cried. "You're crazy. You're a fiend, going around stirring up trouble, getting people killed and—"

John Roddy let go of the doorknob and turned, facing the room. He was as tired as he had ever been in his life. He let his weight go back against his hips and his shoulder-blades, and dropped his hat on the floor.

"That's right," he said. "That's what I've been doing all day. Stirring up trouble, getting MacRein's men worried about you so they'd take me to him, now getting you worried about him. It's not a nice way to do things, and I wish I could have gone about the assignment in a nice, shipshape fashion. But that takes leg-men, and detectives, accountants; it takes all the resources of a good paper or the government. I had nothing but myself."

"But why, man, *why?*"

"You fired me off your paper.... Oh, all right, it was just a job. I've been fired off a lot of papers. But it was my thirtieth birthday, and—it sounds sloppy to say I did it for a free press, or the Constitution, or because I love America—all stand—but maybe that's the reason. You ought to understand. Your father was that kind of guy. And I've done a good job. My foot hasn't slipped once.... Well, once. But I'm not dead, and I've got my story, and if I wanted to, I could go and file it with the A.P. now. Or sell it. I was going to."

"You haven't?"

John Roddy said: "There was one thing I didn't count on. I fell in love with your daughter."

"Of all the preposterous—" Haley McMaylan was laughing. "Why, you never saw her before today—yesterday."

"Hell, I know it. It just happened. And the most unbelievable thing is, she loves me too."

Haley McMaylan said: "I knew you were crazy." But his eyes kept themselves on John Roddy's face, and again he gave that mirthless laugh. "This is another one of your tricks. I'm supposed to react some way, and then you use the reaction.... I'm going to call her."

John Roddy said: "Sure. But just a minute: The reason I held off was because I want you to turn the story in yourself. It's better for her that way. Go to the authorities, and make a clean breast of it. Tell them what's probably the truth; how you got into this little by little, and never saw a chance to get out, and now you want to quit, no matter what it costs you."

"That'll mean—"

"Oh, two, three years in the pen. Maybe not even that. It'll mean the end of your holding office, but it'll be the beginning of your being a real newspaper man like your father. Think what Fighting Jimmy would have thought of a gesture like that."

Haley McMaylan said: "Sure. I'll do—well, I'll call Sara." He started toward the phone.

John Roddy left his hat on the floor; he felt that if he bent over to pick it up, he'd fall on his face. He took three stumbling steps for the couch.

McMAYLAN turned; there was a gun in his hand. "I've been threatened," he said. "You were attempting to blackmail me, about the drunk I was on the night before last. When I refused to pay up, you became abusive. You attacked me. Do you see?"

John Roddy said: "If you add murder to your other troubles, you'll never go back, McMaylan. You'll go on down and down, and you'll end up a sort of errand-boy for MacRein. You'll like that. You'll go calling on the other Representatives and offer them—" He jumped.

He was smaller than Haley McMaylan, and fatigue had slowed up his muscles, but he was younger. He found himself plunging in, one hand open and going for the gun, and the other heading some place in the vicinity of Haley McMaylan's chin.

Both hands missed, but John Roddy didn't. He went cannoning into the taller man, and McMaylan's legs hit a chair-edge going backward, and they both went over the chair. There was a lot of confusion; and once John Roddy, thinking he was on top, brought his fist down hard, and nearly broke all his knuckles on the back of the chair.

Then McMaylan was on top, and he had John Roddy by the hair and was beating his head on the floor.

John Roddy brought up his legs and hooked an ankle around McMaylan's

neck, and pulled. McMaylan came loose in a scrambling rush backward, and Roddy got to his knees. The gun was in one corner of the room, well away from both of them.

Roddy started for it, then heard McMaylan scrambling after him, and bent over, suddenly. McMaylan tripped over him, and fell flat. John Roddy leaped over him, and got the gun. "Cut it out, Mr. McMaylan. We're acting like a couple of kids."

He put the gun in his pocket. "Go call Sara, if you want to."

Haley McMaylan nodded. He pulled his lounging jacket straight, tried to smooth his hair. There was a scratch across the bridge of his nose. "All right."

The phone rang before he could pick it up. "What? Oh, no, nothing. I fell over a chair. . . . No, I don't want the doctor; but if you'd phone my daughter and ask her to step in here. . . . Thanks." He hung up. "They'll think I'm an habitual drunkard."

"Guard your reputation, at all costs," John Roddy said. He sat down on the sofa, hoisted his feet. "I'm dead. Mr. McMaylan, I may have started out in this thing to get you, but now I'm only worried about the consequences to Sara. Ask her. Make a clean break with MacRein, turn him over to the law, and take the punishment."

Haley McMaylan said: "And surer than death and taxes, one of his men will get me. Sooner or later."

"I've thought a lot of things of you, but not that you're yellow."

There was a rap at the door then, and it was Sara—Sara, with a navy-blue house coat on, and low slippers that made her look tiny and childish and—

"Hello, Sara," John Roddy said. "Oh, Sara. How old are you?"

"Hello, John Roddy," she said. "Why, I'm twenty-three, John Roddy dear. Do you care?"

"Then it's true," her father said.

"What, Father?"

"You love this—this—"

John Roddy put his feet on the floor. It was time for him to start working again. The same tight, hard, wearying game he had played all day. Well, he'd had the weight off his feet for a few minutes. And also, he'd been hit a few times. They didn't quite balance out.

He said: "Yes, Sara. Your father knows. And he knows, too, what I told you at the club. And he knows there's only one way out for him."

The girl's eyes widened, and her hand went to her mouth.

"No, no," John Roddy said. "Confession. A clean break. And he's going to do it. And you—I don't know whether you're going to hate me or not. All I can say is, if it hadn't been I, sooner or later somebody else would have caught up with him."

The girl looked at her father. "Oh, Dad! I don't know whether I can stand your going to prison, but I'll have to. And I'll be here when you get out; and John Rod— John Gates will have the paper built up, and we'll all make a new start. You're not old, Dad."

John Roddy thought if she called McMaylan "Dad" once more he'd cry. But he still had a mistake to take care of.

He said: "Your father will have to think it over. Think what line to take. It's possible, you know, that he can make the officers think he just went into this thing." But he saw by Haley McMaylan's face, that McMaylan was in too deep.

"And me," John Roddy said, "I've had nothing to eat for about twenty hours. Will you come with me and eat breakfast, Sara, while your father thinks?"

The girl looked from one man to another. "All right," she said, and she went out to dress.

There wasn't anything a man in John Roddy's spot could say to a man in Haley McMaylan's.

So John Roddy sat there a few minutes, and then he put his hat on his head —the blood surging as he bent to get the hat—and with Haley McMaylan's gun in his pocket, he went out into the hall. It was the second gun he had carried out of that room, and there was not much chance that there would be a third one there. But—

The thing to do was to use his head to protect Sara McMaylan, because MacRein knew what the girl meant to John Roddy. And MacRein was not likely to be a man with very many scruples.

EVEN the midtown section of Manhattan has to quiet down sometime; and this time, at a little after three in the morning, was it. A sprinkler wagon had been down Park Avenue, and the

street had the fresh, aromatic odor of wet asphalt. The night was not chilly.

To the south, the towering New York Central building straddled Park Avenue with its lights bright as the cleaning gang served their shift. But those lights in the giant structure did not give an effect of people or life; they increased the barren atmosphere of the time of night.

Only two cabs were parked at the stand in front of the St. Mark. John Roddy came out and raised his hand, and the second cab instantly shot around the first one for the fare, valuable at this rare hour. John Roddy grinned a little as the first driver woke up, too late, and roared some sort of insult about chiselers.

Then, before he pushed the sleepy girl into the taxicab, he peered in himself. But no one lurked inside. The MacRein hoods would not expect him to try and move the girl before morning.

He got in after her, and gave the name of a restaurant in Columbus Circle. "It stays open all night, doesn't it?" he asked.

The driver turned his face, and John Roddy had a chance to compare it with the picture on the license. Nearly done now. He had nearly pulled off what he had started to do, and he must make no slips.

"Yeah," the driver said, "it's open all night." He started the cab forward smoothly.

They went up Park Avenue fast, with no lights and no traffic to slow them down. John Roddy leaned back, holding Sara's hand lightly in his. . . . Someplace to hide the girl. He had a room down on 34th, near the Armory, that was all right, but it was in an apartment of furnished rooms, and open to all the tenants. Not safe.

