FEBRUARY 1938 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 66 No. 4

BLUE BOOK

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Don't do it, man — don't do it.

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BLUE BOOK

FEBRUARY, 1938 MAGAZINE VOL. 66, NO. 4

Seven Short Stories

A Novelette

A Serial Novel

True Stories of Adventure

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

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Printed in U.S.A.

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 these 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!

"Death on Talisman Mountain"

A not-soon-forgotten drama of strange folk in the Ramapo region, by the author of "The Devil Came to Our Valley."

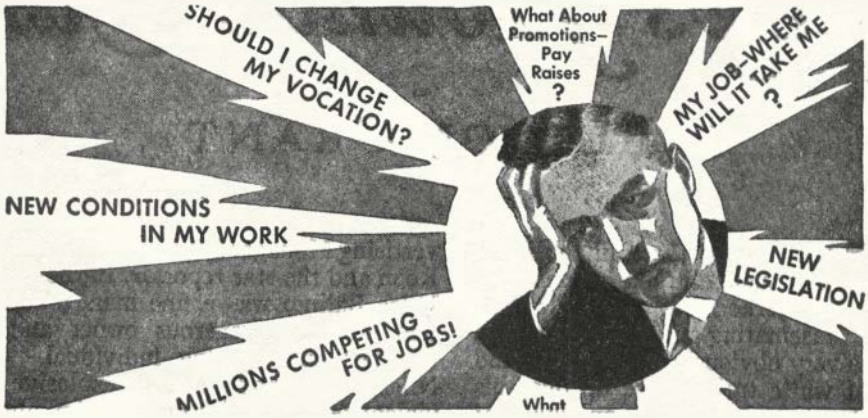
By FULTON GRANT

Coming!

A great novel of Blue Book's own hero Kioga, and that strange newfound frontier Nato'wa beyond the Northern lights.

By WILLIAM CHESTER

who wrote "Hawk of the Wilderness" and "One Against the Wilderness."



WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

YOU'RE like a million other men—you're facing a *big* question. The depression turned business topsy-turvy and now the rebuilding period stares you in the face.

Are the things that are happening today going to help or hinder you—what will they mean in your pay check? Where will they put you five, ten, twenty years from now? How can you take full advantage of this period of opportunity?

We believe you will find the answer here—a suggestion the soundness of which can be proven to you as it has been to thousands of other men.

The whole trend today—legislation, spirit, action—is to put men back to work, raise earning and spending power, *give every man a fair chance to work out his own salvation.*

The road to success remains unchanged but, bear this in mind, *what it takes to win is radically different!*

No employer today would dare risk an important post in the hands of a man who had not learned the lesson of '29. Why should he, when right at this moment he can pick and choose and get almost any man he wants at his own price?

Business organizations are rebuilding—reorganizing for the new conditions. Before it is over every man and every method will be judged in the cold light of reason and experience—then dropped, remade or retained. This spells real opportunity for the man who can meet the test—but heaven help the man who still tries to meet today's problems from yesterday's standpoint! Out of the multitude still jobless there are sure to be many frantically eager to prove him wrong and take his place.

Some Men Have Found the Answer

Seeing these danger signs, many aggressive men and women are quietly training at home—are wisely building themselves for more efficient service to their employers.

You naturally ask, "Has your training helped men withstand conditions of the last few years?"

Our answer is to point to a file of letters from many of our students reporting *pay raises and promotions while business was at its lowest ebb*—together with a myriad of others telling of greater success during these recent months of recovery.

Amazing evidence is ready for your investigation. We have assembled much of it in a booklet that is yours for the asking, along with a new and vitally interesting pamphlet on your business field.

This is a serious study of the possibilities and opportunities in that field. It is certain to contain an answer to vital questions bothering you today about your own work and earning power.

Send for these booklets—coupon brings them free. Be sure to check the LaSalle training that interests you most. We will tell you also how you can meet and take fullest advantage of today's situation. No cost or obligation—so why not mail the coupon now?

LASALLE EXTENSION, Dept. 2369-R, Chicago

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News Hounds Can

By FULTON GRANT

THEY stood there in the doorway suddenly, like a trick rabbit jerked out of a silk hat, fascinating and incredible. The man was very obviously an Oriental, and his great white turban rose up over his dusky face like a turret on the Taj Mahal. The woman was beautiful. She stood beside him, dripping with silk and pearls, and sending out steamy clouds of a rich, heavy perfume which floated through the offices of the *Free Press* like a pleasant but lethal gas.

It was noontime, which accounts for Little Billy's being at the reception-desk instead of Lulu Barnes. Billy disliked replacing Lulu. He was sixteen, and felt the job beneath him, especially now that he was almost a reporter. Possibly for this reason Billy did not hear the strangers until the man spoke. It should be mentioned also that Billy was listening to a broadcast through the earphone of his newest homemade one-tube pocket radio. He felt "safe" to do this, since Mr. Ballum and the others were having some sort of conference inside, and were likely to stay there.

"You, boy!" said the sonorous voice; and Billy jumped from his seat. "I am desiring conversation with the principal of this newspaper. You will so inform him of me. Go."

Billy gulped, and managed to wrench his eyes off the statuesque woman swathed in silk.

"Yessir," he said chokily. "You mean Mr. Ballum?"

The news-ticker by the door ticked loudly. The gimlet eyes of the Hindu bored into Billy. The woman in liquid silk slid onto a bench. The Oriental suddenly produced a white card and handed it to Billy, saying:

"Go. Give to this Mistair Ballum."

IN an inner office, Niles Ballum, owner, publisher and especially editor of the Stane City *Free Press,* was pounding a desk and driving home certain points of importance to a group composed of Advertising Manager MacMann, City Editor Roon and the star reporter, Barney Dow. Niles Ballum was a fine man, a competent editor, a generous owner and altogether an imposing individual. But Niles Ballum had a sudden, explosive and violent temper which carried him, almost daily, into raving tantrums during the life of which no man's job was safe on the *Free Press.* The staff loved him, however, and were perfectly willing to be fired now and then, as long as Niles hired them again the next day, which he generally did. It made life more exciting.

BILLY BOLES approached his employer with a certain timorousness born of experience.

"'Scuse me, boss—there's a feller outside wants to see you. He gave me this card."

Ballum glared, snatched the card, and uttered one of his profane but picturesque comments.

The card read, simply:

SWAMI SHUAN DAS, PH.D., D.Sc., F.R.A.S.

"Don't know him. Don't want to. Tell him to go to hell. I'm busy," Ballum instructed his young copy-boy; but he was interrupted. A booming voice broke in upon his petulant reply—a voice deep and vibrant.

"But no," it boomed. "Such reception, my friend, is not acceptable. I have come bringing money in what is called 'hard cash.' Shall we not—"

"What the—?" Niles Ballum began, but the Hindu lifted his hand in the air and began reciting in a singsong manner:

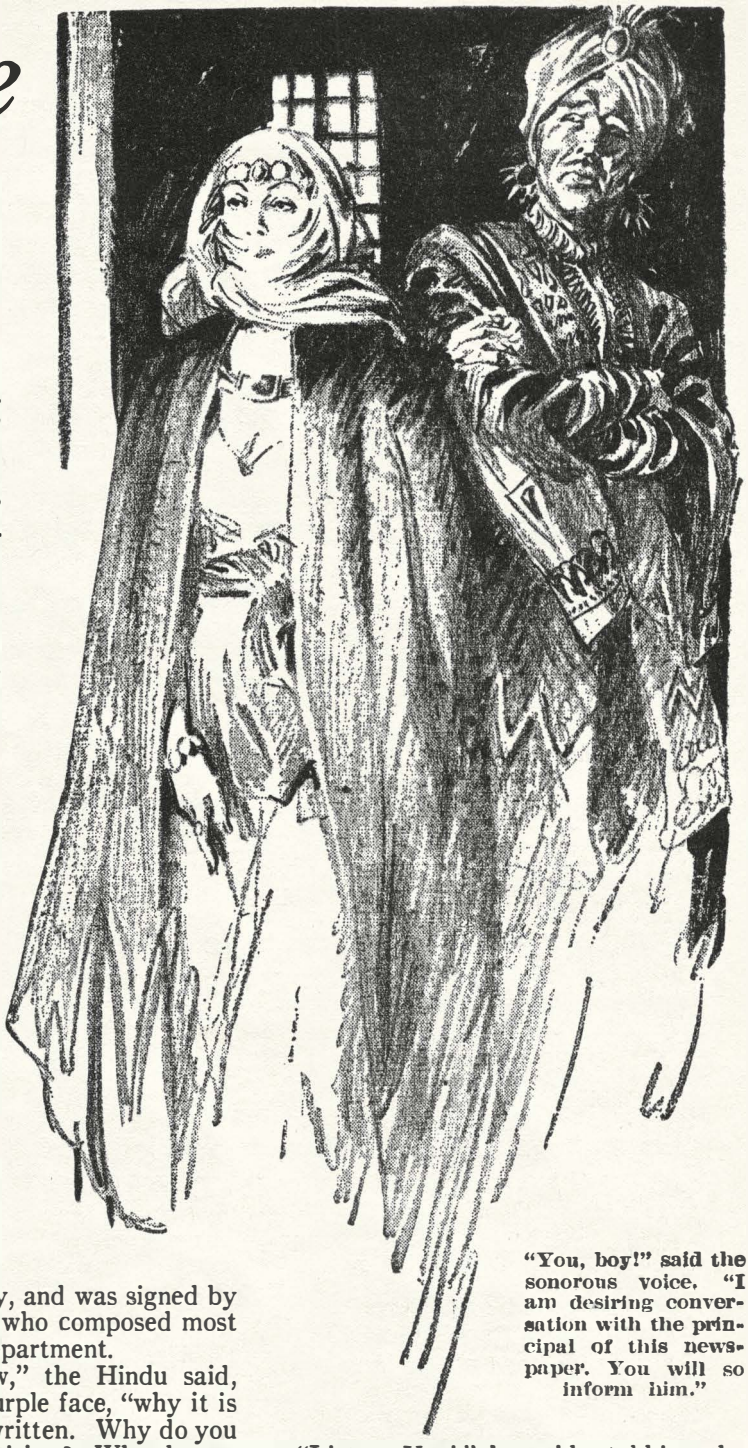
"May the peace and wisdom of Shiva fall upon you, O man, drawing the poison of anger from your heart."

That held Niles Ballum. One cannot, with good grace, use physical violence upon a man who prays. And while the editor-owner stood gaping and choking back his anger, the Oriental strode forward to the desk and laid a typewritten letter before Ballum. The letter was on

Bite

Illustrated by Austin Briggs

The able author of "The Devil Came to Our Valley," "The Pirate's Beard" and many other good ones is at his excellent best in this story of a star reporter, a cub, and of the swami's little miracle racket.



"You, boy!" said the sonorous voice. "I am desiring conversation with the principal of this newspaper. You will so inform him."

Free Press stationery, and was signed by Charley MacMann, who composed most of the advertising department.

"I desire to know," the Hindu said, ignoring Ballum's purple face, "why it is that this letter was written. Why do you not accept my advertising? Why do you return my money? What have I done which would justify such an insult?"

MacMann broke in then.

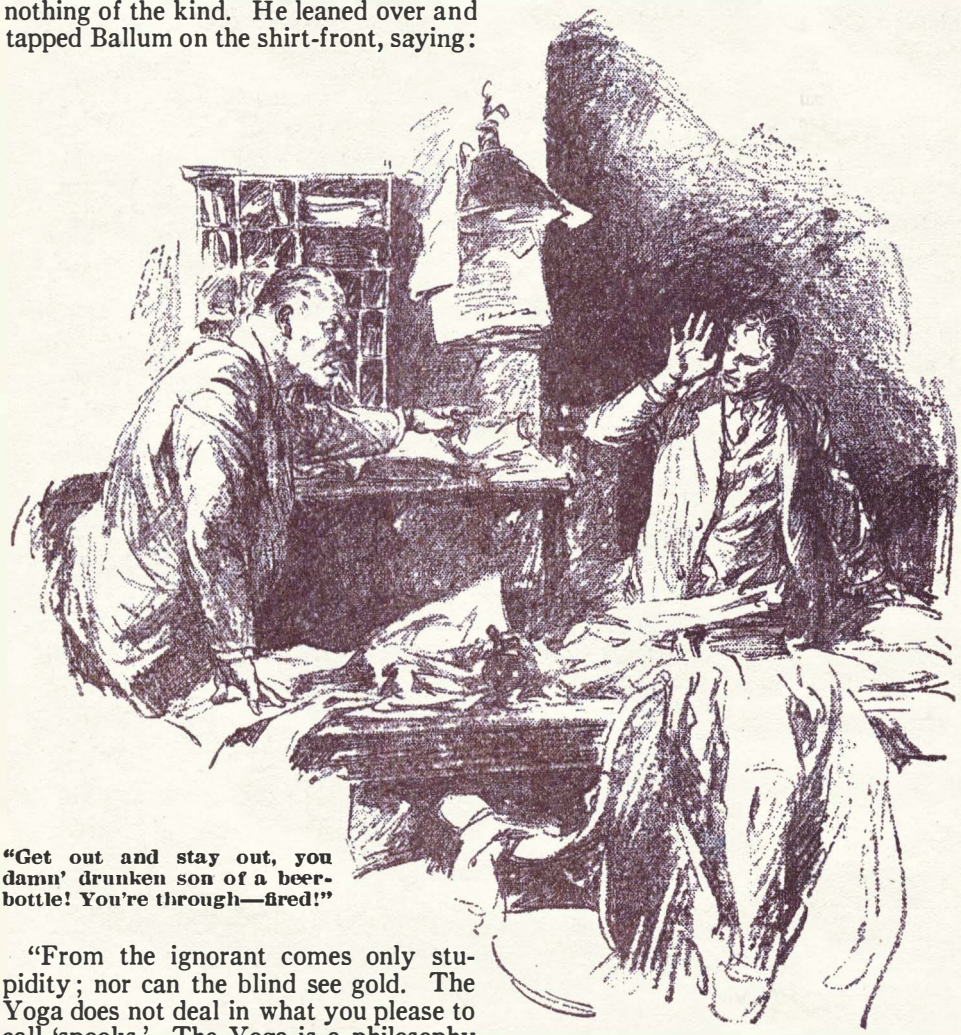
"That's right, boss. I wrote that letter. I told him we don't take that kind of advertising. I sent his check back."