Not safe for this girl drowsing against his shoulder, this small girl who meant more to him now than anything else in the world. What place would be safe, until Lucius MacRein and all his men were dead or in prison?

It was like one of those dreams where you move a stone, and three more stones fall down, and you move them and more stones come down, and you keep on and on, always moving stones and they keep piling up higher and higher.

Of course, the answer was that a man should mind his own business. A newspaper man should print what his boss wants printed, and leave out what the boss wants left out. And if he didn't like it, he should go into some other trade. . . .

And always the stones pile up, and now the pile was getting topheavy, and about to fall on him and crush him, and—

He awoke with a start; his cheek had been resting on the top of Sara's head. She moved drowsily on his shoulder.

Carefully, so as not to wake her, he peered out the window. They ought to be at Columbus Circle now; but then, maybe he'd only dozed off for a moment.

A street-light flashed by. Seventh Avenue at 38th. He blinked. Must be 58th.

The next sign was 37th.

He said: "Hi, we're going the wrong way!"

The driver didn't turn his head. John Roddy leaned forward and rapped on the glass partition. "Pull up. We're going the wrong way!"

THE driver shot around the next corner into the side-street, and stopped. He opened the slide. "Yeah?"

"You went the wrong way. I said Columbus Circle, and we're almost down to the Penn Station."

The driver's stupid face was lit up by the headlights of a car passing them from behind. "Yeah?" he looked around at the barred windows of the fur district. "Columbus Circle, huh?"

The car that had started to pass them stopped directly in front of them, and two men hopped out. One of them carried a sawed-off shotgun, and a badge gleamed on his coat. "Anything wrong here? This is the Loft Squad."

John Roddy's hands were quick, shoving the gun he had taken from Haley McMaylan between the seat cushion and the side of the car. To be caught parking without a reason in the fur district would probably mean to be searched. Well, he had his membership card in the Newspaper Guild, and—

The man with the badge and the shotgun came up. "Climb out, hackie. Who are your passengers?"

"I picked 'em up at the St. Mark's."

"All right. Sorry to inconvenience you, Mister, but we'll have to find out who you are. Get out, will you please? What's that, a girl with you? You can stay in the car, Miss. Just don't make any sudden moves."

John Roddy climbed out, stiffly. "I've got identification cards," he said. He reached for his inside pocket.

The man without the gun caught his wrist. "That's all right, Mac. We'll get them out." His hand went into John

Roddy's inside pocket, took out his wallet. Then he patted John Roddy all over. "No gun, Perry."

The man named Perry said, "Good enough," and smiled.

And then he started to say something else, but John Roddy wasn't listening. Because the badge on the man's coat was a police badge, all right; it read *First Class Detective Sergeant.* But it also read *Cleveland*—and this was New York!

The man with the wallet said: "Gates. Newspaper man."

Perry poked the shotgun into John Roddy's ribs, and said: "Nice work, Jake. Hoist them, Gates, and keep them hoisted. . . . What'll we do with the gal, Maury?"

Maury said he didn't know. "Jake, take her back in your cab, and drive her along the river where there aren't any cops, and we'll—"

From the interior of the cab, Sara's voice said: "What's going on, John?"

John Roddy said: "Nothing, sugar. I just ran into a couple of old friends, and they want me to go some place with them. It's a big story. A big story, eh, Perry?"

Perry said: "Sure, lady. We're reporters, like Gates here. We got a tip on a big story, like, and we need him to go with us."

So MacRein hadn't expected the girl to go out during the night. His orders had just been to pick up John Roddy. "Honey, the driver'll take you back to the hotel, and you go to bed. I'll pay him now."

Maury said in a low voice: "I don't like it, Perry. The guy's too agreeable. And how do we know, maybe the dame has something the boss wants, and if we let her go—"

Perry said: "The boss would 'a' mentioned a dame if he wanted a dame. You pick the dame up, it's kidnaping—I don't want it if it aint necessary."

JUST hoods, these were—street wolves doing MacRein's bidding. Like the dumb Joe. These were not of the caliber of Tex. "It's just a debt I owe the boss," John Roddy said. "I welched on a bet. Don't get this kid mixed up in it."

Perry said: "I don't know nothing about any of that at all. I jus' know the boss wants you. And like Maury says, the dame stuff is poison; but if you know the boss, Gates, you know how tough he can get. We gotta do right."

"Then let Jake take her back to the hotel and forget about her."

Perry said: "I got it. Jake, you gotta rod?"

"Yeah. Whatchu think?"

"Oke." Perry leaned forward. "Look, lady. I tell you what: I'll drive you back to your hotel in my car, see, and then the boys here can take the cab on." Then, in a low whisper: "Maury, you get in with this mugg. I'll stall around, see, get the girl to drink a cup of coffee in the all-night up on 40th. You call me there if the boss wants her."

John Roddy bit his lip. "Boys, it may be hard to persuade her to get in a private car. Leave her in the taxi, why don't you?"

And Perry fell for it. "I'm running this. G'wan, tell her to get out."

RODDY wanted nothing better, but he had to make this look good. He hesitated, and the sawed-off dug his ribs. He shrugged. "Honey, you do what he said. He's a police officer; he'll be all right. And Maury and I, here, can go on and cover our story." His eyelid dropped, but maybe the girl couldn't see that. Anyway, she started to climb out. As she passed John Roddy, he squeezed her hand. "Just go on with Perry, dear. This is Sergeant Perry, Miss Menafee." Now, where had that come into his head?

Now she was going away from him, walking toward the big car parked forward. A small girl, and all the world to him, going up forward to get into a car with a dirty rat of a gunman—

Maury said: "All right, sucker. Climb into the cab."

John Roddy nodded with the air of a man who knows he is in for trouble, but sees no way out. He climbed in slowly, as slowly as possible. He tried to give the slowness a tantalizing, annoying quality; he wanted to irritate Maury. His success in maneuvering things so that he was the one to get into the cab had perked him up again.

He was bent over, half in and half out of the cab, when Maury shoved him. John Roddy took the shove the easy way, falling forward as though it had been a lot harder than it really was, and this way he sprawled along the cushions of the back seat. His fingers dug, and he had the gun back again.

Now!

He rolled on his back, and dug his elbows into the seat, and pulled himself

up, sitting. Maury ducked his head, and said: "Pull your feet up. I don't want to get kicked in the chin."

John Roddy obediently sat up straight. And then, as Maury ducked his head to get in after him, John Roddy brought the gunsight down, hard, on the gangster's head.

Maury grunted once, and then John Roddy's fingers were steel on the other man's shoulder. He pulled the inert body in, shoved the gun through the still-open window, into Jake's back, and said: "Get going, hackie. This is a gun."

He dropped Maury across the floor, planted his feet on him.

Jake didn't stutter, but he came close to it. "Where'll I go?"

"Where you were going in the first place. South toward MacRein's?"

"We was gonna take you west, here, to—"

"Wherever it was. And get going."

The cab ground into gear. John Roddy kept his head down, and the gun through the window, and they came even with the other car; out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sara getting in, and Perry behind her. There wasn't an awful lot of light to see anything by except the paths of the headlights.

Then Perry messed it up. He yelled: "Jake! I changed my mind. Follow me!"

John Roddy said: "All right, Jake. You'll have to do what he says." He hoisted Maury to the seat next to him, and propped him up in a corner, working with one hand. The gunman's hat had not fallen off, but the crown was dented queerly.

Jake stepped on the clutch, and the other car swung out from the curb and passed them.

Jake went into second, then into high, and they were off, down the dark street. Off to some place where there might be another, or ten more of MacRein's men; where Tex might be, or—less likely—MacRein himself. And Sara McMaylan would get there first—

RODDY took a deep breath and did what seemed best to him at the time. He reversed the gun quickly, and let Maury have another one behind the ear, then snapped open the left-hand door, and swung out on the running-board.

Clinging with his right arm, the gun clumsy in the other hand, he fired at the tires, at the gas tank, of Perry's car, fired at any spot that was low enough to miss Sara.

Jake screamed, and chopped at John Roddy's hand with his fist; the taxi began zigzagging. John Roddy let another shot go at the rear of the sedan; it seemed to him he heard metal clanging as he got the gas tank; but he couldn't be sure, for now Jake had his gun out, and was bringing it around.