Niles Ballum caught on, and this gave him somewhat of a vent for his feelings.

"Listen, Yogi," he said, stabbing the tall brown man with his finger: "That letter ought to make it clear. We just don't take advertising from astrologers, fortune-tellers, palmists and all that kind of thing. Nothing personal, see? You might be the real McCoy, see? I wouldn't wonder. Maybe you can read my bankbook through ten inches of asbestos; I

wouldn't wonder. You may be palsy-walsy with all the spooks in hell, see? But we have to have policies on this paper, and that's a policy. Well, so long. Nice to have seen you. . . . Sorry you can't stay."

Did the Hindu go, abashed? He did nothing of the kind. He leaned over and tapped Ballum on the shirt-front, saying:



"Get out and stay out, you damn' drunken son of a beer-bottle! You're through—fired!"

"From the ignorant comes only stupidity; nor can the blind see gold. The Yoga does not deal in what you please to call 'spooks.' The Yoga is a philosophy out of which grows power—the power of thought-transference, among others. Do not confuse the Yoga with the charlatans of which you are speaking."

"Okay, okay, Swami, have it your way—" Niles Ballum began, but the stabbing finger stopped him.

"I will open the eyes of your blindness, O man. I will permit you to be witnessing the power. Look you, then: In your outer office coming in there is a tocker—a ticking—how you call—"

It was Barney Dow who said:

"Sure, he means the news-ticker."

The swami nodded, haughtily grateful. "If I am telling you what is printing upon that news-tocker—ticking—tacker—that thing, without seeing it with my eyes, then will you perhaps understand a little that the Yoga is not to be confuse' with the fortune-telling?"

Niles Ballum seemed about to throw him out then and there.

But Barney Dow spoiled it.

"Hell, feller!" he said. "You don't mean you can read the ticker from *here*—without seeing it at all?"

"Yiss!" hissed this Oriental. "Exactly."

"I got five bucks says you can't do it," said Barney.

"Me too, another five!" That was Charley MacMann, who is Scotch and never missed a sure thing yet. Even Niles Ballum felt his anger quenched by his curiosity and said:

"Swami, you're nuts. But if you wanna lose another five, I'll increase that

bet. You're playing with a bunch of newspaper men, not a bevy of tea-fighters."

The swami smiled, and slowly extracted three five-dollar bills from his pocketbook, which he drew from under his silk jacket.

"The pleasure of taking your money," he said, "was not expected. Please be silent."

They were silent. The yogin drew from his vest pocket a little carved piece of jade, about two inches in diameter and about an inch thick, which was attached to a green silk cord around his throat. He seemed to warm it in his hands; then he pressed it close to his face as he said:

"It is now twelve-thirty, gentlemen. Upon the news-ticker there are many words which come, slowly. I will read—you will listen."

He closed his eyes; then he started:

"'New York society today faces a foot-sore climb up to penthouses when the city's three thousand elevator operators walk out at two P.M. in city-wide strike stop. Pasadena, Mrs. Clara Dodd Frobishter, former movie star and year's bride of the automobile magnate, purchased a ticket to Reno today, but refused all comment upon the rumor of divorce impending stop. Paris, France: violent rioting this city today as Croix-de-Feu, Rightist party, marched in parade while Leftists attacked with stones and clubs.'"

Niles Ballum stopped him.

"Hold it, Swami," he yelled. "It's a swell trick, but here's where you lose. That's all we can remember. Billy, you run out and tear off that news-ticker sheet and bring it here. I want to catch this guy while he's hot."

BILLY ran. A silent tension filled the office; and when the youngster came back, his face blank like a sheet of paper, his eyes round and staring, everyone guessed something extraordinary had happened. And so it had.

"Gee, Mr. Ballum. . . . Gee, looka here!" Billy gasped, handing over the torn-off paper.

The yogin clasped his long fingers, smiling with supreme assurance. The three newspaper men stared at the strip of ticker-sheet upon which the purple ink of the automatic machine spelled out those few lines of news.

"Gawdamighty!" said Barney Dow. "He got it word for word!"

And what Niles Ballum said cannot be printed here.

But did the yogin get his advertising contract? He did not.

The swami Shuan Das strode out of the *Free Press* offices, grumbling angrily about the stupidity of humans, yet richer by fifteen dollars—not a profitless visit.

THE next episode actually came three days later. In a sense, however, it began the very next day when the *Star*, the somewhat yellow-tinted paper which was the chief rival of the *Free Press* in Stane City, printed the swami's advertising with a vengeance. The space used was half-pages. He announced the first of a series of "Public Audiences" to be held in the Armory, under the "auspices of the *American Society for Metaphysical Research*," and with the aid of "that world-famous spiritual communicant and penetrant into the Life Beyond, Harsutra Krishtayamayavana," who very plainly was the lady in dripping silks who had sat in the lobby of the *Free Press* while the swami was educating Niles Ballum and his cohorts in a new way to lose fifteen dollars. Charley MacMann, the advertising chief, saw that ad, clipped it, and came charging into Niles Ballum's office.

"Listen, boss!" he moaned. "These policies and principles of yours are swell, and they sound grand, see? But we just principled ourselves out of about five thousand dollars, see? And the *Star* got it. I hope you get fat on it."

Ballum saw the ad and said a naughty word. MacMann departed from his office before the swelling rage in his employer's breast should use him as an outlet. And nothing more happened until the mayor of Stane City committed suicide, two days later.

That sounds queer, but it was a fact. One of the boys the *Free Press* pays to keep the paper informed about things that happen at the Municipal Building, came babbling to the phone—he was a file-clerk or something of the sort, and not essentially poised—crying that Mayor Horace M. Dunling had just blown his brains out.

It so happened that the call came in when everybody was busy, and it was Little Billy Boles who actually answered it. Billy is nobody's fool, and he knows a news-story when he hears of one. And so, failing to locate City Editor Roon immediately, he put that call through to Niles Ballum himself.

In two minutes Niles came screaming into the office, asking for Barney Dow. Barney was not there.

Ballum yelled himself hoarse; he had everybody telephoning around town to find Barney at the different places he was *supposed* to call for his routine work. But no Barney. Nothing at all. And in the meantime the biggest local story on record was hanging fire at the Mayor's office. It was then that Little Billy did his stuff.

WHEN he understood just what had happened, Billy tiptoed out the back way through the composing-room and down through the cellar where they keep rolls of paper stock. He sneaked out and ducked around the corner to Pat Mooney's saloon, where Billy knew well —only too well, in fact—that he would probably find Barney Dow. . . . He did.

To assert that Barney was drunk would be a half-truth. Barney was having one of his "happy" drunks. He had rolled up one of the bar towels and wrapped it around his head like a turban. He had put his coat on backward to make it look like the Hindu swami's black silk frock, and he was giving a drunken but plausible imitation of the Hindu yogin's trick of reading news-tickers by "thought transference," or whatever. He had a crowd, too. A usual bar-crowd, laughing and cheering and egging Barney on.

"Listen, O ig'rant peoplesh. Thish ish Shwami Barnigo Dowgogo speaking. Lemme show you 'bout yoga. Itsh won'erful. Take this telephone book, now. Turn to Page sixsh hun'erd an' four—thatsh in the J'sh. A' right; now I'm goin' to tell you whatsh on that page. Boopo-doopo-buggle-muggle-oom! Tha'sh way I talk to Shiva—Shiva's a li'l Hindu god, shee? Shiva's my pal. Okay, Shiva, le's go! On that page, fellersh, ish a lotta Joneshesh—itsh all Joneshesh. Beginsh with 'A. Jonesh' and runs through to 'Z. Jonesh.' Aint that wonnerful, now. . . . Hey, lemme alone, you!"

This last was caused by Little Billy pulling Barney away and trying to whisper to him. Barney resented it, but Billy was firm.

"Please, Barney," he was saying. "Please, the chief wants you. He's half crazy already. It's the biggest story we ever had, and there isn't anybody who can handle it except you."

The words, their import and their subtle flattery combined with the tearful face of Little Billy, had their effect.

"Wassat? What you say? Old Mayor Dunling committed *suicide?* G'wan, I don't believe it. Not our pink-and-pretty mayor. Nossir, he never had the guts. Mus' be some mistake. . . ."

"But it's true, Barney, he did. He did it right in his own office at the Municipal building . . . . shot himself in the head. And everybody's gone crazy . . . . especially Mr. Ballum . . . . he was counting on you to do the story, Barney. *Please* come back with me!"

In Billy's life there were only t ree loves: his mother; his hobby, which was radio; and Barney Dow. He worshiped Barney as only a sixteen-year-old can hero-worship. And six days a week when Barney Dow was entirely sober and in his right mind, the reporter returned Billy's admiration by shedding upon the lad some of that deep, rich light which was in his soul and which made him, drunk or sober, one of the greatest news-reporters in the country. Barney knew that Little Billy Boles had what Barney called "the stuff."

And indeed, it was scarcely a year before this writing that Little Billy—the staff called him that because of his whimsical resemblance to the famous character in Du Maurier's "Trilby"—had not only helped Barney to solve the famous Voude kidnaping case and get a national scoop for his paper, but had actually saved his life. Therefore, Barney had taken the youngster under his wing and was painstakingly instructing him in the science of news-gathering.

And now, when his hero, his demigod, was in trouble, Billy stood fast beside him, cajoling and pleading and dragging him toward the door.

"*Please,* Barney," he was urging, "You *know* they can't get along without you. Who else could cover that story?"

So Barney returned to the office.

IT was not, as may be suspected, entirely a rarity that the star reporter of the *Free Press* should, on occasion, come into the office the worse for alcohol. The staff was, after some years of him, rather adjusted to his weekly appearance in this condition. And yet their interest in the usually tempestuous meeting between the irascible Ballum and the intoxicated Dow was just as alive, just as keen each week as it had been the week before; for with Ballum and Dow, almost anything might happen, and generally did. True, Barney Dow, despite his downfall on the "big-time" newspapers

caused by this same weekly bacchanalian routine, was still the best newspaper man in Stane City—a fact which Editor Ballum knew and respected. But some fine day, the staff knew, Niles Ballum's temper would overcome his psychological indulgences, and then—

Which is precisely what happened, and for reasons.

BARNEY Dow gave the staff in the city room a silly grin, gave City Editor Roon a sillier salute, and wobbled on through into Niles Ballum's office. Ballum was blunt, vociferous, profane and outspoken as he attempted to give Barney his assignment. He ended:

"Now get this straight, you drunken slob! All the papers have got the story about Dunling shooting himself, but nobody seemed to have figured out a motive, see? Mayor Dunling was just getting to be a big shot, Barney. You know all about him. Politically he was secure. He was rich as Croesus . . . . made money during the war shipping munitions or something. And he was being touted for Governor—you know that too. Also he was happily married—married Winnie Fursdick of Manchester about six months ago. So nobody can figure why he did it. That's your job, kid. You go catch a motive and

The night watchman at the bank was found unconscious, nearly dead.

give us a scoop, Barney. That's all you got to do."

But Barney's momentary control and lucidity had abandoned him.

"Scoop?" he said. "Sure I gotta scoop, Ballum. Trus' ol' Barney. Always has a scoop in his pocket. Listen: I gotta go see that Hindu swami feller 'at took fi' dollars away from me, see? Gotta getta scoop outa the ol' swami—"

Swami! That was too much. What Niles Ballum said, precisely, need not be reported here. What Niles Ballum *did* was to grab his star reporter by his collar, jerk him savagely through his office door, drag him across the city-room, and push him violently toward the door of the lobby, yelling, among other things less printable:

"Now you get out and stay out, you damn' drunken son of a beer-bottle! You're fired. You're through. You let me down once too many. If I ever see you around here again, I'll tie your legs around your belly, you blankety-blank-so-and-so-of-a-such-and-such. . . . *Swami!* When we've got a suicide story!"

And more, much more.

Barney regained his equilibrium in the middle of Niles Ballum's maledictory speech. He gave his ex-chief a fishy grin, winked hugely at him, placed his thumb firmly upon his nose in an insulting gesture, pursed his lips and gave utterance to a sound which defies phonetic reproduction. Then he walked, unsteadily, out of the office.

THAT night Stane City Merchant's Bank was robbed of sixty thousand dollars. It was an odd robbery, and a highly efficient one. It might, indeed, never have been reported until morning had not an unknown individual with a raucous voice, obviously disguised, telephoned the police and the *Free Press*, one after the other, advising them of the crime. As to the night watchman at the bank, he was found unconscious, nearly dead from the administration of chloroform in a dangerous quantity.

An expert job, that robbery, and utterly puzzling. One of the steel panels of the employees' entrance to the bank building had been removed—scored by etching with some powerful acid, then tooled out and grasped by a suction plate to silence its removal. The burglar alarm had been disrupted skillfully. The crooks—or the crook—had burned their way through the metal frame of the vault door in the basement, releasing the powerful thrust-bolts. An electric arc-welder had been used, it appeared. The money had been taken from a smaller safe inside the vault. It was the pay-roll of the Dunling Munitions and Chemical Works, due to be distributed the next morning. That was all. No other clues. No other meaningful facts. The watchman recovered enough before morning to place the time of the robbery at about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock. He had actually started his round of the corridors at ten-thirty. Stepping through from the business office part of the building into the bank, a bag or some heavy cloth had been dropped over his head, and he had been held fast until the chloroform took effect. That was all he knew.

The curious element came from the fact that only the high-up bank officials knew of the waiting pay-roll; and only two persons, Mr. Melling, the bank president, and the chairman of the board, knew the plan of the burglar alarms and the special seven-number combination of the smaller safe, a miracle of modern mechanical cleverness. And it was impossible that Melling, the president, could have robbed his own bank, since he and his wife were actually attending one of the séances of the swami Shuan Das at the Armory, when the crime took place. As to the chairman of the board, he was no other than the late Horace Dunling, president of the Dunling Works, mayor of Stane City, and—a rather convincing fact—entirely dead, a suicide only two days before.

That was all puzzling enough, but the worst was the mysterious telephone-call. Could it be that the criminal, a victim of some sort of megalomania, had made those calls out of braggadocio? And if so, why had he only told the *Free Press* and not the *Star?* The meager skeleton staff of the *Free Press*, however, remaining to play a little poker and to stand by in case of a late story after the paper had been put to bed, was grateful to the informant, for his favoritism gave them a much-needed scoop. . . .

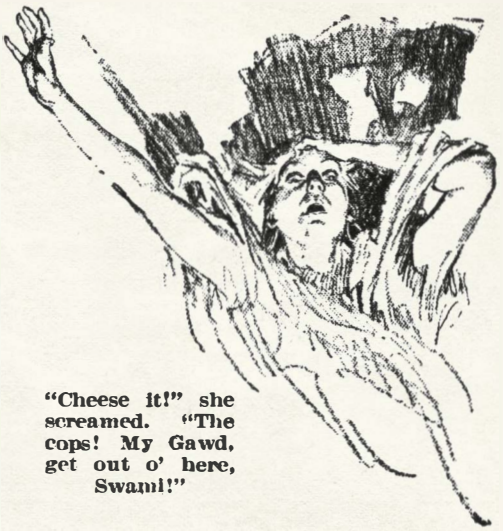
That evening was a sad one for Billy Boles, however. That his friend, hero and idol Barney Dow should have been fired from the staff was a bitter enough thing in itself. But when his day's job was over, Billy searched high and low in all the saloons which he knew his friend patronized, and even in Barney's modest boarding-house, but nowhere could he locate the able though festive reporter.

Dinner at home was slow and dull. Mrs. Boles, Billy's care-worn mother, wondered at her boy's distracted silence, but refrained from speaking of it. After dinner Billy went up to his radio shack on the top floor of his old apartment building, a tiny cubbyhole once a large water-tank but now wall-boarded and used by Billy for his experimenting, his gadgets, coils, tubes, condensers and especially that crude but efficient two-tube, twenty-watt transmitter which was the pride and joy of his young life. Radio was a passion with Billy. Indeed, he belonged to that glorious fraternity of the air, the "hams" of America—the amateur radio operators—who have passed the rigid Government examination and who hold their nightly conferences over the ether waves. Fine fellows, these—a great formless, headless society. Their ranks number sixty thousand or more. They comprehend every race, every color, every age, every profession. In time of disaster, flood, fire and famine, they have already stood by and served their country by relaying precious messages when the commercial telegraph lines have broken down.

IN his shack Billy toyed with his new pocket receiver: a tiny thing—a mere assemblage of a single tube, a few flashlight batteries, a few turns of green wire around its box to make its aërial—but efficient enough to pick up most of the broadcasting stations in a single earphone which could be slipped into a coat pocket with the set, and used at will.

For a time Billy experimented with it. He unwound some of the turns from his loop coil in order to increase the frequency to where he might receive the short waves so precious to amateurs. But his heart was not in his work that night. His heart was filled with woe and trouble and lament for the departure of Barney Dow. Hoping to shake off his depression, Billy pocketed his little radio and went down the stairs to the street, planning to visit a friend and fellow radio-hobbyist a few blocks distant.

Walking down Erasmus Boulevard, Billy toyed with his new-made receiver, pulling the phone from his pocket and endeavoring to listen while walking. Theoretically, at least, the little receiver *should* operate just as well in his pocket as elsewhere. He walked and listened, his hand to his ear. Not a sound. He fingered the knob on the little box in his pocket, changing the wave-length.



"Cheese it!" she screamed. "The cops! My Gawd, get out o' here, Swami!"

Still no sound. Perhaps he had injured it in his pocket. Perhaps nobody was operating on the twenty-meter band. Perhaps the flashlight batteries didn't stand up. Perhaps—

He was passing the much-lighted entrance of the Stane City Armory. The electric signs announced the séance of the famous Hindu Swami, Shuan Das, "worker of miracles." Billy recalled the "miracle" he had seen and heard right in the offices of the *Free Press*. A fake, of course. Barney Dow had said so. Barney always knew. But clever, very clever. Wonder how he could do a thing like that—read that ticker through the walls, at a distance of maybe a hundred feet. . . .

Suddenly Billy stopped dead. There was a voice in the earphone which he still clasped in his hand close to his ear. The voice was saying:

"Now, madame, let me repeat your question so that I may be sure. You are desiring to know if your husband will succeed in an important venture he will undertake this week. That is it? Very well, madam, I will transmit this question to the divine Harsutra. With the aid of Shiva she will both absorb my thinking and reveal to you the truth."

The thing was impossible! The voice seemed to be whispering, rather than speaking plainly, but it was very clear, very distinct. He twisted the little box in his pocket, changing the direction of the little loop aërial. When it was aimed directly at the Armory the sound was loudest. When aimed broadside to the building, it was almost gone. Now there was silence. Then there was a faint voice again—a woman's voice this time—

not easy to hear, not clear at all, saying something.

Billy stepped quietly up the steps of the vestibule. There was no one at the ticket-window, since the show had already started, and was indeed half over. He passed through toward the muffled double doors. Still no one in sight. He slipped quietly through and scuttled to a seat in a rear bench. Then he understood.

The swami stood in the aisle, clasping in his hand the little amulet of jade. The silken woman sat on the platform on a high dais. Every eye of that crowd of three hundred or more persons was fixed upon her. The yogin was talking in a whisper with one of the audience.

And in the little earphone which he pressed to his head, he could hear the swami's every word—also the whispered question of the gentleman of the audience who was testing the swami's powers.

Radio! That was the secret of the "miracle"—short-wave radio. A tiny transmitter! A tiny receiver like Billy's own concealed in the girl's clothes! Earphones under her turban. Probably the man had a tiny microphone concealed in that jade amulet. Maybe that green silk cord around his neck was a flexible wire. Elated and excited and eager, Billy Boles scrambled across the rear aisle and through the doors, as silently as he had entered.

He hurried on down the street to his friend's house. His friend was an older boy with more money to spend, and therefore was the proud owner of a more powerful transmitting station, not built on a wooden panel-base like Billy's, but a bought-and-paid-for station looking like a commercial broadcasting station in its three-story black cabinet of crackled metal. It was late when Billy arrived, but among amateur radio operators the day begins at ten o'clock at night when the "hams" go on the air. The boy's name was Proctor Ames; his station was called X2PA, and he had a two-hundred-watt power output, enough to send his call signals across the United States into far-away California.

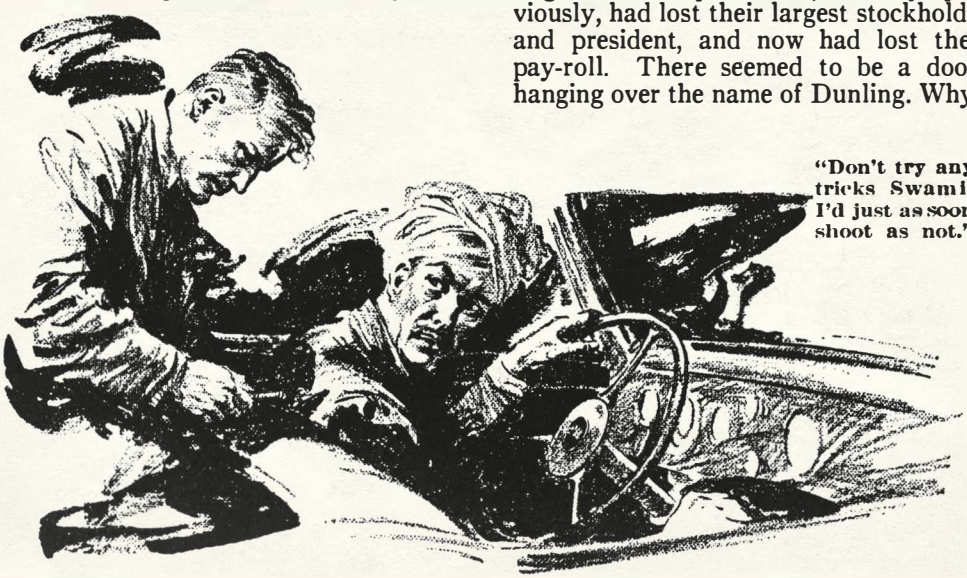
Glad enough to see Billy, he listened carefully to the curious tale the younger boy had to tell. He nodded then.

"Sure," he said. "That's possible. Say, I've got an idea. Suppose we get the gang together tomorrow night and blast out signals on that twenty-meter band. Say, we'll just ruin that show with QRM. They won't even know what's the matter. Say, that'll be a scream. Pop and Mom were going to the Armory tomorrow night, anyhow. I'll make 'em invite you and me. Say, wait till I get the gang lined up."

Then he threw the switch of his powerful transmitter and launched that call into the air:

"Calling CQ, CQ, CQ, calling CQ—"

ROBBERY of the Merchant's Bank had the city babbling with excitement. It was bad enough in itself that a modern, competently run banking institution in an up-to-date small city should be broken and entered despite the vigilance of police and guards and modern devices. But the worst of it seemed to be that the chief sufferers were those workers for the Dunling Munitions plant who, two days previously, had lost their largest stockholder and president, and now had lost their pay-roll. There seemed to be a doom hanging over the name of Dunling. Why?



"Don't try any tricks Swami. I'd just as soon shoot as not."

There was nothing wrong with Mayor Dunling. He was a mild, comfortable, *Babbitt*-ish fellow who had fallen heir to a small powder-works, had profited by the war and become wealthy.

Why pick on poor Dunling? There was no harm—nor any good either, perhaps—in Stane City's smiling, easy-going mayor. Weak, sluggish, led by the nose politically, a slave to party, pompously social, an unblushing climber, undeniably a lightweight—call him all those things, but you could find no reason why Providence should have first poisoned his soul to a point where he took his own life, then plundered sixty thousand dollars from his estate. Or was there some connection between the suicide and the robbery? The police found nothing wrong with the books. Dunling had plenty of cash in his own name, and securities worth half a million.

The next day the police actively worked on both cases. As to the robbery, they discovered nothing at all—or almost nothing. Clutched in the hand of the watchman when he was discovered and before he regained consciousness, was a piece of heavy black silk—a mere fragment, as though he had struggled and gripped something silken in his struggle, and had torn a shred of it. But the man himself remembered no such thing.

"I might have grabbed at something," he admitted. "But I was that scared and surprised—so you would be too, with a black cloth dropped over yer head from nowhere at all, and the chloroform in yer nose. . . . Nope, I don't remember about that."

Still, there was the cloth. Men don't wear cloth like that. Women don't rob banks, use acids, electric arc-welders and chloroform bags. Or not classically, at any rate. Maybe the silk came from a necktie. But even that was hard to picture. And so the police were thwarted and checkmated by a new angle to the mystery.

That day Barney Dow came back to the *Free Press*. He was entirely sober. He walked through the city-room, nodded to Roon, said, "Hi, gang," to the wondering staff, and went on into Ballum's office.

BALLUM'S jaw dropped open, and a loud, coarse word was poised ready to fall out when Barney raised his hand.

"Shut up, Ballum. This is my day to howl. Now listen: I've got the solution of the Merchant's Bank robbery. I can name the crook. I can tell you how he worked—almost. And I can give you a real scoop. Do you want that story?"

"Do I—why, you— Sure, Barney, sure I want that story. Of course I want it, you damned joker. Now you go right back to your desk and get to work. Maybe I was hot-headed the other day, but—"

"No, you don't, Ballum. Not with me. When I'm fired, I stay fired. You've fired almost everybody on this staff with music and profanity, and then pretended it was all a mistake. I told you once before you couldn't do it to me. Maybe I do get drunk once in a while. Sure I do. But I never failed to get you a story yet, did I? Now if you want this story, Ballum, you'll have to give me a new job on this sheet. I mean a *real* job."

"Why, you dirty chiseling—"

"Okay, if that's the way you feel, I'll be running along over to the *Star*—"

"No, no, wait, Barney. Don't be like that, Barney. What kind of a job do you want, Barney? I can't discharge Roon and put you on the desk, exactly."

"Don't fire Roon. I don't want to be a city editor. Me, I'm a reporter. I want a job as a roving reporter. . . . I make my own stories. I want to be able to go out and get drunk if I want to. You know me, Ballum. I always bring in a story. All right, that's the job I want—for a hundred dollars a week and an expense-account. And I want a contract, too."

Ballum's face was black. He was choking. Words curdled in his mouth before he could get them out articulately. And as he struggled to his feet, Barney Dow saluted him, kissed the tips of his fingers, and started toward the door.

"Okay," he said, "if that's the way you feel. The *Star* will give me a real job."

That did it.

"Come back here, you damned so-and-so. I'll hire you—only, go write that story now."

But Barney's head shook.

"Sign the contract now." Barney produced a piece of typed paper. Ballum swore, but signed. Barney said: "Thanks, chief. Now you'll have to wait for that story until I can prove it. See you in the movies."

And pocketing his new contract, he ran out before the storm burst. . . .

Billy Boles, returning from an errand, met Barney on the street in front of the office, and his joy was unbounded.

"Barney!" he cried. "Gee! I knew they couldn't fire you. Say, this is great!" And he pattered along beside

his idol, oblivious to Barney's curt answers, chattering of his strange adventure of the night before, when he had inadvertently "solved" the miracle of the swami Shuan Das.