John Roddy twisted and fired at Jake. You couldn't miss at this distance.

The taxi swerved sharply to the right, then lurched up over the curb. A lamppost came from nowhere and hit John Roddy; he went flying backward, the gun out of his hand, hitting the pavement hard, stunned, breathless. The cab went on from him, and he had time to get up on one elbow and see it go crashing into the window of a fur-shop.

A burglar-alarm went off with enough noise to wake the dead.

John Roddy fumbled his way to his feet, and looked around for his gun. It lay back of him about ten feet, shining in the light of the post that had swept him off the running-board. He tried to run toward it, but there were a great many things wrong with his muscles and his joints.

Something roared that was not the burglar alarm and not the taxi crashing, and something whistled near his ear and passed with a sharp clipping noise; but he never realized that it was a bullet until he had the gun, and had turned, and saw Perry running down the street in the glare from the headlights of his own stalled car—trying to drag Sara McMaylan after him.

But the length of both their arms separated the girl from the man, and it was a fair enough shot—for a good marksman in good condition. John Roddy was neither, but he couldn't see the girl go away that way, and he brought the pistol to bear and squeezed the trigger, easily, gently, just right, and Perry let go of the girl, and turned, his left arm hanging funny from his shoulder.

Light shone on the blued-steel barrel of the gun in Perry's hand, and John Roddy said, *"This is it"* to himself, and squeezed the gun again, because now the girl was running to one side, along the sidewalk toward John Roddy.

So they both fired, but neither bullet connected so far as John Roddy knew. And then he tried to squeeze the trigger again, but the gun was either empty or jammed; there was no explosion.

("Well, I gave it the old college try, and now—")

In a street that had learned to know noise, there was a new one, and as loud a one as any. And Perry, standing ready to take care of John Roddy, sat down, his gun leaving him.

John Roddy was aware that Sara McMaylan had got the sawed-off.

Then the sirens of all the police cars in New York converged on them, and fancy-colored police spotlights swarmed into the block and surrounded them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JOHN RODDY swayed on his feet, but he didn't know it; it seemed to him that the street was rocking. Men in uniform and out of uniform came at him from all directions; but by that time, he had his feet working again, and he had made it to Sara McMaylan, was standing with his arm around her shoulders, holding her.

"That was—that was fun," her voice said. Her face was pressed against his coat, and the words were muffled.

John Roddy said: "I'm gonna have to learn a new way of life. This isn't the way you take care of a girl. This isn't the right way at all."

"Oh, John Roddy, is this the first time you've been in love? How wonderful!"

"I've been around, but it's the first time it's meant anything. I don't know," John Roddy said, standing partly on his own legs and partly by leaning on the girl. "I'm a guy who makes his living with words, but the words don't seem to come—"

Light flashed hard and strong in their eyes. "Of all the times to start mugging," a tough voice said, "you two sure picked a dandy. Lady, you drop that shotgun, willya?"

It was a uniformed police lieutenant.

John Roddy let go of Sara, and the girl let go of the shotgun. It clattered on the pavement.

She said: "Officer, did I—did I kill him?"

The lieutenant said: "You didn't help his digestion any, sister. Yeah, he's dead, but I don't know whether you did it with the sawed-off, or whether the revolver slugs in him took care of him. . . . You two are under arrest, of course. What's it all about—loft robbery?"

John Roddy looked down the street. There were cops all around the sedan, and all over the taxicab, and there were special gray-coated private cops swarming around the fur-shop whose window the taxi had smashed. Maybe Houdini could have walked out of that street, but probably not.

"No," John Roddy said. "Attempted kidnaping." He put his hands up to hold down his throbbing head, and his hat fell to the pavement. He let it lie.

He said: "You know, a guy either ought to use his head for thinking, or for getting banged. These dual-purpose heads don't stand up in actual service."

The lieutenant looked at him. "I got an ambulance down the block. You want it?"

"I'm all right," John Roddy said. "No ambulance. I could use about a bushel of aspirin, but that'll be later—" More men were joining them. The ones in uniform had lots of gold on them, but most of these men were not in uniform.

The lieutenant said: "He says it's a snatch. There any other witnesses besides him and the girl?"

"All dead," somebody said. "Who was kidnaping who, or what?"

"I don't know yet, sir. I just started questioning this fella here. Don't even know his name."

"Gates," John Roddy said. "John R. Gates, one time a newspaper man. More lately *alias* John Roddy, a Congressional investigator."

The lieutenant said: "Hey, Dauphey, you been working with the Feds. Heard of a dick named Roddy or Gates in town?"

"He wouldn't have." John Roddy pressed his head again. "Private. I've been working for Congressman Haley McMaylan. This is his daughter, Miss Sara McMaylan. I—I'm sorry I don't know you gentlemen's names."

"Punch drunk," one of the cops said. "We better get him to a hospital."

John Roddy said: "No. . . . Yeah, I'm a little slaphappy. I— Sara, have you any way of proving who you are?"

"A card to the President's speech last week—a House Gallery card."

"Dig it up," John Roddy said, "while I talk. And please, gentlemen, listen, because I don't know how long I'm going to be in shape to go on talking. I've been doing some investigating for Representative McMaylan. He saw traces of crime in his own city; and when he got to Congress and compared notes, he

found the same sort of thing all over the country."

"Oh, John Roddy," Sara breathed.

He found her hand, and squeezed it. In the circling lights, the cops were looking at his Newspaper Guild card, at Sara's engraved card.

Somebody said: "Well, why aren't you out in McMaylan's State, then?"

John Roddy waved his arms. "You think New York is exempt? Why, it was in this very city that they threatened to kidnap Miss McMaylan if the Congressman didn't lay off them." John Roddy's head cleared, and for a moment he had that wonderful, controlled feeling he'd had when he started this. "That's why he sent for me," John Roddy said. "Because he knew that a man who could make that sort of threat in New York and get away with it must have police protection, and—"

A HIGH voice said, "Don't hit him, Lieutenant.... Mr. Gates, you mean to say somebody threatened to kidnap this young lady right here in this city?"

John Roddy bit his lip to keep from smiling. They were falling for it. He'd taken a chance on swallowing all the teeth he had, but he'd not been hit, and he had touched these men on just the right spot to get them into line for him. "Sure," he said. "What kind of cops are you? Didn't you see that that one man was wearing a fake police badge? A badge stolen from Cleveland? They had a taxi planted in front of the lady's hotel. How about that? That hackie was carrying a gun, and what kind of a city do you call it where you let cab-drivers carry guns?"

"I'll show you what kind of a city this is," the high voice said. "I'll show you what kind of a police force we've got! Just lead the way to wherever you say all this—this high crime and intrigue—stems from, and we'll put on a raid that'll show all the G-men and private investigators in the world what kind of police we have. Inspector, I'll want a riot squad and an emergency car. Two details of detectives. This Gates can ride with you and me in your car. Where to, Gates?"

"South," John Roddy said. "To the house of a man named Lucius MacRein. Or is Lucius MacRein too big for your strong-arm squad?"

The high voice was nearly squalling with rage. "Come on, and I'll show you! Lieutenant, take this young lady back to her father, and tell him the New York cops are on their way with the evidence he wants. Come on, Gates."

"John Roddy," Sara murmured, "how you do talk!"

"I was going pretty good, at that," John Roddy murmured, and then he was being led away, and Sara was going off in another direction.

He'd done it. His tongue had slipped once that day, and he'd got Sara into danger and trouble; but he'd got her out again. MacRein was done, and McMaylan was warned: Sara'd get there in plenty of time to warn her father what line to take.

He was in a big limousine, and he was going south again, at a clip that would have scared Barney Oldfield. Through Greenwich Village like a fire in a celluloid plant, and then whirling into the quiet, dignified street he'd visited twice before that day.

Leading the charge up the white marble steps, but not alone this time. It seemed that half the cops in New York were on his heels.

Maybe afterward these high ranking officers would stop and think what they'd done—charged a private house without warrant or even evidence; but they were mad, now. John Roddy, saving his strength, stood back as they burst the door open. Then he was one of the first of them in, and he was in time to see Tex Milo at the top of the stairs, gaudy in flowered pajamas.