SUDDENLY Barney Dow stiffened to active attention.

"Wait! What was that, kid? You took a pocket radio to that place and heard the voice of the yogin? Short waves, huh? Sure, that does it. And what's this about tonight? What gang? Oh, the radio hams—gonna turn loose with their powerful transmitters when the show is on, and make a racket to interfere with what the girl on the platform hears? That it? Say, kid, this is the berries. You and me, we're gonna scoop the town. Listen, kid, here's something new—"

And Barney, in his turn, told a story.

"I told you I figured this Hindu was a fake, eh? They're all fakes, these public performers. Houdini proved that for everybody. Lots of times their gag is just a blind for a blackmail racket. They get people to come to their 'private seances,' and they worm out a lot of stuff after they get their subject all worked up and half hypnotized. Then they use that for blackmail, see? Well, maybe I was drunk, but I figured this swami was like that. And when the mayor killed himself, I figured it must be blackmail somewhere. That old gust of wind didn't have any reason to commit suicide otherwise. So I put the two together, and when I got sobered up, I went chasing back over the trail where this swami had stopped and lectured before he got here. I found out plenty, kid, plenty!"

"Gee! That's swell! What did you find out, Barney?"

The reporter was pardonably conscious of impressing the boy. He replied slowly, capitalizing on suspense:

"Well, maybe it's only coincidence, Billy; but what I turned up is a fact, just the same. In every town where that Hindu spook-jerker has been during the last month, there has been some sort of a robbery. Laugh that off."

"A robbery! Then you mean he's the one who—"

"Maybe, and maybe not. I can't prove he robbed the bank here. I can't prove he did any of those robberies—not yet, anyhow. But in Elmira somebody stuck up a clothing-store at night and lifted over a thousand dollars cash—right while the owner of the store was sitting at the theater and listening to this yogin's lecture. Got it? In Olean it was a bus company's collector. Somebody chloroformed him and took about fifteen hundred dollars, the day's takings of three routes. And in Binghamton, somebody got away with a special fund which a local church had collected for missions and which was put away in the parish-house safe.

"Queer, hey? I can't prove a thing, kid. But think of this: that Hindu rents a whole floor at the Etruria—that costs him three hundred dollars a week or more. He's got a staff of four embryonic swamis with him,—supposed to be studying,— and about five servants. Also he spends thousands of dollars on advertising. Now believe me, son, even at five dollars a head, he doesn't take in that much money in his lectures. And those guys aren't philanthropists nor altruists. So what? Me, I dunno; only we've gotta find out what makes it worth his while. It *could* be robbery, hey?"

"But Barney—" Billy Boles was puzzled. "How could he pull a robbery when he's giving his lecture? I saw him in the Armory just about the time that bank job was pulled. . . . Honest, I did, Barney. That's when I found out about the radio gag."

Barney grinned.

"Maybe," he said, "he's triplets. Maybe he does it with mirrors. You can't ever tell about these swamis. Come on, kid, let's go and talk to Police Headquarters. Maybe that trick you and your radio pals are planning for tonight will spill the beans."

THE lecture at the Armory that night was brilliant. The rumors of the latter-day miracles which were to be seen there had brought Stane City's "best people" in droves. The swami Shuan Das fairly beamed his pleasure and unctuousness as he paced up and down the aisles, sidling up to this or that socially important—and therefore the more impressionable—dowager, and assuming a whispered tone of confidentiality as he urged her to make some demand upon the "miraculous powers" of the woman Harsutra, who still sat upon her dais on the platform. Responses were good. It had become almost a fad for society to consult this phenomenal mind-reader. True, although she invariably had seized their whispered questions by "thought transference," her replies were often if not invariably so cryptic as to admit of many

translations. But where there is will to believe, belief is easy.

The crowning moment of the evening, however, came when a frankly skeptical person, by name Paul Fenn and by profession a piano-teacher and organist at the Calvary Church, attempted to trip the yogin up. Instead of following the general practice of whispering confidentially into the Hindu's ear, this fellow got to his feet and sneeringly informed the entire audience of his plan:

"Folks," he said, "I still think this man is a fake. I'm going to try to show him up. I'm going to hum a little tune in his ear, and I want him to transfer that tune to the lady and have her tell us what it is and who wrote it. I'll write the name and the composer on a piece of paper for everybody to see."

BUT the swami was not in the least disconcerted. He bowed deeply and with gravity. "If it please Shiva," he said, "you shall be satisfied."

Then he leaned forward to listen to the man's humming, clasping his precious amulet in his hand not far from his face. He nodded, prayed into his amulet and closed his eyes as though in deep thought, while the piano-instructor passed a little card down his row of seats. It was a tense moment.

Presently, however, the girl on the platform got down from her seat, walked to the piano which had been drawn to the rear for their performance, and played several bars of music, after which she announced:

"A delightful composition, Mr. Fenn—the second movement of Ravel's 'Pavane for a Dead Child.'"

The crowd roared their appreciation, and the Hindu bowed low once more. Fenn, the organist, mumbled some words of apology. He too had been converted. It was then precisely eleven o'clock.

And at that instant the woman on the platform screamed.

She screamed—and screamed again.

She staggered from her seat and clawed at the veils and wrappings about her head and face as though some stinging insect were causing her torture inside. Still screaming, she stripped the cloths from her face and flung them away. The spectators might, had they thought of it, been astonished to hear the dull thud as of a heavy object which these flimsy, filmy rags made as they struck the floor. But the spectators were lost in their bewilderment, caused by other revelations.

When her veil and wrappings came off, it shockingly developed that the mystic lady Harsutra, far from having the swarthy skin and jet black hair of the East Indian, had a flaming head of ruddy hue, and a skin as white as any in the auditorium, save where the applied color disguised her features and forehead, leaving a white rim at her neck and chin.

But she still screamed, now more articulate. She screamed words which were a far cry from those used by the stately follower of Yoga but a few minutes before. "Cheese it!" she screamed. "The cops! My Gawd, get outa here, Swami—the cops is on the air."

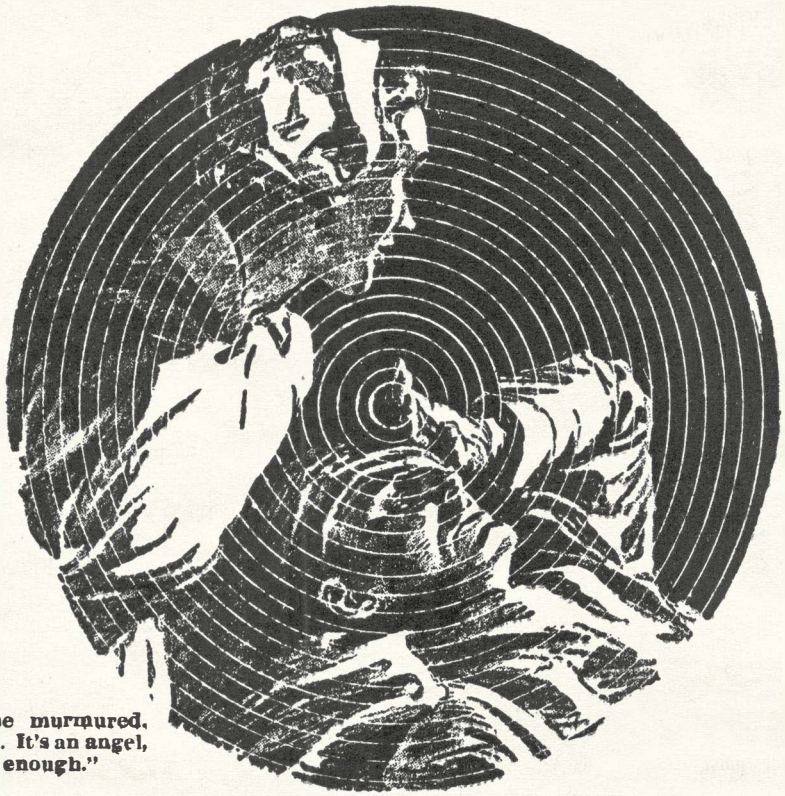
Then she screamed as in a mortal agony, and collapsed to the platform.... And with reason.

At her first cry the swami had started toward the platform. At her second he had stopped and stared with complete amazement, watching her tear off her headdress. And at her last cry concerning the "cops," his hand was seen to reach under his silk robe, appear with something that glittered, fling far back of his head and hurl forward again, emitting a sparkling streak which ended in the girl's breast and stood there quivering while she fell.

Then the yogin ran, hurdling a seat, plunging down the aisle, smashing at hands which tried to restrain him, darting through the rear doors, and vanishing down the steps.

PANDEMONIUM broke loose inside then. Women shrilled and screamed; men charged the aisles. The whole crowd stampeded and became an immovable, seething mass of brainless bodies. Almost five minutes elapsed, because of this congestion, before the first pressing, fighting figures were able to break through the doors and give pursuit outside.

But actually there was no pursuit. The Hindu, once in the street, seemed to have planned for just such an emergency. Quickly he darted toward the rear of the Armory. At some distance down the street was a long black car, carefully parked at a corner where there should be nothing to impede its quick removal from the curb. The yogin leaped into this car, jammed the starter and was rolling away before the first of the startled crowd had turned the corner behind him. So rapid was his escape, so deft were his movements, that he did not peer into the rear tonneau of that powerful seven-passenger machine—else he might have altered his



"God!" he murmured. "I'm dead. It's an angel, sure enough."

plans considerably. As it was, he darted through the side-streets until he arrived in the broad reaches of Cyclorama Drive; then he opened the throttle, and the great heart of the machine purred its loudest song as the car hurtled with increasing speed out to the highway. . . .

The Hindu was bent over his wheel. His turban was a little askew, and perhaps interfered with his rear vision as well as his hearing, for he did not notice the two figures, one tall and lanky in silhouette, the other short and evidently young, which quietly rose behind him. A firm hard object was thrust into the small of his back and a voice said:

"Take the next turn to the right, Swami. You aren't going places tonight. And don't try tricks. I'd just as soon shoot as not."

The Hindu made no audible reply. The mysterious power of Yoga seemed to fail him then; nor was he able to perceive, through any means of thought-transference, that the object thrust into his back was not an automatic but a small fountain-pen flashlight, or that the voice behind him came, not from one of the police force of which his girl associate had warned him, but from one Barney Dow, reporter on the Stane City *Free Press*. He slowed the car. He made the right turn as directed. He heard the voice say:

"Billy, you feel under his clothes for that radio gadget. We'll need it for evidence."

He felt hands probing his ribs, fingers seeking and finding the belt of flashlight batteries and the little box which contained his transmitter for "thought-transference."

"In Elmira," said the inexorable voice behind him, "it was an Armenian owner of that clothing store. You knew that he was in America without a passport, so you blackmailed him to give you the dope on his store. You made it look like a robbery but poor old Almasian practically gave you that money. In Olean, though, you did a good stick-up job—no cheap blackmail about that. In Binghamton you wangled the dope about the church collection out of a poor old lady who came to you in trouble. That was just another little job. Are you gonna tell us how you made poor old Dunling tell you about that money? Better tell me now. It'll save some tough going, later."

The Hindu said nothing.

"You made him tell you, and then he shot himself—that right, Swami? He was the only one who could have told you. You got something on Dunling,

and you scared him into telling you. Thought you were pretty smart, hey? You knew he was a worm—just a poor worm the big shots have been flattering. So you blackmailed him, hey? Made him tell you. Made him look like an accessory to your bank-robbery, hey? So he wouldn't talk. Come on, Swami, shall I go to work on you to make you talk?"

But the turbaned figure in the driver's seat made no sign that he heard. The car began to accelerate now. The speedometer slipped its needle over slowly from fifty to sixty-five. Then sixty-seven. Then seventy. Barney pressed the "gun" into the man's back, saying: "Take it easy, Swami; we don't scare worth a damn. If you wreck this car, you get it as bad as we do."

But the swami merely shrugged.

Suddenly he slumped forward. His hands fell from the wheel. The car gave a wild lurch. Barney snatched at the wheel, caught it too late and too roughly. The heavy car gave to the right, slowly, then gathered momentum which threw its rear end around. To lose control of the wheel at seventy miles an hour is death. Barney shouted to his young friend:

"Duck, Billy! We'll crash!"

He threw himself at the wheel in a frantic effort to save, but a sharp bend in the road completed the skidding car's destruction. Like slow motion, the car seemed to brush through the corner barrier of white stakes, and to sail far out into the ravine below, settling in the brushwood with a rending crash.

Then darkness shut down.

BARNEY Dow awoke in a white bed in a white room, with a panorama of white beings hovering around him. His head was paining badly, wrapped in swathing bandages so tightly that only his right eye was exposed and usable. The pain seemed to be spreading to every part of his body. He groaned. He opened his only remaining free eye and blinked. He groaned again. In the room somebody said:

"Thank God! He's coming out of it."

Barney tried to sit up, groaned at the pain, and relaxed again. Then he whispered hoarsely:

"Somebody give me a drink—what I mean, a drink!"

Some one laughed nervously. A voice said:

"Well, maybe the hospital can find a drink for a hero. What'll it be?"

Barney sat swiftly up in bed, glowering out of his single eye.

"Who the hell made that crack? Whaddya mean, hero? Where's Little Billy? Where's that drink?"

Then he fainted with the pain and the effort.

HOURS later, he came back into consciousness. The odor of carbolic was somewhat diluted by another smell, a familiar odor. He opened his eyes. He saw a white-robed figure. "God!" he murmured. "I'm dead. It's an angel sure enough!"

A woman's voice said briskly:

"No, Mr. Dow, just a nurse. Here's your drink, if you still want it. The interne said it would be all right."

Barney drank. The whisky was good. Felt good—did good. He opened his eye and stared around. There were flowers. A big scrawly sign on a bunch of lilies read: *"From the Gang!"* Another said: *"Barney Dow, he catchum Hindu! Rah!"* A third said: *"Compliments of the Police Department."*

"Hey," he called hoarsely. "What *is* this?"