A cop let Tex have it in the shoulder, and the gun the jockey'd been holding down on them came sliding and bumping down the stairs. There was time enough and confusion enough for John Roddy to scoop it up.

The cops swarmed over the house, but John Roddy put a bullet through the lock of MacRein's office door, and got in there. He shut the door behind him, and shoved a chair under the knob, and said: "Cops, hundreds of 'em."

"Your work?"

"No matter now," John Roddy said, and joined Lucius MacRein.

The promoter had slid back two of the knotty pine panels, was busily pulling papers out of a steel filing-cabinet. He was dressed in gray flannel pajamas and rabbit-fur slippers.

John Roddy snatched up an armful of papers, and threw them in the middle of the hooked rug; he struck a match and tossed it on the pile, and flames leaped up.

MacRein said: "Here, what are you—"

"No time," John Roddy panted, "for halfway measures." His fingers ripped out a file marked *M*. They ripped out another file with the name of McMaylan's city on it. He tossed them into the blaze, and they caught at once.

"Nice work," Lucius McRein said.

"Sure," John Roddy told him, and hit him behind the ear with the butt of Tex's gun.

Then he opened the door into the hall, yelled, "Fire," and ripped off his coat, and began to beat the edges of the flame. The more he beat, the more papers on the edges went out; and the higher the flames in the middle flared up, from the fanning. He had put all the papers that probably pertained to Haley McMaylan in the middle.

"Fire!" he yelled again, and the lieutenant who had questioned him came in.

He grabbed up a pillow and began helping put the fire out. "The boss is dancing a hornpipe," he yelled, over the noise of the crackling paper. "They found six *Wanted* muggs hiding in the cellar. And enough guns for an army."

"O.K.," John Roddy said. "I guess the fire's out."

"Yeah," the lieutenant said. "Too bad we lost these papers in the middle. But I guess what's left's enough evidence. . . . Hey! Hey, outside! This newspaper fella just keeled over."

CHAPTER TWELVE

JOHN RODDY sat on a divan and held Sara's hand under the edge of the blanket that the nurse had wrapped around him. "A funny thing," he said. "This time yesterday, in this very room, the bandage was on your father's head, and I was doing the talking. Now I've got the bandage, and he's got the floor."

"Take it easy," the girl said. "Just take it easy. John Roddy's earned a rest, Mr. Gates!"

He said: "I think your dad's covered. I did my best."

Haley McMaylan grinned at him, and smiled at his daughter, and went to the door and opened it. He said: "You men can come in now. I've got a statement to make."

He raised a hand, and silenced the rapid-fire questions. "Just a statement. No questions. . . . I hired John Gates and financed him to investigate the MacRein gang for reasons of personal and civic importance."

One of the reporters said: "Is it true they were trying to take your city over, and you swore you'd get them?"

Haley McMaylan said, slowly: "That's one way of putting it. Gates there—my future son-in-law—handled the thing so that that conclusion could be drawn." He looked at his daughter again, and then, looking out the window, went on: "The truth is, I was more or less involved myself. You get into these things, and the first thing you know, you're getting in deeper—I've already mailed my resignation as Congressman. I've turned over my stock in the paper to my daughter. It may be," Haley McMaylan said, "that I won't be convicted. But I'm not going to perjure myself to avoid it. Or ask others to. I'm leaving for home on the next train," he said, "and offer myself to the Government and State investigators as a witness."

He raised his hands. "That's all."

After the three of them were alone, John Roddy said: "I don't think you had to do that."

"It would have come out," Haley McMaylan said. "And I make a prettier picture taking my medicine before it's choked down my throat. Sara owns my share of the paper, John. But she's no newspaper man. I guess that puts you in the saddle." He sighed. "I'm glad it's over. When the afternoon papers come out with my statement, do you think I'll be arrested?"

John Roddy said: "I don't know. I don't think it matters. You can take it. When I left you here yesterday, I thought you'd jump out of that window."

Haley McMaylan said: "I may be a crook. But I'm no coward."

"I might have known that," John Roddy said, "from the kind of daughter you have."

Sara said: "John Roddy, stop it—stop trying to talk yourself onto the good side of your boss. . . . Oh, Dad! I don't know what to say, I—"

John Roddy said: "Shake, Dad. We've only just begun to fight."

Someone pounded on the door from the hall, and Haley McMaylan went to open to the Law.

The novel by Frank R. Adams, postponed from this month, will appear in our forthcoming September issue.

The Fight at

A former contributor wrote us that he'd taken part in the storming of Sidi Barani. We cabled him: "Tell us about it." The censor wouldn't

TONIGHT there was a menacing note in the harsh Arabic clamor from the refugee Bedouin encampment. That temporary city of camel-hair tents was filling and emptying daily in those days when Graziani's Libyan host was pouring eastward over the Egyptian border, and Wavell's little Army of the Nile grimly digging itself in to oppose the Italian advance. The Bedouin of the Western Desert were fleeing in hordes before the advance of Graziani, the "Butcher," who in days gone by had so ruthlessly massacred their Senussi co-religionists in Libya. Fleeing eastward, they were drifting in somber caravans through the thinly held British lines, circling the barbed-wire entanglements of Mersa Matruh fortress, and impinging on the railway at Gerawla, the next station on the Western Desert railway. At Gerawla they swarmed all over every eastbound train, roosting on boxcar roofs like gulls, and clambering over the locomotives like troops of baboons. Eastward-bound to safety.

"Pack-train's two hours late, sir." Sapper Boggs raised his wind-scorched face from the telegraph instrument which still continued to hiccough its clicks spasmodically.

Curse the damned pack-train! Two hours more to wait till I could move on to Mersa Matruh and my bed. Only yesterday one of Musso's high-flying bombers had dropped one alongside the motor trolley in which I patrolled my section of the line. Bunged a hole in the radiator and condemned me to hop trains on my rounds until the radiator could be repaired.

"What about that turn-out job in Mersa? How's that going?" I asked my sapper-stationmaster. Only a few hours previously the latest raid had smashed the main-line turn-out at Mersa Matruh station and held up the return of the empty water-train. If we could only get that empty water-train back through Gerawla, most of the congregated Bedouin would board it and depart eastward.

I'd be glad to get rid of the lot that had collected tonight. In general the Bedouin were friendly, but it was inevitable that some Italian agents should trickle through with the genuine refugees. I'd bet my steel hat that Italian propaganda was back of that excited shouting. A few agitators could easily incite the simple desert people to sabotage the station. Cause delay on the line, and delay would be serious, now that our one-horse railway was already overtaxed to keep the army supplied with requisites for the coming battle. If those Bedouin should rush the station, I had only two sappers to defend it.

"They'll be an hour with that turn-out job yet, sir. I just asked them." Boggs picked up a tattered magazine and began to admire the beautiful ladies in its pictures. Jackson—Boggs' relief—sauntered in, freckled and red-headed. Frankly the two young boys discussed the points of the beauties on the magazine page. Stifling my impatience, I sat and smoked. That infernal Bedouin outcry! Louder and louder!

Suddenly the doorway filled. A huge black man entered, a Sudanese. Round his middle the green sash of the Egyptian Frontier Force and across his barrel of a chest a row of ribbons. A great black hand snapped to a grizzled forehead in salute. Then the veteran of wars sauntered over to Boggs, accepted a cigarette and squatted on his hams to smoke it.

"Boggs, what the hell's that?" I asked.

"Dropped off the passenger tonight, sir. Waiting for a lift to his detachment somewhere out in the desert."

The black man rose and spat expressively as he waved his hand toward the Bedouin encampment. *"Musquois. Italiani."* ("No good. Italians.")

I nodded. Something was brewing down there, I felt certain. The shout-

Gerawla Station

permit a detailed story of the battle (nor publication of our author's name), but these two episodes of the Libyan campaign are significant.

ing had risen to a crescendo and was drawing nearer. Weapons? Looked as though we'd need them. There were the two sappers' rifles. Another rifle in a corner, bayonet fixed. That must belong to the beribboned Sudanese, because he now moved over to it and squatted beside it to finish his cigarette, puffing tranquilly and screwing up his eyes in enjoyment.

Three of us, against God knew how many Bedouin! Three only, because I counted out the Sudanese, good fighter though he looked. I could hardly ask him to fire on his own people.

SEVERAL Bedouin appeared in the doorway of the little station building and entered uninvited.

Enraged at the violation of his domain, Boggs dashed at them like a bitch defending her litter. Surprised at the sudden assault, they backed out. I slammed the door and locked it.

The Bedouin outside began to pound on the door with their fists, shouting insults in Arabic.

The bolts of my sappers' rifles snicked in well-oiled unison as the cartridges slid from magazine to breech. Ready!

"Don't fire yet," I ordered. Those Bedouins were Egyptian subjects. Allied nationals. If I didn't have a good excuse for firing, I should be facing a court-martial first thing I knew. Orders had been explicit about the treatment of our allies, and those orders were being stringently enforced.

All this time the Sudanese had been calmly squatted on his haunches, puffing at his cigarette. Just as I had judged him—neutral.

Something heavy crashed against the lock of the door. A hammer that must be. They must have looted the ganger's tool-shed.

"Best give 'em a shot or two through the door, sir." Boggs and Jackson were fiddling with the locks of their rifles, fingers itching.

"No. Wait till they break the door in." That broken door would be evidence enough to clear me if we killed some of the poor devils.

At that moment the door burst inward with a crash, and white-robed figures surged in, hammers in hand.

Before my sappers could fire, there was a bull-like bellow as the Sudanese charged into the white-clothed mass. In the flame of our solitary hurricane lamp his bayonet flickered like silver lightning. In a moment the room was clear, and dim white figures were melting into the night.

"*Musquois. Italiani,*" remarked the grizzled old savage as he nonchalantly wiped his reddened bayonet against one of the three white figures that lay huddled in the doorway.

Under Bombs for Shelter

"GET yer dommed hands off the door of that dommed boxcar," Sergeant Wellbourne's parade-ground voice was vibrant enough to have rattled the glass in the window beside me—if glass there had been. But glass existed only in fragments in the fortress of Mersa Matruh, for Musso's bombers had seen to that, especially in the railway station, where I was sitting at my desk.

Through the empty window-frame I could see Wellbourne on the platform—barrel-like, on two legs like concrete pillars. The hot Libyan summer morning was drawing streaks of moisture from his sun-scorched face and the reddened skin of his forearms peeped through a mat of hair. Across the shimmering rails of the main line track a resplendent Egyptian officer was fumbling with well-manicured hands at the door of one of a row of boxcars on the siding.

"But I moost load the baggage of my companee. Today we moost evacooate." In his eagerness, the officer did not seem

to notice the lack of respect of my subordinate.

I smiled inwardly. If young shiny buttons had been standing on that spot yesterday! Why, that raw new circle of earth on which his polished boots rested was what we had just filled into the bomb-crater. Busted both rails of the siding, that one had. Lucky those boxcars hadn't arrived yesterday, or there would have been fireworks.

A hot spot was Mersa Matruh. The native railway employees had long since stampeded and left my lot of sappers to run the railway. Now the Egyptian Army was moving back, and the Army of the Nile stood its ground alone.

Involuntarily my eye roved upward to where the flagstaff stood beside the stone frontier post building on the ridge above the station. The garrison of Mersa Matruh lived with one eye on that flagstaff, where a red flag was hoisted when Musso's bomber squadrons droned into sight. The staff was empty now, thank God. Westward the barren rocky ridge melted into the mirages. Out there somewhere Graziani's blackshirt hordes were massing for a push, and Wavell's little Army of the Nile was marshaling its slender resources to hold them. Our one-horse railway fed the Army of the Nile. Its main artery, and a vital one.

I forced my attention back to the traffic report on my desk; how hard it was to concentrate when one's thoughts were always on the red flag that might be flying from the flagstaff! Sometimes that flag gave as much as a minute's warning, sometimes less. Less than a minute to get below ground before the bombs burst and their low-flying splinters whirred and moaned above your head like invisible hurrying demons.

"E-e-e-e-e-UMPH." Out of the corner of one eye I saw the Frontier Post building dissolve into a yellow cloud of dust from which sped dark fragments. In a second I was running desperately. Fifty yards to the nearest slit trench at the bottom of the steps—the narrow deep one. Fifty yards. Six seconds at least, and in any one of those seconds the next bomb might fall.

High overhead was a vicious droning. *"W-o-o-ah . . . w-o-o-ah."* Savoyas 79—no mistaking the uneven beat of their engines. A flock of them too, by the sound.

Those damned steps! Twenty of them. Three leaps, and I was at the bottom, while Wellbourne's pudgy figure landed on its feet beside me. Sharp left now and a thirty-yard sprint. Into the narrow zigzag trench I dived as a frog dives into a pond, headfirst. Landed soft on some of my sappers who had beaten me to it. Stood up and adjusted my tin hat. Wellbourne! Where was he? Then I remembered. Wellbourne didn't fit into this trench. Too narrow. Once before he had tried it, and stuck.

I peeped over the parapet. There Wellbourne was, running, making for that dugout across the street.

"Crash," a hellish din. The freight clerk's shanty split into a thousand fragments and the stench of high explosive caught my throat.

WELLBOURNE was down—rolling. Now he lay still in the middle of the tarmac street.

"Boom. Crash. Wuumph." The ground rocked. Air full of flying wreckage. Bits of things rattled down onto my steel helmet. The solid earth contracted and expanded under the hammer blows of bombs. Through swirling dust clouds I could still see Wellbourne. Flat on his belly now. Rocked from side to side by the blasts, nails clawing at the black shiny tarmac under him. Face turned toward me, one cheek pressed to the ground. His features anguished. Eyes screwed tight shut, and mouth grinning like the mouth of a man in pain.

Then it was over. From the trench I emerged just in time to see a soldier rise from a dugout and hoist the red flag. Fifty Savoyas had unloaded over two hundred bombs in a few minutes, and he was just hoisting the flag! Bomb-craters everywhere, but precious little damage.

"Get away from that dommed boxcar, I keep telling ye." Back on the platform again, Wellbourne waved a red forearm that had a white strip of sticking plaster on it now—a bit of sticking plaster that I had clapped on the nick where a splinter had grazed him. "Get to hell away from it! It's chock full of bombs for the R.A.F."

The shiny Egyptian's face had been pale from the bombing. Now it turned green, sickly green.

Wellbourne waddled up to him, threw a friendly arm over his shoulders.

"Take a pull at yourself, lad. It's all over now."

The Egyptian gulped. "Praise be to Allah! But to theenk I did take shelter under that boxcar when the bombs was falling!"

Carbolic Cocktail

The man who wrote "Tears of the Poppy" reveals the romance of his youth.

By LEMUEL DE BRA

THE hospital has long since passed out of existence, but on that cold March afternoon it was a very busy place, with doctors coming and going, and student nurses hurrying here and there through the reception room.

The uniform worn by the reception nurse was stiff and white, and I remember thinking how sharply it contrasted with her soft black hair, her gentle brown eyes and kind face. But then, I have a weakness for nurses.

She took one fleeting glance at me and reached for pad and pen.

"Name, please?"

"Lemuel De Bra."

"Age?"

"Twenty-four, last corn-huskin'."

She ignored my quip. "Occupation?"

"U. S. Internal Revenue Inspector."

Then came a rapid-fire string of other questions that, during the thirty years that have passed, I have forgotten. But I remember that at last she inquired sweetly:

"What is your mother's maiden name?"

I took a firmer hold on the edge of the desk. "Listen, Beautiful," I said. "I know that before I can be treated for my particular ailment you must have a record of my mother's maiden name. But unfortunately I can't remember that bit of so-vital information. All I know is that she was a full-blooded Apache Indian. Before I was born, she slaughtered twenty-seven white men, women and children. And I,"—here I looked down at a long paper-knife within easy reach of my hand,—"I was marked with an urge to kill that at times is absolutely uncontrollable!"

At that, Beautiful's head snapped up and her mouth flew open. I know I was a ghastly sight. My face was gaunt and a nauseating yellow; the whites of my eyes were as green as spring grass. I was so weak I had to hang onto the desk to keep from falling.

Suddenly a white hand flashed out. *"Clang, clang, clang!"* went the desk bell. I heard the swish of starched skirts. "Put him to bed immediately!" ordered Beautiful, and a nurse took firm hold of each arm. As they led me away, I heard the reception nurse putting in an urgent call for my doctor.