The nurse had a sense of humor.

"I said you were a hero," she remarked.

"Cut it out. I figure I got hurt in that crash. Tell me, nurse, and stop kidding."

She crossed the room and picked up a newspaper from a table.

"Try reading this—if you can," she said; then she fled.

It was a copy of the *Free Press*. It was dated October 22, whereas Barney knew perfectly well that the date was only October 18. But still more startling than the impossible date was the impossible headline, a three-line, eight-column banner, flaming across the page:

CRASH ENDS CAREER OF ORIENTAL CROOK: FREE PRESS REPORTER IS NEAR DEATH AFTER HEROIC SCOOP

And under the bank on the right-hand column was the italicized inscription:

This incredible story was written by the Free Press *staff writer, Barney Dow, who dragged his bleeding body two miles into the city, aided by a boy, and actually typed the first two paragraphs, after which he collapsed and was taken to the hospital. The editors take pleasure in presenting to* Free Press *readers such evidences of loyalty, responsibility and old-fashioned heroism in a world of waning principles and increasing softness.*

Then followed the story.

Barney stared, gasped and swore.

"Hey!" he called out to the empty room. "Hey, I never wrote this story in my life." And yet he knew well enough that the style was his own and that no other man on the paper could have written that copy. Also no other man could have given the information: His flying trip through northern New York State cities—his talks with the police officials of those cities concerning the activities of the Hindu.

BUT there was much more. There was material which Barney had never known nor even guessed. There was a sort of life-story of the Hindu swami Shuan Das, told by one Mae Manny, alias Harsutra Krishtayamayavana, alias many other names, whose fondness for "brave and daring" gentlemen had led her to follow the late, but not lamented, Mike Denniger, America's recent Public Enemy, now stopped in mid-crime by G-men's bullets. Mae Manny used the Hindu's amorous attentions to conceal herself, disguised as Harsutra, from the watchful eyes of the F.B.I. She had been a big help to the Hindu. And when, one day, he gave her full confidence as to his blackmailing operations, it had been the girl herself who had pointed out to him the possibility of "big-time" criminal operations, and the "perfect" alibi possible by using his public appearances in the lecture hall. This, she said, had been accomplished by training the four young men, his "disciples," to disguise themselves and to take over his lectures now and then, the public suspecting nothing at all. Obviously a man who appeared in public at the moment of a crime could not be suspected.

It was a good news-story, Barney admitted; but beyond the first two paragraphs it contained information which he could not have known. . . . Yet the style was the same. How could he, Barney, have known, for instance, that Horace Dunling, the jovial, easy-going mayor of Stane City, had been blackmailed into giving the Hindu information about the sixty thousand dollars in the vault of the Merchant's Bank and the secret combination? How could he have known that the ruse employed was that Mae Manny had presented herself as his "lost" daughter by a wife whom he had abandoned twenty years earlier and had neglected to divorce before he married again? And as for the accident, the wild automobile ride, the crash from which he and Billy Boles had escaped with minor injuries only by a miracle—who but himself could have told that story?

And Barney Dow, sore and weak and baffled and uncomfortable in his bandages, found himself growing in resentment toward that story.

"Hero, hell!" he grumbled. "That's a lotta nuts. Wonder what happened to the kid, though."

Then his door burst open.

"Barney!" It was Little Billy's voice. The boy came in violently and all but embraced the injured reporter. So violently indeed, that Barney did not see the others standing there; nor did he notice at first the new and stylish clothes and grown-up hat which stood out on the shaggy-haired lad like a bandaged thumb. "Gee!" exclaimed Billy. "Gee, Barney, I was afraid you—well, I was afraid—we were sorta—you know—"

"Yeah," said Barney, "but I don't kill easy. Now tell me this, kid, who the devil did that blurb in the paper about this hero stuff? Who wrote that story? I'm gonna raise hell—"

"You," said a voice, "can start right in raising hell now. I'm running this paper, Dow, and I'll run it my way. Shut up and take this—from me to you, you so-and-so."

THE voice was Niles Ballum's. Behind it was the editor's grinning face; behind him was grouped the entire staff. In Ballum's hand was a bottle which was extended to Barney. The grin spread contagiously over the entire group.

"Listen, Barney," said Ballum. "You tried to write that story, but you collapsed. But we didn't know it at all. Nobody knew how badly you were hurt, so we left you and Little Billy alone. So we have a new man on the staff now. A new man, and one of the best. His style shows a pronounced Dow influence, but perhaps that's natural. As for you, you're going on a vacation with pay. You can hang around the office now and then if you want, if you'll give our new man a hand sometimes; only we don't think he needs much help now. Meet our new staff-writer—Mr. Boles, Mr. Dow."

Said Barney, after due hesitation:

"Gosh! Say, isn't somebody going to open that bottle? Seems to me there's a ceremony about a new man on the staff."

Somebody did.

Another fine story by Fulton Grant will be a feature of our next issue.

Manchukuo Dance

By Sidney Herschel Small

Special knowledge of the East adds weight to this fine story by the author of "The Lord of Thundergate."

THE northbound Chinese Eastern Express whistled in the night, answered by a tremulous throbbing echo from the narrowing Manchurian plain. There was a nervousness in the sound, which Andrew Wickson knew had been increasing ever since the train had left Harbin. The Japanese engineer must know what had happened to his mate in the engine-cab of that train which had been halted and looted, a week ago, at Bridge Thirty-six.

Wickson slid out of his berth in the cold black compartment and went to the window. As the track curved for a bridge approach, he was able to see a lantern

"There will not be even a friendly hand to place incense on your grave, provided they dig you one. . . . I will not permit you to go. —You insist? I feared as much!"

being waved in some intricate signal. The train slowed, crossed the shaky Russian-built bridge at moderate speed. Without this new signaling, unlike the customary simple arc of light, and different at each bridge, Wickson realized that the engineer would have pounded the train across without slackening.

Trust the Japanese not to be caught twice by the same trick. Wickson, his face showing tired, grim lines as he snapped on his berth light, wished that they hadn't been caught the first time.

Ordinary bandits, Mongol or Manchu *hun'hutze,* couldn't have figured out how to stop a train with proper signaling. Exactly what had happened, who the raiders were, the Manchukuoan-Japanese authorities were not telling, if they knew. Wickson dared not ask, lest his interest cause him to be removed from the train and returned to Dairen. It was understood that he was going to Tsitsihar merely to conclude his company's business there; although even this, for the powerful Meade Corporation, had been troublesome to arrange. For the Japanese, now that their war-machine was rolling over China, were impatient of civilian problems.

He knew this much: the train had been stopped, a week ago, at Bridge Thirty-six; the crew had been killed; one person at least had been carried off with the loot. . . . Jacinth—Jacinth Meade, who'd

told him she never wanted to see him again, never, never! Jacinth, hair golden as the gem for which she was named.

Wickson marked his map. This was the thirty-second bridge since Mukden; three more, and then Thirty-six. The train, now that it was Japanese-operated, would be on schedule, which meant that the thirty-sixth bridge would be reached before daylight. This was important, since Wickson had noted that there was not only new signaling, but a military guard at each bridge.

He was traveling first-class, in order to have a compartment to himself. This also was vitally important.

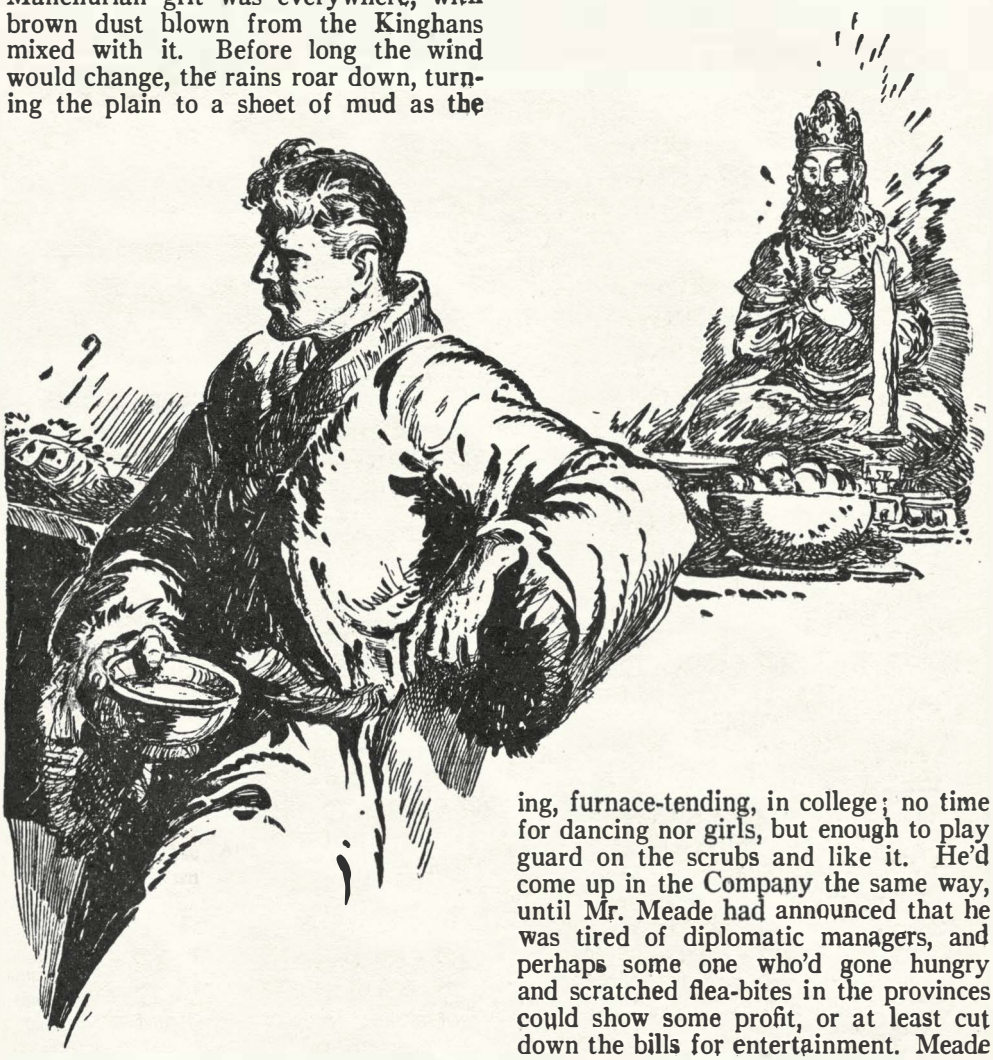
It was four o'clock, a black morning. Manchurian grit was everywhere, with brown dust blown from the Kinghans mixed with it. Before long the wind would change, the rains roar down, turning the plain to a sheet of mud as the rivers overflowed. The fleeing robbers probably counted on that.

Wickson turned off the light, and cigarette in mouth, match ready to strike, saw a faint eastward gleam, yellow.

Then the color vanished. It wasn't the sun, but some nomad's fire.

His teeth cut through the cigarette, the bitterness of wet tobacco nothing to his own as he realized that if Jacinth had been sold to nomads, any search would be useless. Nomads, like their fires when a train passed, disappeared. If Jacinth had been sold to them, which was what ordinary bandits would have done with her, she would never be seen again. But Wickson clung to his original feeling that the holdup had been too cleverly planned to be ordinary bandit work.

Wickson had figured it out slowly. He wasn't, he knew, a smart man. He'd always done things the hard way. Hashing, furnace-tending, in college; no time for dancing nor girls, but enough to play guard on the scrubs and like it. He'd come up in the Company the same way, until Mr. Meade had announced that he was tired of diplomatic managers, and perhaps some one who'd gone hungry and scratched flea-bites in the provinces could show some profit, or at least cut down the bills for entertainment. Meade had no objection to routine bribery, but saw no sense in dinners for attachés too self-important to return them.



Wickson had met Jacinth in Hongkong, while receiving Meade's orders. What

happened next was hard for him to believe, right up to the moment he was kissing her. It was doubly marvelous when, later, she cabled him from the States that they'd waited long enough, and she was coming to Peiping—on a Japanese boat, since the American ships were all tied up, strike-bound.

HE had tried to learn things while she was crossing; manners, conversation, dress, even how to dance. There was no grace in his big body, and the same lack of coördination which had kept him on the scrubs. Even the half-caste teacher gave him up after a dozen lessons.

Jacinth had said, when he met her, "Darling, you've grown again!" and had then introduced him to the man beside her. "The Captain's invited me to the Legation Ball. He gets one dance. The rest are yours." Her eyes were bright, and shy. "We've never danced together, have we, Andy?"

It was difficult for Wickson to explain that they wouldn't now, since merchants weren't invited to the ball. He did it poorly, with no help from the other man. As a matter of fact, the Captain's attitude indicated that there were no caste lines; that it all depended on the merchant. Jacinth, misunderstanding, in no time was using the word *jealous*—and walked away with her train-companion.

Andrew had gone to her hotel; she was dining at the Legation. He waited for her to return. "Apologize in the morning," Jacinth told him.

Morning showed him a different girl, as proud as before, but one badly hurt. Knowing, or thinking she knew, why Wickson was not welcome at the ball, she gave him no chance to speak, but stormed about the Eurasian girl; oh, everyone was talking about it! Andy, amazed, blurted out the truth. The girl was just a dancing-teacher. That was all. Just a dancing-teacher. Jacinth, thinking the obvious, hearing this agreement to what the Captain had mentioned so casually, had stared, and then shoved Wickson out of the room. Had he caught her to him, she would have wept out her pride, misery and anger in his arms.

She left Peiping before Andrew realized how his words must have sounded.