Then I was between cool sheets, with my feverish head resting on a cool white pillow. A pretty nurse was scrubbing a spot on my arm with an alcohol sponge. A doctor stood beside her. I scarcely felt the quick jab of the needle. . . .

When I woke up, a golden light was flickering on the ceiling. I lay still and watched it, wondering where the heck I was. Then I turned my head—and beheld a vision that to this day remains the most beautiful picture I have ever seen.

BY the open fireplace sat a young nurse in blue and white uniform with white apron and tiny cap. The flames brought out golden sparkles in her brown hair. Her head was turned, so that I saw the profile of her soft cheek and lips, and I thought she was the most lovely and desirable creature I had ever seen.

With exaggerated feebleness I called out: "Angel!"

She smiled—and my heart began showing strange symptoms.

"You mustn't call me that," she reproved kindly. "I am Miss Maynard, the night nurse on this floor. Do you feel like talking with your doctor now?"

"No," I replied truthfully, "I'd rather talk with you."

Then, as quickly and silently as she had come, she was gone. When she returned, my doctor was with her.

The doctor and I were old friends, and he got right down to business. "Tell me all about it!" he ordered bluntly.

I told him. The chief had sent me to Reno, Nevada, to work with the local deputy on a big case. At the end of our investigation we had to spend a straight

twenty hours in a cold-storage room completing our tests and seizure. We got out at three in the morning, completely worn out, half starved, and chilled to the bone.

I came to in my hotel room the next afternoon with the house physician bending over me. An old gall-bladder trouble had recurred; I was already showing signs of being jaundiced. . . . I was advised to return at once to San Francisco and see my own physician. I refused to take the advice, stuck to the job, but almost two weeks later had to give up.

"SO, Doc," I concluded, "here I am!"

"And here you're going to stay until I throw you out!" he informed me flatly. Then he turned to the nurse. "For supper, he gets nothing but a glass of orange juice. For breakfast, give him two and a half ounces of—"

I didn't hear the rest. But next morning I found it wasn't anything to look forward to. It was clear like water, had no odor, but tasted like a mixture of Epsom salts, asafetida, turpentine, decayed lemons and any other horrible thing you can think of.

The only consolation was that, although I had to take the horrible mess, it was brought to me every morning by that night nurse with the marvelous blue eyes and caressing voice.

So three weeks passed. I was improving nicely, but still had to take my morning cocktail. I had learned to throw the stuff down my throat so quickly I hardly tasted it.

Then came the morning that proved to be the great turning-point of my life.

Miss Maynard glided in as usual with her heart-warming smile—and that glass of hellish concoction. I lingered over her smile a minute, then took the glass and tossed off the stuff.

Slowly, I handed the glass back.

"Miss Maynard," I said, "that—that wasn't the same medicine."

She took the glass, held it to her nostrils—and her lovely face turned as white as her apron.

"There—there has been a slight mistake," she said. Then she walked unhurriedly to the sliding door, went out, closed the door as usual—then I heard her steps fairly flying down the hall.

A moment later Miss Butterway, the superintendent, eased into my room. She was pulling on a lavender dressing-robe over her nightgown. To my surprise, she sat down on the edge of my bed. I started to ask her what she was doing up three hours ahead of time, but my tongue seemed to have gone dead.

Miss Butterway felt my pulse. "Let me see your tongue," she directed.

That sounded screwy to me, but I obeyed.

"You'll be all right," she told me. Then *she* walked unhurriedly to the sliding door, went out, closed the door—and literally flew down the hall.

Scarcely two minutes later it seemed to me that half the nurses and doctors in the hospital were crowding into my room. I remember one big Amazon with red hair and bulging eyes had a rubber hose that looked as big as a fire hose. Another nurse carried a gallon pitcher. Others had various and sundry instruments of torture.

And all crowded around my bed.

"Here!" snapped the red-headed Amazon, flourishing the fire hose. "Open your mouth and swallow this!"

And then—I'll draw a veil over what happened then.

Years later I heard the voice of my doctor:

"Nurse, fill an eight-ounce glass half full of whisky."

"Yes, Doctor."

I perked up. Help was coming!

"Stir into the whisky four teaspoonfuls of Epsom salts. Give Mr. De Bra a teaspoonful of the mixture every ten minutes."

I was terribly weak, but I gasped:

"See here, Doc! What happened?"

"Nothing," the Doc lied professionally. "You'll be all right."

A few minutes later I got my first dose of whisky mixed with salts. It was terrible. But what was worse, I saw nothing of Miss Maynard. The red-headed Amazon relieved her that night.

NEXT afternoon I was alone, and feeling better, when a vision in soft gray with touches of creamy lace at her wrists and throat, floated into my room. To my confusion and astonishment, she sank down on the edge of my bed, took her lovely face in her equally lovely hands, and burst into violent weeping.

"Good gosh, Miss Maynard!" I exploded. "*Please* don't do that! Those beautiful eyes of yours were not meant for tears! But say! What's it all about, anyway? What was that stuff you gave me?"

"Car—carbolic acid solution!" she sobbed through her fingers.

"Whew!" I was scared then, even though it was all over. "Well, don't you care," I tried to console her. "Maybe they won't fire you."

Instantly she flung up her head, looked down at me with her tear-wet eyes.

"They've already discharged me," she said. "But what does that matter to me—beside the fact that"—her voice broke again—"that *I hurt you?*"

I looked at her a minute, utterly dumbfounded. Then I took one of her hands, and presed my blistered lips reverently against her soft palm.

That night I talked turkey to Doc.

"See here, old sawbones! I know that you and every other hospital take the greatest care to avoid making mistakes like that one. I know that such a thing might not happen again in a hundred years. So I'm not blaming anyone—least of all, Miss Maynard. But I'm telling you right now that unless she is on duty tonight as usual, I'm going to walk out of here in my nightgown, and I'm going to tell everybody I meet that you tried to poison me with carbolic acid. And when that failed, you tried to drown me by pouring half the Pacific ocean down my gullet!"

For an instant he looked startled; then he smiled.

"So some one told you, eh? Well, then, I may as well tell you that it wasn't altogether Miss Maynard's fault. Our new interne refilled the bottles that day, and in putting them back on the shelf he got them mixed."

So Angel wasn't fired for giving me a carbolic cocktail!

But I got even with her. Or did I?

ANYWAY, I married her. And for years she has given me the happiest married life any man ever had. Also four of the finest babies that ever kept a clothesline busy!

There are no gold tints in her hair now; it is flecked with gray. There are tiny wrinkles around her sweet mouth. And she measures—God only knows how much—around the hips!

But then, I have a weakness for nurses —as you have learned.

China Plane Factory

The Japanese didn't like this factory at all.

By GLADYS DAY

IT was nearly time for breakfast—morning rice, the Chinese call it. Suddenly I heard a shrill cry, high, piercing.

Throwing a robe around my shoulders and sliding into my slippers, I rushed out onto the veranda to see what was wrong. The Chinese are stoics and not given to fright.

My husband Charles held the position of aëronautical adviser to the Chinese Government of Chiang Kai-shek, and in addition was in charge of their largest airplane factory. This plant was located near Shiuchow, in North Kwangtung Province, and our home was about half a mile from the factory, in the village.

As I came out on the veranda, I saw Chinese running down the street, pointing toward the sky and shouting that the Japanese were coming. I shaded my eyes with my hand to shut out the glare of the bright morning sun. In the distance I saw black specks in the sky, and could hear the dull roar of their motors.

There were no military objectives near. The airplane factory, which was the only military objective in the district, was half a mile away. The first bombs fell at the far end of the village; and mixed with the smoke of the explosives I saw parts of houses go sailing into the air. Then I did not have time to watch other people's misfortunes. I saw the bombs leave the planes, heard the high note that accompanied them, heard it grow and grow until it was a weird wail; then came the explosion. The nearest bomb landed two hundred feet from our house. I had thrown myself flat, and outside of shock from the concussion escaped all harm.

Charles ran from the house, and together we sat on the ground and watched the Japanese planes systematically bomb the village. It was no fault of theirs that they left a house standing; they tried hard enough. Fortunately for us and for Shiuchow, their accuracy was not up to their enthusiasm for destruction.

Altogether the Japanese dropped about a hundred bombs, but most of them landed in the open, although about three hundred Chinese townspeople were casualties, eighty of them killed. Actually over half of these injuries were caused by the Japanese planes diving and machine-gunning the people running for shelter.

Wondering if this was a forerunner of what was to come, we returned to our home as the bombers disappeared in the distance. A twenty-foot crater decorated the field at the side of our house, and all the windows were gone from that side. But that was all, and in a few minutes our laughing Chinese servants were serving our breakfast, taking it as a great joke that the Japanese had wasted so many bombs.

Next morning the Japanese bombers returned to Shiuchow. We heard the drone of their motors, and this time we were well out in the open before they started their devilment. They changed their tactics. Now they straddled out in line and began dropping their bombs. Time after time they came back, and from all the noise we were sure that it was the end of the factory. Charles was blue over the prospect, but there was nothing that could be done about it. There was not a machine-gun or anti-aircraft gun to defend the place.

Finally the bombers had done their worst, used up their bomb load and departed. We rushed over to the factory to get the answer. To our amazement, only one corner of the building had been touched, and no material damage had been done inside. Within an hour three hundred coolies were working under the direction of the mechanics, removing the machinery from the building. Manfully they labored, but it was a heavy job.

FOR the next four days the Japanese bombers returned and dropped their bombs *at* the factory. I say *at* it, for despite the fact that they were unopposed and flew fairly low, only one more bomb came close to the mark, and that one damaged another corner. The fifth day saw the factory empty. Every piece of machinery had been removed, down to the electric wiring and the waterpipes, and not one dollar's worth of damage had been done to the machinery by Japanese bombs.

Meanwhile, out under the trees other gangs of coolies had been busy building mat sheds. These bamboo-pole sheds with their mat roofs, protected from aërial observation by the leaves of the trees, afforded good concealment; and in them the machinery to build airplanes was set up in what is probably the only outdoor airplane factory in the world.

For several months the airplane factory kept up its activities out under the trees. The Japanese must have known it, for every few days they would return and scatter their cargo of bombs over the country, sometimes among the trees, and again into the town. They did destroy two mat sheds and the machinery in them, but the factory continued to turn out from three to six planes every month, depending on the supplies that came through.

Then the Japanese started in regularly to machine-gun the town. I was caught in one of these raids, suddenly, without a chance to escape. They swooped down from a great height, and almost before we knew it, their bullets were spraying the streets. With hundreds of Chinese men, women and children, I ran wildly for any shelter. There was none; the flimsy houses would not stop a machine-gun bullet. I stumbled over dead Chinese; I tore my clothing and skinned my hands and face. I saw the bullets kicking up dust all around me, Chinese falling everywhere, but I seemed to bear a charmed life. I escaped unharmed, but it was getting to be no pleasure, living in that part of China.

The Chinese officials decided that the airplane factory was too valuable to leave in a place where the Japanese were so active; and after another especially severe raid on the town, they ordered Charles to move the factory to a more secure location. We moved out onto the river, where for two months we lived on Chinese junks, while they searched for the proper factory site. And all that time the Japanese continued to bomb the almost abandoned town of Shiuchow.

Eventually the machinery was moved to a spot in the Province of Yunnan, within sight of the famous Burma Road.

It was better there, but we were never entirely free from Japanese bombings. All told, I went through thirty-five bombing raids and numerous machine-gun attacks. Each day I'd write down all the details of the day's excitement in my diary; and as I read it now, it sounds very much like the reports of the raids on London. Also after living for six years in China, four years of it under constant bombings, I'd say like the English: "There will always be a China."

"Hairy Mary"

A young Australian tries pearl-diving—and fights a strange monster.

By KEITH DOUGLAS YOUNG

ORI, my tender, was from Koepang, where only the very best diving tenders come from. Years of constant tending in the rich pearling beds that lie in the warm waters off the Northern Australian coasts had educated him to the point where he knew more than most divers. I learned almost as much from his lips as I did from my own underwater experiences.

Of the many tales he told, the least horrible of all, I thought, was his account of the dangers of "Hairy Mary." The very name, I must admit, intrigued me; but as he continued, and told me it was a giant seaweed that drifted aimlessly about the bottom like its earthly counterpart, tumbleweed, I felt I was more than a match for it. Having reassured myself on this point, I continued diving, completely forgetting his warning concerning "Hairy Mary," and thinking only of more tangible dangers such as sharks, octopi and monster gropers.

Looking back, it seems strange that I could have been such a fool as to disregard Ori's sincere warning, for many times in the past his advice had come in mighty useful and helped me out of more than one tight spot. But disregard it I did, and thereby hangs a tale.

The cruise of the tiny Japanese lugger had taken us through the archipelagoes of southeastern New Guinea, through the Louisiades, then over to some outlying islands of the Gilbert group. Now we were heading back to Thursday Island in Torres Strait with a hold almost full of shell. Gold-lip, silver-lip, and the more common but still valuable black-lip pearls, with the exception of a handful of seed pearls and baroque (blister pearl), had not come our way; but there was a tidy profit in the shell itself, so I suppose the cruise could be accounted a success.

There was, however, still a little room for more in the hold; and Okajima, the skipper, headed for some beds off the Solomons he had heard about. We arrived at a likely-looking spot early one morning, and while the native crew broke out the pump, I donned my cumbersome suit and prepared to descend. I crawled down the ladder and waited, with small wavelets slapping at my legs, while Ori screwed on my helmet and adjusted my weights. When this was done, I let go the ladder and began sliding into the hazy blue depths while the sharp *click-clack* of the pump changed by degrees to a muffled *cluck-clock* as I descended.

The water was deep—a whole lot deeper than I preferred to go; but experience had shown that at these depths I could expect to find the most valuable shell, and pearl-bearing shell at that.

I TOUCHED the bottom, advised Ori of my safe arrival, then after making the customary compensating adjustments with my exhaust valve, began searching the bottom for the elusive oysters. My time on the bottom was strictly limited owing to the depth (I was considerably more than a hundred feet down), and I was anxious to locate the bed before Ori signaled that my time was up. Suddenly I caught three split-second flashes to my right as some oysters hastily closed themselves at my approach.

I strode ponderously over to where I had seen the flashes and quickly located two of the oysters. However, I felt certain I had seen three flashes of the pearl-shell's inner nacred surface, and was loath to leave the spot without finding oyster Number Three. A diver gets in a frame of mind, where he feels sure that he'll find *the* pearl in the *next* oyster.

My time on the bottom had almost expired, and Ori had sent down one warning signal already. Nevertheless I was determined to find that solitary oyster before rising to the surface, and continued searching, but without avail. I suppose I was so engrossed in searching that I failed to notice the water getting darker. That often happened when the sun

slipped behind a cloud, so I didn't allow it to bother me. I was crouched low with my eyes fixed on the rubble and marine debris that littered the sea-floor when it happened.

Without a second's warning, everything suddenly went black. For a moment I thought I had blundered into an octopus and been squirted with the creature's sepia ink, but I soon discarded that theory, for this terrible oppressive blackness seemed to have weight and was pressing me down. I felt a wave of fear sweep over me, but I forced myself to be calm. Panic, at this depth, could easily have fatal consequences. I raised my hand to grope in the ghastly darkness for my lifeline, and as I did so, my bare hand plunged into the midst of thousands of tiny hairlike tendrils that were gradually insinuating themselves about my body. My blindness was a tremendous handicap, but I did not need eyes to tell me what had happened. A monstrous "Hairy Mary" had drifted down on me with the current, and I could feel its terrible embrace becoming tighter and tighter. I fought desperately to get my hand up to my valve and lifeline, and at last had to desist when I could move my arm neither up nor down among the myriad hairs of the encompassing weed.

I could still feel air hissing into my helmet, and although it was heavy with the mingled smells of rotten oysters, bitter graphite grease and warm rubber, it was a link with those above and told me that my air-line was still intact at least. . . . Just then, as if it was tired of playing with me like a cat with a mouse, the "Hairy Mary" seemed to tighten its grip, and I felt myself being dragged off my feet and along the sea-floor. More and more hairs were wrapping themselves about the suit, and I had a feeling I was imprisoned in wet cement which was rapidly drying.

PANIC amounting almost to hysteria overcame me at this point, and I fought and struggled frantically with my invisible and silent captor. The most I could do, however, was to shake my head inside my helmet like an idiot. I remember praying that those on the lugger would discover my plight before it was too late and my airline snapped. I guess I must have screamed then, for I felt a trickle of saliva run over my lips and down my chin.