Nothing was to be gained by damning the male wrens of the Legation, one of whom had arranged Jacinth's transportation north to connect with the Trans-Siberian at Karymskaya, since she insisted on leaving immediately, and all foreign vessels carried full lists because of the American strike. Less was to be gained by cursing the attaché who came twittering about the abduction. Wickson had listened to the few facts. When the man began mourning that it was all very difficult, since the Japanese Government believed it a matter for Manchukuo, and the United States had no relations with the latter, Wickson stonily closed his desk.

A cold-blooded fish, the attaché reported. . . .

Now, in his bleak compartment, Andrew tried to recall if he had neglected anything; he had left Peiping in a hurry. He did things poorly when rushed, although there had been pitifully little to be done.

The engine hooted again, and Wickson said aloud: "Bridge Thirty-three." It, and the next two, crossed the winding river where there was nothing but tule marsh, impassable except to natives. But at Thirty-six there was a caravan bridge also, often washed away during the rainy season, and a mile upriver, a collection of huts called a village. Wickson had done some buying there. Perilla seed, sesamum, horn, bristles, a few good skins.

BRIDGE Thirty-four. . . . Thirty-five. There was, now, the faintest of green streaks, off to the east, intensifying the blackness of plain and sky.

He had the map open again, the light on. The exact Japanese-printed map showed eleven miles to Thirty-six. Wickson, with unusual abruptness, changed his intention, which was to drop from the train when it slowed, swim the river, and walk the mile or so, on the far side, to the village. The devil with it! He'd roll when he jumped, and leave the train above the bridge. Save time. It didn't matter that a week had elapsed. He wanted to avoid the wasting of minutes.

The train rocked across the bridge. Wickson had a glimpse of lanterns, soldiers. With increasing speed, the train hit a straight stretch. Andrew opened the window, dropped his bag out. He put both feet on the sill, pulled himself up, turned, balanced, and, backward, thrust himself away from the car.

Cold air whipped him; then he thudded down, rolling over and over. The train swung on toward Tsitsihar. He had not been seen by anyone.

His right shoulder ached, and skin had been scraped from forehead and cheek; but when he stood up, he knew that the rest of him was only bruised. He ran

back, found his bag, and took from it gun and holster, hurling the suitcase behind a hillock, out of sight.

Behind him, as he hurried toward the river, the sudden sun swept up, pale and wind-swept, across the plain where sheep and shaggy ponies grazed, without sign of herder. He stopped at the bank, unbuckled the holster, and waded into the mud. Water rose waist-high, then to his arm-pits. Once he slipped, but kept the gun dry.

The wind cut through him when, dripping, he began to run again. He didn't mind the cold; it made him doubly alert, and he was going to have need of his wits. Need of the one thing which he had least. Perhaps he'd learn nothing. The thought made him run the faster. Oh, Jacinth! Here through his fault, she who was so swift and impulsive. . . . Where? In a skin tent on the plain? Sold to wandering Tartars? In a raider's camp?

Village dogs began to bark, snap, before he slowed; he hurried to the one big mud-and-timber house of the town, kicked more mongrels out of the way, and hammered on the solid wooden door.

It was opened without whining questions, a good sign, showing that the merchant within was not afraid of bandits. Wickson had hoped this would be the case. There had to be a reason why a merchant of standing lived here.

The room was hot from the *k'ang,* the stove filled with brittle kaoliang stalks and used as chair and bed. Yuching Kou squatted on it, his head covered with a peaked cap of citron-yellow felt, his wadded blue coat fastened by a scarlet girdle, his trousers claret red. On his feet were *wda,* Manchu boots stuffed with grass. The pungency of a Russian cigarette hovered over the *k'ang.*

Blinking, the merchant asked, *"Chi chong ngo kin ko ni?"* ("How have you been since I last saw you?")—as if this were a polite call, and not being made by a white man with torn clothes, bloody face. *"Hai!* That was a fine banquet given you by the merchants when you left us! I ate until I was red in the face." Puffing on his fat cigarette, he added cautiously; "Does it rain, that you are so wet?"

"When a man falls from a cloud," Andrew quoted, "he cannot expect to find a soft bed beneath him."

"And it is the same from a train? *Ho!* Your health is excellent?"

Wickson said: "I cannot observe the formalities. Do you know where the white woman has been taken?"

Wickson was forced to walk so closely to it that the big rock appeared to move.

The merchant looked at his cigarette. He said, "Ah," and next: "Where women are involved, there are no formalities." He clapped his hands, shouting orders. "You will put on dry clothes, and as we have rice, tell me about this woman."

WICKSON stripped. The paunched Yuching Kou grunted at the sight of the white man's muscled body. Reaching for a padded undervest, Andrew said: "Where is she?"

"You are as bad as the Japanese," the merchant wheezed. "They came to me with a thousand questions, the answers to which they wrote down in little books." He sighed. "I fear I was of no assistance."

Steaming food was brought, a porridge of millet, soup of chicken and bamboo shoots, slices of pale smoked salmon, oval dumplings of wheat flour.

"Sit beside me," invited Yuching Kou. "It is well that I am fat, for my clothes fit you across, if not up and down. Try a dumpling. They are very good." He popped one into his own mouth, and chewing, mumbled: "The bandits of old

Kharabieff have taken her into the hills, my son. There is no help for it."

Wickson's hand shook as he lifted a bowl of scalding tea.

"No man," whispered Yuching Kou, "knows his own servants, so we must speak with caution. I would assist you, since you are of our guild. It happened like this. I became weary of one-sided trading with thieves, and Russians or no Russians, I told them so. I said: 'No more food, cartridges nor tobacco, unless you pay.' So—they robbed the train, taking money and a maid."

THE merchant filled his mouth with salmon, then continued: "Before the Japanese came, life was easy for these white and half-white bandits. It is different now. Nor are they in undisputed possession of the hills. There are other bands, not starved sons of coolies, but deserters from the armies. Trading with any of them, even at a profit, has become risky. I am about to retire, far from here, and it is my advice that you go with me. But you will not take this advice?"

Andrew said: "No."

"Then let us consider the possibilities, guild-brother. If you complain to the Japanese, or even tell them where she may be, the soldiers will be seen on the plain, and bandits and girl will vanish. If you go after her, alone, you will be captured, and there will not be even a friendly hand to place sticks of incense on your grave, provided they dig you one."

"How do I get there?"

Yuching Kou sucked grease from his thumb. "There is a third possibility. Tell me this: can you dance?"

"No!"

"Do not shout." Yuching Kou could not understand the white man's vehemence. "I mention it as the third possibility. These bandits have a custom brought with them from beyond the northern border; a maid goes to the man who dances best. The others, if they fail after trying, are killed." He scratched his chest, searched inside the padded coat and found the flea; cracking it between his nails, he added: "As dead as this flea. However, it is always a chief's son who wins, and there is no longer any competition. It is merely a custom."

"You mean I could get there, and say I wished to dance for her?" It would give him his excuse to get to the bandits' hiding-place. Wickson was ready to grab at the chance.

Yuching Kou said earnestly: "Do not try it. She will go to the chief's son. No other member of the band will dance for her; they know what the outcome would be. I will not permit you to go. I—You insist? I feared as much. Very well. It is written that a guild-brother may not be refused information. I will have writing-materials brought, and we will act as if completing a transaction for what goods of mine remain here. Let us say the price is—two thousand, gold. You have that amount?"

Wickson nodded. He hadn't expected to receive information for nothing. It was enough to be told anything which would set him on the way.

"So," said Yuching Kou. He began writing, shouting the price for this, for that. As he wrote, he began to make a map on the paper, showing rivers, landmarks across marshy ground; he wove in, under his breath, shrewd comments.

A turn to the right here. A doubling-back there, around a mound in what was almost swamp. The Japanese had never been able to find the bandits' lair, and no wonder. Next, a scrubby birch forest. Another stretch of plain. A hut where woodcutters worked. A cave along a river-bank, in which, long ago, gold had been found. Three peaks on a hill; a man must walk toward the peak on the right, until he reached a second water-course. Before long the stream narrowed. . . .

"And so," the Chinese ended, after finishing his instructions, "you arrive. You say that you cannot dance. What, then, will you do?"

"Russians are white men. They—"

"Are part white, part wolf. They steal the ragged women of the herders. Think what this flower-maid means to the chief's son."

Wickson said savagely: "That's just what I'm thinking."

WHEN Andrew started westward, away from the railway and toward the hills, the sun was up. In his ears rang shouts of Yuching Kou; in accordance with the usual fashion, the merchant was howling that he had been robbed, tricked and betrayed by the white man. Almost before Wickson was out of sight, however, the fat Chinese began preparing for departure. He had no intention of having any bandit ask how the white man had learned the way to the lair. . . .

An old crone appeared accompanying Jacinth, garbed for the wedding. . . . The girl's eyes were blank.

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

The marshy plain was flooded with light. There was always the rolling brownness, with irregular patches of high grass; always the purple-dun shoulders of the rising hills, streaked with black where ice, wind, had bitten ravines. Overhead, the sky was blank, lilaceous; ahead only was there a cloud, hanging as if impaled on a peak.

Wickson reached the birches when the sun was behind that cloud. Following the merchant's advice, he prepared to spend the night among the trees. He had no fire, not because he feared the bandits, but because he had no intention of falling prey to other thieves, the native *hun'hutze* who robbed herders or unarmed caravans.

He ate the soggy handful of dumplings he'd stuffed into the breast pocket

of his Manchu inner-robe, wished that he had a cigarette, and then leaned back against a tree. It was already cold. The wind snarled. Wickson, having slept none the previous night, was positive that sleep, now, was equally impossible. But he slept at once, heavily.

It was black as the pit when he awoke. If there were a moon, and he saw none through the leafless branches, it must be a scimitar. He was stiff with cold, and involuntarily grimaced when he moved his right arm.

HE started with gray dawn, and because of that, nearly missed the way. He had to retrace his steps once in order to comply with Yuching Kou's map. Time was lost when he reached the river carved across the plain. It was difficult to find the exact cave give as a landmark, a new starting-point, since continued erosion had bored out other places where Chinese miners, long ago, had panned gold. He saw white bones half covered with red dust and gray-green sand.

When at last he began to climb, headed toward the peaks and a single bare tree lodged in rock, he was aware that he was being followed. Once or twice he paused and looked back; once he thought that he saw a man dodge behind a rock, once he had a vague idea that there were other men moving up the water-course, stooped down, out of sight. This last, he believed, was imagination.

Either the near hills protected him from wind, or it had died down. The one cloud was like a dark opal, fiery heart, purple and black and maroon at the edges. More, it had increased in size, concealing the far mountain.

Wickson marched along. He should have been hungry; he had too much else to think about. For example, never in his life had he done anything he hadn't planned, even if his plans didn't work. Now, all he could tell himself was that he must do something, somehow, when the time came.

Not until he reached a narrow place where a trickle of water ran did his follower appear. It was done dramatically enough, and although Wickson was ready, the sight of a man in the empty land was startling.

One word or movement, Wickson comprehended, and the gun pointed at him would be discharged. He stood stock-still, and as the man in sheepskins came nearer, Andrew was able to see the fellow's eyes widen at discovery that the Manchu robe concealed a white man. Wickson, on his part, thought the guard was a half-caste.

The man pointed upward, with the barrel of his old, polished Mauser, and waited until Wickson walked ahead before moving. At first there was no trail, but soon one appeared, narrow, steep, worn by feet and water. It seemed to be a stream bed, five feet wide, with smooth high sides.

Several times the guard raised his voice, and watchers came from their posts to stare at the white man, to follow him and his captor.

Wickson walked around a huge rock balanced on a smaller rock; water must have washed away the softer material between. He was forced to walk so closely to it that the big rock seemed to move. Then, without warning, he saw a broad open space filled with men. Twenty or more.

Some started running forward; a voice stopped them. The speaker, Wickson saw, was an old man, a very old man, who stood very straight. His beard was white, indistinguishable in color from his frogged military jacket. The old man's eyes were brilliant. They held Wickson so tightly that he was unable to glance about, although he was positive Jacinth was not in sight.

THE old Russian started to speak curtly; then, smiling, he bowed stiffly. "English? No. American. Of course. *She* is American. So you have come after her, eh?"

Why, this shouldn't be difficult. The old soldier was a gentleman, one of the White Russia s driven into Manchuria. Quick hope made Wickson say, "Sir, if such a thing as this had to happen, I am glad she was brought here, to your protection."

"Tell me," the old man said, "how much it cost you to bribe Yuching Kou."

Wickson thought he saw the purpose of the question. He said, "Not too much. Not so much that a sufficient reward will be impossible. Enough of a reward so you'll no longer be at the mercy of traders, sir."

The old man chuckled. "You are clever," he said. "I may be able to persuade my wolves to permit you to depart."

Wickson said: "Five thousand."

"A month ago, I would have given you anything for a single thousand. Today it is different. We have all we need."

It looked to Wickson like a question of price, and he began to hope. He said, "Ten thousand. Enough to take your sons out of this barren land. Payment whenever and however you wish it."

The old man's eyes lit. "Paris," he said; then, slowly, "It is too late. I am too old. Nikky knows only horses and hills. He is happy here. With a woman such as he will have— But I do not mean to be cruel. Let us dine together; it is a long time since I have dined with anyone. Even my sons prefer scorched mutton. What would they do in Paris? It is not a matter of money."

WICKSON, cold as ice, walked to a cavern with the old man, while the bandits began preparing their own meal. This was unreal. Everything was unreal. The thick rugs on the floor, the steaming samovar, the glistening ikon. Jacinth here, only to be won by a man who could do the thing Wickson couldn't—dance!

He had, true, a gun inside his Manchu robe, although there was no way of knowing how long he would keep it. Even so, one gun, one clip of soft-nosed bullets, wouldn't help at all. Neither would threats.

"We did well on the raid," said Kharabieff, as an interminable feast began; wild duck, mushrooms and pigeons' eggs, bamboo-shoots stewed with stag heart, sea slugs from Vladivostok, sweet champagne.

Outside, the bandits tore at chunks of half-cooked mutton.