Then came a strange "rushing" feeling, and I lost consciousness.

I came to on the deck of the lugger in such agony as I would not wish upon Hitler. I was doubled up with the "bends," since my frantic struggling had thoroughly saturated my blood with thousands of minute bubbles of nitrogen and I had been hurriedly brought to the surface without the customary, and necessary, "staging" to decompress me. Ori had removed my helmet but not my suit and I could see the deck and rails littered with festoons of the golden hairs they had torn from the suit to get me out. Ori had felt the tremendous weight on the end of the life-line and, guessing what it was, had ordered the entire crew to help him haul me up. The "boys" had deserted the pump and seized my life-line, fortunately of good strong Manila, and with all hands heaving, they had managed to break me out of the "Hairy Mary." It had not been an easy victory, as the great heaps of weed on deck bore mute testimony.

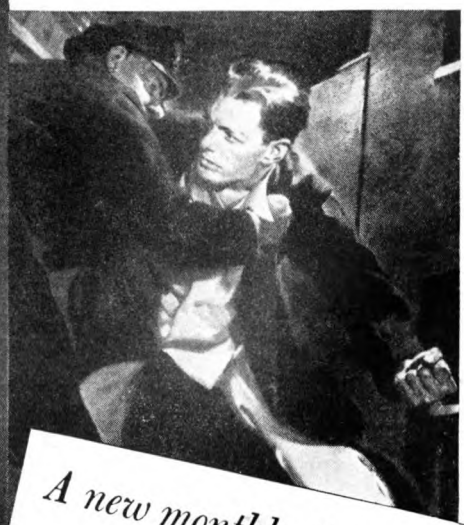
Half-crazed with pain, I dimly heard Okajima rap out a few sharp orders and the crew sprang to the halyards and raised the heavy mainsail. As the breeze filled the sail and the boat began to gather way, I writhed on deck in the most damnable agony. Particularly bad were the excruciating pains in my joints. Wrists, elbows and knees were sending out waves of pain that threatened to engulf me at any moment. When I was stripped of my sodden suit later on, a fiery red rash across my abdomen showed that I had ruptured some internal organ.

Finally the lugger was deemed to be a safe distance from the "Hairy Mary"—whereupon my helmet was screwed back on and I was dumped over the side to the level I had been working at when first caught in the weed. I fainted for the second time when my helmet was replaced and I recovered consciousness dangling at the end of my lines a few feet from the bottom. Although the paralyzing pains of the "bends" had abated, I still felt terribly weak and barely had sufficient strength to reach up and feebly tug my life-line. After what seemed an eternity, I received an answering signal from the lugger and my ascent began shortly after that.

I never dived for Okajima after that and would have given up the diving game for good had it not been for a run of bad luck at the fan-tan tables of Thursday Island which forced me to ship as a diver on a Malay lugger. But that, as somebody once said, is another story.

REDBOOK — EXCITING NEW FICTION KEYED TO THE LIFE OF OUR EXCITING WORLD TODAY

An inquiring reporter and the mystery of the red-headed woman



Who was the red-headed woman who broke into Lida Lansforth's bedroom, hit her in the face with a cigarette box and bawled her out? Lida didn't know, the police didn't know, and Andy, the inquiring reporter, tore his pants trying to find out. And why was George, Lida's husband, wandering the streets alone in his pajamas? Read "One Night in Spring"—the story of a mad, clarifying evening in the lives of four interesting people. It's a novelette by Mary Roberts Rinehart, complete in August Redbook, on sale July 2nd.

A NOVELETTE BY

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

A new monthly feature

WHERE ARE WE GOING? AND WHY?

The trend of our times reported and interpreted by **SOMERSET MAUGHAM, MORRIS MARKEY,** *and others*

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—

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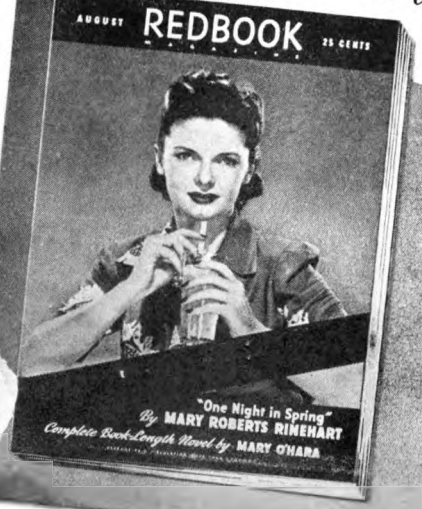

More August Fiction by

MAZO DE LA ROCHE
WHITFIELD COOK
RICHARD SHERMAN
ANDREW GEER
BRISTOL S. D. GROSVENOR

Our Readers* Write Us—

ONLY ONE FAULT

While I read many other magazines, I would like you to know that BLUE BOOK *has always been my favorite, and I have been a regular reader for many years, away back before the time of C. H. New and his series of "Free Lances in Diplomacy." I value* BLUE BOOK *so highly that I have all copies on file since 1925.*

You ask your readers for criticism and/or brickbats. I have only one fault to find, and you can remedy that: The lengthy serials are a detraction, for I do not like to have to wait so many months to complete a story. I realize that some of the best stories are too long for one issue, but believe your regular readers would prefer to have longer installments and divided into not more than three parts. I remember how long-drawn-out was "A Million for Destiny," and while I certainly enjoyed the yarn, it was irritating to wait all that time for the lot. I trust my few words on the subject may in conjunction with others you will probably receive, help you to formulate a policy on these lines.

I may remark I particularly like the topical war stories you are putting out just now—keep them up! As a veteran of the last big argument (1914-1918) they hit my fancy.

Wallace J. Browne
Sydney, Australia

A BONE TO PICK

I'm a radioman aboard one of Uncle Sam's seagoing "sewerpipes" (submarines, to you). BLUE BOOK *is tops with the boys in this outfit, and I'm no exception. It's one of the few mags that* fulfills its promise *to give the reader action and adventure—good, clean, true-to-life adventure. A far cry from the sloppy concoctions contaminating most of the periodicals.*

H. Bedford-Jones is my idea of a writer that's really got something. It doesn't take a gob long to see that he's been around. Descriptions as vivid as his aren't produced by dissolving a couple of travel-guides in a quart of liquor. If you ever discontinue him from your mag, we'll have your office torpedoed.

I've a bone to pick with Brand, in "The Luck of the Spindrift." The story is excellent, but couldn't he have stuck to his quotations and left detailed descriptions of radio-apparatus, and procedure, to us radiomen who do *understand them?*

Morris Klatskin RM 3/c,
Submarine Base, New London, Conn.

WE'RE WAITING

What is your page anyway, a mutual admiration society? Everybody thinks BLUE BOOK *is wonderful and would rather do without food and drink and Bull Durham than without the current issue.*

Doesn't anybody ever write in to say that BLUE BOOK *is a lot of drivel and the only thing he uses it for is to start fires? Or do you have a waste-basket reserved for such letters?*

Honesty compels me to admit that I like BLUE BOOK, *too; but you just wait till you publish something I can criticize. You'll get a letter so hot it'll burn the mail-bags!*

A. J. Ormsby
Hornell, New York

HOW TO LEARN ABOUT MEN

Until recently I considered BLUE BOOK *as masculine as a man's cigar and quite devoid of feminine interest. In fact I never took the trouble to examine a copy until I read it to the boy friend while his eyes were inflamed. Then I suddenly entered a new world of adventure, some old historical facts presented with dash—and sprinkled with glamour.*

Reading these books together has created a closer bond of comradeship between the boy friend and me. Women's magazines are constantly publishing articles on "How to hold your man" once you catch him. My advice—from experience—is: Get wise and read and study BLUE BOOK *to learn all about man—his ways and habits. The key to many a man's heart can be discovered between its pages. And girls, ask him to explain any scientific facts you fail to understand. Give the brute a chance to prove his superior knowledge and feel extra important to you—keep him thinking it's a man's world and that* BLUE BOOK *is the best magazine of its type.*

Elizabeth Kuelo
Schenectady, New York

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*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the ones which we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.

We specially desire for our Real Experience department true stories from the fighting men in training and overseas.