Wickson said suddenly: "The girl was to have been my wife."

"Ah," said the old Russian. Champagne bubbled in him. "The only way you could get her back would be to dance for her. Nikky would be too good for you; he is so good that none of this band will dance against him. They know the penalty. The loser is swung back and forth over the cliff, and then hurled to the rocks below. It is not a pretty way to die, and, you are thinking, hardly civilized. I learned the custom from the Tartars, although killing the loser is my own idea. Since I am the judge, I have preserved my dynasty."

"I see," Wickson said.

Kharabieff offered fat cigarettes, and poured thick, dark brandy. "Yes," he said. "It is really a formality. Nikky's dancing is really more a celebration than a competition, since none will dance against him. You, my friend, will depart in the morning, without having seen the girl. It is easier, believe me, to go."

He tossed his cigarette out of the cave; half-forgotten thoughts must have been passing through his head. "Take my word for that. I know."

Wickson said: "For what you are remembering, let me stay."

"And dance? Do not be a fool. If you insist upon remaining, I will not forbid it, but it will not make you any happier."

Wickson, watching the firelight in the open space, tried to think of something which might be done. Dance? Why, even a paid teacher had given him up. And primitive dancing was remarkable for its agility, grace, and portrayed meaning. He'd have no chance, with Kharabieff as judge, even if he could dance.

If Jacinth, loving him, knew that he were dead, after the competition, she might be better able to become an unthinking block, every spark crushed out. He wished he might throttle the hope she'd feel when she saw him. There was no hope. Then, a shiver ran through him as he recalled the automatic. Was *that* the thing to do for her?

Low thunder growled far in the west. Wickson tried to think of anything left undone. Could the Japanese have surrounded the hiding-place? No. Could he himself have chartered a plane, brought men? Ridiculous. If, however, he had realized how the guards would leave their posts and follow him and his captor to the lair, then some plan, involving the troops, might have been worked out. It was too late for that. If the bandits let him go, they'd be doubly watchful until the rains poured down and flooded the plain.

NEXT day, except for Wickson, was busy. It was a breathless day, with the air heavy. Spasmodic gales of dust blew over the hollow in the hills, so swift that once the lamp before Kharabieff's ikon was extinguished, so strong that the offerings of food before a lacquered idol were scattered over the earth.

Nikolas Kharabieff went about singing. The other men, envious enough, were kept in good humor by wisely administered liquor. Their jokes were crude; now and again they would point at Wickson and laugh. From their glances, Wickson knew in which of the caves Jacinth must be held.

Once, Nikky, when Wickson was watching him, strolled over to the balanced rock, and pushed against it so that it moved.

It seemed to Andrew Wickson that the rock was intended as a final bulwark against attack. If sufficient force were applied, it could be tumbled down the path which led up to the lair. Probably several men would be needed to start the rock on its way; Nikky had moved it, Wickson knew, just to show his strength.

Why couldn't the rock have been balanced so that it might be tumbled into the hollow, instead of away from it and down the path? If that had been the case, Andrew, for an instant, supposed he might work out something. However, even if this were the case, the big rock, rolling into the open space, could only crush a few men; rolling down the path, it would become a juggernaut.

THE day passed too swiftly. Jacinth was being attired by some woman. The chief's cavern was prepared as a wedding chamber. By four in the afternoon it was dark, the fire was lighted.

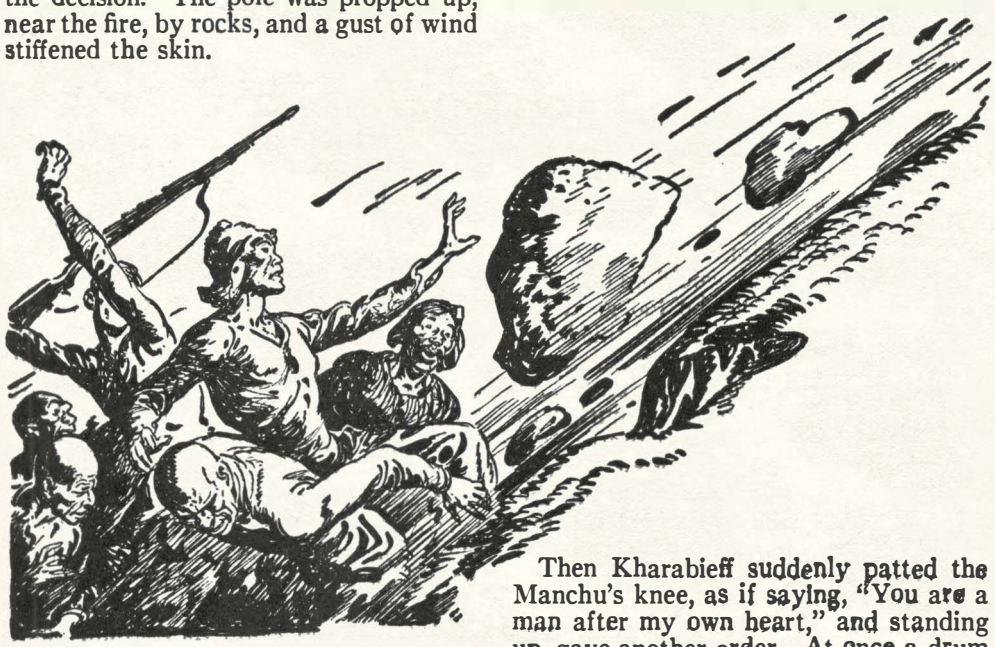
An ancient follower of the chief, a Burriat-Cossack, took a bloody sheepskin, and from it magically decided the exact hour for the dancing, the marriage. After this divination, a pole was brought, of tough Asiatic ash, and the skin was hung to it as a flag, so the gods could see the decision. The pole was propped up, near the fire, by rocks, and a gust of wind stiffened the skin.

His eyes widened, narrowed; as he shouted a warning, Wickson turned, and saw what had so startled the old man.

Men were entering the hollow, as villainous as the band itself. Men in tattered uniforms, herders' jackets, sheepskins, men with false horsehair beards, all red; *hun'hutze*. At their head was a gaunt Manchu, and, close by, several guards of the Russian's band, all gagged. Wickson guessed correctly what had happened; some *hun'hutze* had marked the position of the guards, yesterday, and, returning with his brother robbers, had stalked them one by one.

Kharabieff snarled a word. Guns were ready, but none of the bandits fired. The old man was really superb. He advanced to the *hun'hutze* leader, smiling all over his face, spoke a word, and, when the Manchu nodded, led him to a heap of skins near the fire. Brandy, cigarettes, were brought. The *hun'hutze* remained in a stolid group while the leaders talked.

Wickson realized how one incorrect action might start a fight. He considered shooting one of the robbers, to start the fighting; what purpose would that serve? None. His one hope was that he might have opportunity to talk to the leader. Bribery. Ransom. Call it anything.



While Wickson was staring at it, he heard old Kharabieff's voice, thick with brandy. "Well, it is about time. I envy Nikky, I can tell you. A long winter, no fear of soldiers, a maiden. I—"

Then Kharabieff suddenly patted the Manchu's knee, as if saying, "You are a man after my own heart," and standing up, gave another order. At once a drum rolled, and a half-nude renegade bounded toward the fire, pounding away on the taut skin, and, as the thrumming continued, the bandits squatted in a wide circle about the fire, leaving a spot unoccupied, where more skins were placed.

Wickson's body became an arc of effort. The rock slowly swung away. . . . Andrew heard one high-pitched howl of terror.

Kharabieff walked quietly toward Wickson. In sheer satisfaction he crowed: "If I had been the Manchu, I would have wiped every man out. I would have killed old Kharabieff, I can tell you! But he did not. He allowed me to talk with him. So we have decided that his son and mine are to dance, for the girl he knows we took from the train, and for the leadership of the two bands! I said, 'We will judge as has always been done?' and he agreed."

Nikolas, and a tall young Manchu as well, knelt beside the rug. Then the old man pulled Wickson toward it, as if desirous of having some one to talk with, and, as he began to whisper what Andrew did not hear, an old crone appeared from a cave, accompanying Jacinth. Kharabieff continued boasting; at any other time, Wickson would have been forced to admire the clever way in which the old Russian arranged his men in case of trouble.

Now, Wickson saw only Jacinth.

The girl's golden head, still held high, as if unconsciously, was bedecked with a jeweled crown, silver, amethyst, and turquoise. She was richly garbed for the wedding, all in white, with firelight picking out silver threads in the brocade. A chain was about her neck, and the fire found the amethyst at its end, between her breasts, making it gleam and glitter like a sun-brightened evening cloud.

The drums fainted down; the gusty sighs of the men became audible. The girl sat, when the crone pushed her, like a jointed doll. Her eyes were blank.

Wickson said: "Jacinth!"

The word shocked her back to reason. She stared around, and finally saw the man in the black Manchu robe and knew who he was. Twice she tried to speak.

IT was the man who said: "Don't say anything."

"I'll be here all my life," Jacinth whispered. "All my life!" That hope which Andrew feared she would have came to

light: "Give them money. Don't leave me here. Oh, Andy, please don't leave me here!"

Wickson said slowly: "I won't leave you here."

"You can't help it. Can you help it? Can you do anything, Andy? You've got to do something."

Wickson thought: "The one thing I could do is the one thing I can't. But even if I danced well, and better than the others, Nikky would win." He said, "I'm going to do something,"—and thought of the gun. He supposed he'd known all along that it was the one possible thing. Unless he could get to the Manchu *hun'hutze* leader. He moved slightly; old Kharabieff pulled him back.

The drum sounded again, with thunder behind it, nearer. The young Manchu leaped up, and the drum sounded steadily as he danced a story of war. The watchers, already stirred with the sight of the woman, with brandy, leaned forward as they watched the stalking of the victim, the rhythmic cadence of the chase, the final kill, while the flute screamed and cried out.

Kharabieff, like the *hun'hutze,* applauded, while his son glared at him.

"You are a fool, Nikky," said Kharabieff.

Jacinth was saying, to Wickson: "If only I hadn't left Peiping! Andy, I love you so." Hope wasn't yet dead. "If you told anyone you were coming here—they might come after you—with soldiers—"

"THE only person I told," Wickson's voice said, while the robbers grouped about the young Manchu, praising him, "has every reason not to tell where I went." His mind was far from what he was saying. Suppose he jumped up, ran, reached the rock, and, when the horde pelted after him, he could shove the rock so that it would crash down the path? It might work. *If* he could shove the rock. In order to do it, he needed a lever. The flag-pole with the bloody sheepskin on it. To get it, he'd be forced to run to the middle of the circle of watching men. He would be caught before he reached the pole. But . . . suppose he danced? He could tell Kharabieff that he needed the ten-foot ash, for the dance. Since it wasn't possible to get to the Manchu leader, and strike some bargain, nothing else remained.

Then the Russian said to him, "Steel yourself. If I announce Nikky as the winner, which I will, and these vermin realize that their chief's son must die, there will be fighting. My men will be ready, but some will be killed, eh? However, if there is a third contestant, and *he* is swung over the cliff, trouble can be avoided. You will be the third man. You love this girl. You have no desire to live. You—"

"It isn't necessary to convince me," Andy said grimly.

Kharabieff suggested: "Have more brandy."

LIGHTNING flashed, with instant thunder; a brief torrent slashed down.

The Buriat-Cossack, in the following hush, made his instrument cry out like a falcon, by pulling a moist finger across the tight skin. Nikolas began the falcon dance. The drum-music became soft and tender, rolling, throbbing, never silent, with the flute sighing an overtone; the powerful half-caste began to step off a dance of strange love, moving in beauty, pursuing a desperate winged joy, transient, bitter-sweet, compelling. . . . He seemed to be shuttling a web for his love; his arms went out; he caught what he sought.

The drum lulled; the flute took up the measure, weird and savage. Each of the musicians seemed playing independently of the other, each telling the same tale, but as it appeared to them. Like two tunes become one. Like two powerful loves blended in a single man.

Another lightning flash turned the sky to green, and Nikolas whirled about, assuming a posture of defiance, as if warning anyone against taking what he had secured. The music vanished in the thunder from the sky.

Kharabieff said, "Bravo," under his breath, while every man, bandit and robber, turned toward him. Very sagely, the old man stood up, and began to explain that he had the honor to announce still another contestant, a white man, who had demanded the right to dance. The rules, Kharabieff continued, were different when there were three competitors. Only the poorest dancer was killed. The winner received the girl, but the second man was given a suitable reward.

Wickson thought: "The less I tell Jacinth, the better. It won't work. I'm not sure there's a place to hide on the other side of the rock, nor that they'll all follow me and go tearing down the path. But it's better to have a go at it." He must remember, at the very last moment, to do what would take Jacinth from the

bandits. He said, half-audibly, "Good-by, darling," and stood up, slipping out of his robe and inner robe, moving the holster so it went inside of the Manchu vest.

The Manchu chief was standing also, and talking slowly, coldly. Was this, he demanded, a trick? The old wolf of the hills was famous for tricks. Three men could compete; that was fair. But did Kharabieff agree that of the two who had danced, Russian and Manchu, that the Manchu was the better dancer? Let Kharabieff say, at this point, a preliminary judgment.

Wickson stood very still. He saw Kharabieff lick his lips, heard the old man begin to talk, softly, persuadingly, how it was necessary to see all three before forming an opinion; how the young Manchu had impressed him; how—

Thunder rolled over his words.

The chief of the *hun'hutze* said:

"Decide!"

Kharabieff was silent. The young Manchu walked past the fire, toward Jacinth, and, with a finger, touched her cheek. Nikolas, instantly, scowled and pushed the Manchu back. The Manchu's knife was out; some one, even while it flashed, and Nikky jumped back, had caught up his gun and fired.

A zigzag lightning flash turned the light of the discharge to a puny streak of yellow. Rain hammered down on the fire, tremendously, almost before men began to fight across it, over it. Wickson, somehow, managed to stumble, fall, over Jacinth, to press her down against the heap of skins. She moaned, "Andy, Andy," and her lips were like ice against his face.

AS lightning blazed, Wickson saw how desperate the conflict was. Men, breast to breast, locked together, guns useless, staggered against the rock wall, into the fire, over the cliff. A Manchu, knifed, swayed drunkenly as if to some grotesque music. Two men, rolling on the ground, clawed at each other's faces, to be trampled by the others. It was like a wild, ecstatic dance, with death as the reward. The Buriat-Cossack crouched, clawing the ground, as he waited for a chance to drive his knife into a *hun'hutze*. Nikolas Kharabieff, avoiding contact, fired excitedly, until his father shouted for him to aim at the Manchu leader of the *hun'hutze*.

It was Kharabieff's wily old mind which made the difference; the *hun'hutze* chief, now dead, was right in having feared the Russian. It would have been better, for the intruders, to have taken advantage of the first surprise.

Kharabieff, watching, cried loudly: "They run, brother wolves. After them! None must escape." With that, well satisfied, he reached for brandy, as his men began to pursue the fleeing robbers down the path. Only Nikolas was not in hot pursuit; he, standing at the rock by the head of the path, began to fire his gun in the air, and to yell in triumph.

To Jacinth, Wickson said: "Stay here. I'll be back." He was on his feet, and, as old Kharabieff lifted the bowlful of brandy, struck him solidly behind the ear.

Nikolas hadn't turned. Good. Wickson had the pole; Nikky went down like a Manchu going over the cliff when Andrew swung the heavy ash.

HE must work fast, before either Kharabieff could knife or shoot him, before the men on the path reached the lower end of the U-shaped trail. He heaved, slipped on wet rock and came heavily to his knees. As he shoved the pole into position as a lever again, and found traction for his feet, his injured shoulder screamed at him. An intense, blinding pain ran up his straining arms and to his head. The rock moved, grated, settled back.

Wickson's body became an arc of effort. The rock slowly swung away, and, with an unexpected lurch, crashed down the rocky funnel of the path. Andrew heard one high-pitched howl of terror above the battering of the boulder; it might have been the yell of a knifed Manchu, but it might also be that someone, pursuer or pursued, had seen the descending rock. Either way, Andrew realized, the path was being cleared of whatever was on it.

He turned. Old Kharabieff was on his knees, shouting, "At him, Nikky! Your knife!" But Nikolas lay where he had fallen, and Wickson dragged him toward the heap of skins where Jacinth lay. He dragged him along with one hand, since the other now held his gun. No weapon was necessary. Kharabieff made toothless, inarticulate sounds; he was old, very old, and very broken.

"Leave me the last of my wolves," he pleaded. "It is not much to ask. I could have killed you."

Jacinth was looking at him now; all Wickson could see of her was the oval of

her face, the last firelight on the silver crown. Was her head whirling, as his head whirled?

He said: "Hold the gun, Jacinth. If the old man moves, pull the trigger," and, swiftly, tied the semi-conscious Nikolas. Next, he bound the older man, and carried him into one of the caves. Let Nikolas squirm over the ground to his father, if he could; that would consume more time. Ultimately, the thongs could, somehow, be worked off. Wickson looked at the fire, kicked away the sodden ashes above the glowing heart, so that it, also, would be extinguished. Young Nikolas would never scorch his hide, burning away the bonds, but the old man would.

Then, heart pounding, he walked to the girl, and knelt beside her. They stared; Jacinth put out a hand, was in his arms. She clung to him fiercely, as if she would never let him go.

"It hasn't happened," she whispered. "I'll wake up in Peiping, worrying about you and your Eurasian girls."

"She was a dancing-teacher—I mean that I paid her to teach me. I can't dance. It may've been a lucky thing I couldn't."

"I wouldn't have left Peiping if I hadn't loved you so terribly, Andy."

It was raining steadily. Wickson said, "I'll find clothes for you. We've got to cross the plains before they flood."

Jacinth said, "Will this be like a nightmare? Will I forget it? I can't forget it, Andy. I'll never be able to forget it."

She was, Andy saw, close to hysteria; he must, somehow, stop it. How lovely she was, in the wet gown. Now she was beginning to tremble, to shake and sob. She must be stopped. He knew how reaction must be setting in, and how dangerous it might be for her. What should he say?

HE began: "We must get started. No telling how long we'll be held up when we want to leave Manchukuo. You see, you'll be Mrs. Wickson, and no Mrs. Wickson was taken from the train, and she hasn't a passport, and she didn't even come into this country, and the Japanese authorities will write books about it, and—"

"Love me, Andy, and never let me go. I'm all right now. When you love me, that's all I'll remember."

The fire was out. Lightning streaked across the sky, ice-green, blue, yellow—dazzling, dancing silver-white. Rain wet their faces as they kissed.

The Hand

COTTEREL stared defiantly at his cell-mate. A flush was in his thin cheeks, a burning light in his eyes.

"They can't keep me here!" he snarled under his breath. "They can't! I'll get away. It may take months, years—but I'll do it. They can't keep me here for life. I'm innocent, I tell you! I didn't do it!"

He had been working up to this point of explosion for days. Normally a young man of definite charm, of winning personality, he had become sullen and glowering. Wise old Manning, who had spent half his life in prisons, knew the symptoms and was worried. He had come to like young Cotterel rarely. He had come to believe that this "lifer" was really not guilty of the crime that had sent him here.

To the old man's notion, this prison was a "pipe." The two were allowed to talk. Manning could have his beloved brushes and sketching materials—an expert forger, he was a creator of exquisite pictures; and in comparison with some places, the regulations here were lax. But as old Manning was well aware, they were not careless.

"I tell you, I'm leaving!" Cotterel went on. "I've got it all figured out. You needn't hand me any bunk about getting transferred to Alcatraz if I fail. I don't intend to fail. It may take me months, but I'm not going to stay here."

Manning said nothing, for the best of reasons: his vocal cords were paralyzed. But his long, slender fingers spoke for him.

"Suppose you get bumped trying it?"

"I'll take that gamble," said Cotterel. Since being incarcerated here, he had had plenty of time to learn the finger-talk employed by Manning. "I've made up my mind."

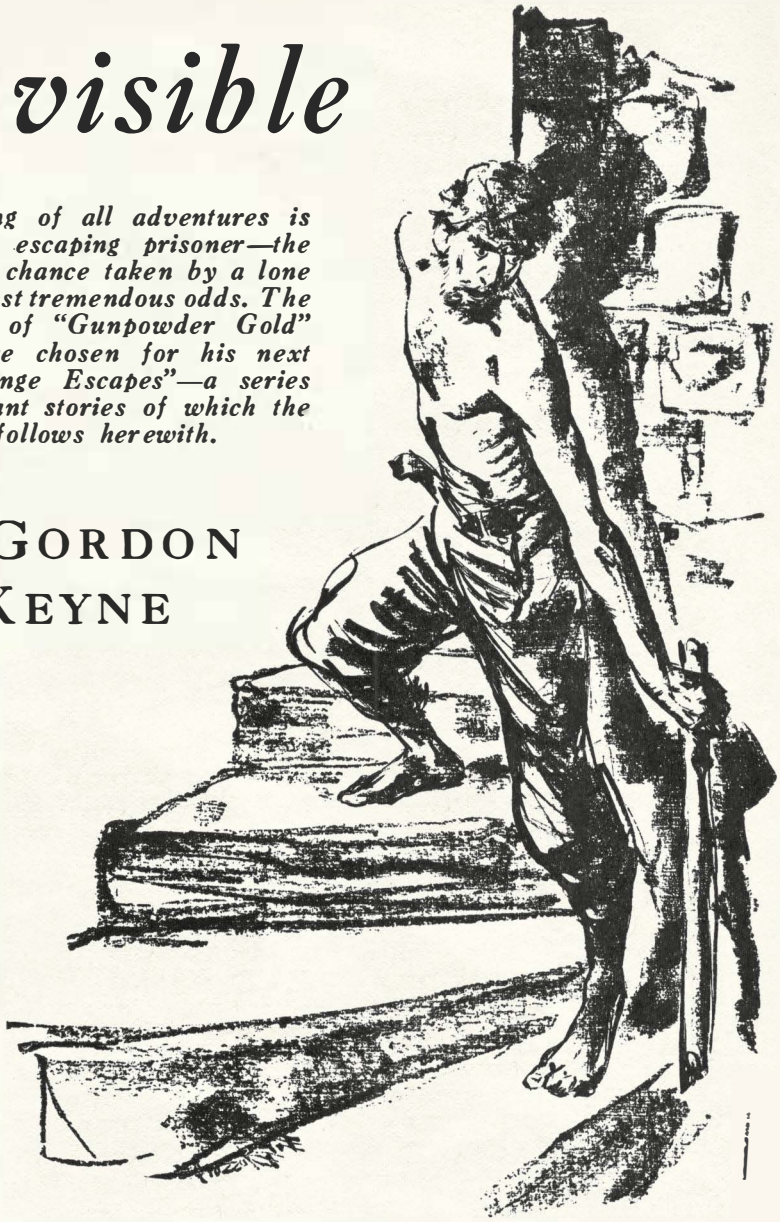
Manning regarded him anxiously. A wise, shrewd old man was this forger; a man of the keenest intelligence in many ways. He had come to feel a real affection for young Cotterel. Time and again he had acted as a buffer, a windbreak. He had saved Cotterel from many an ill-judged impulsive action.

Invisible

Most exciting of all adventures is that of the escaping prisoner—the life-or-death chance taken by a lone fugitive against tremendous odds. The able author of "Gunpowder Gold" has therefore chosen for his next theme "Strange Escapes"—a series of six brilliant stories of which the first follows herewith.

By GORDON KEYNE

Illustrated by Earl Blossom



Kermen crouched, immobile. The sentinel was approaching.

His fingers began to work nimbly.

"You have a plan? You are sure of every detail?"

"Absolutely," said Cotterel with defiant conviction; and Manning nodded.

"Good. I knew you had a brain. You've provided against everything, even the invisible hand and the unexpected message? Splendid! In that case, you're sure to win. Nobody has ever escaped from this place, but you'll do it. Congratulations!"

Cotterel gazed at him with a slight frown.

"I figured you'd try to argue against it. You really think it can be done?"

"Absolutely," said the swift fingers, "under the given circumstances."

"Hm! What d'you mean by that invisible-hand stuff? Radio?"

Manning's wrinkled, prison-gray features relaxed in amused laughter. They sat on the lower bunk together; the indefinable, repugnant odor of clean but massed humanity drifted in upon them, the murmur of sounds from this cell-house hung in the air about them.

Cotterel waited, sensing that the older man's mind was pregnant with unuttered things. He had grown to hold Manning in a peculiar esteem and respect that was beyond mere friendship; criminal or not,

the man had a fund of deep, sure wisdom —all the deeper, perhaps, because he was now behind the bars. He himself—guiltless of crime, yet condemned—owed a heavy debt of friendship to this man, and recognized it.

"No, not radio." Manning's fingers were hesitant. "The invisible hand and the unexpected message—two things that nearly every man forgets. One is a certainty; the other a bare possibility. One is here, waiting for you every day. The other may not come for years. By some miracle of the law of averages, they do show up together—well, perhaps once in a century, as they did with the Sieur de Kermen."

Cotterel looked at him, puzzled.

"Damned if I know what you're driving at. Invisible hand? Have you gone nuts all of a sudden, or have you turned spiritualist?"

Manning uttered a silent chuckle. "Neither. . . . Here, I'll show you where that chap Kermen lived. Hand out the sketches, will you?"

FROM under the bunk Cotterel produced an album of sketches by the hand of old Manning. The latter produced one—apparently the sketch of a fairy island, a solid mass of masonry rising from the sea with its pinnacle in heaven. Battlements lifted from the water; towers lifted farther, buttresses curved in a breath-taking sweep upward, to culminate in a cluster of spiring walls.

Cotterel stared at it, fascinated.

"Well? What's this place?"

Manning caught up a pencil and wrote a few words, for which his nimble fingers then made the symbols.

"One of the most famous prisons in the world; on an island off the Breton coast, the Alcatraz of a bygone day. In fact, they got the idea of Alcatraz from this place. While in the nominal charge of monks, it had a royal commandant and a garrison of soldiers, received the secret prisoners of the King, and was the most dreaded prison in all France. Architects called it the Marvel; France called it the Ocean Bastille; on the maps it was known, and still is, as Mont St. Michel."

"Oh!" said Cotterel. "I've heard of it. Who was what's-his-name?"

"Kermen? The Sieur de Kermen wrote a witty verse about Madame de Pompadour, and that finished him. He was a young Breton noble. He was hauled out of his home between two days and plumped down in Mont St. Michel."

With his pencil, Manning pointed to a spot halfway up the top cluster of masonry.

"There, in this tower, was a cell. In the cell was a massive cage, eight feet square. In the cage was Kermen—for life. This was in the late fall of 1762. Five months later, Kermen escaped. He was one of the few persons who ever accomplished such a feat."

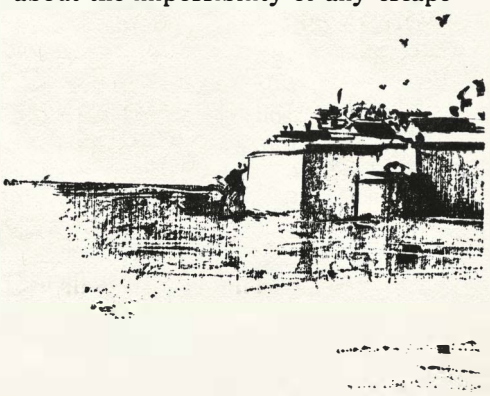
The eyes of Cotterel lit up suddenly.

"Tell me about it! I might get some pointers, eh?"

"You might," was the silent reply. "There was one difference between this place and Alcatraz of the present day. Mont St. Michel was situated on sands that dried for miles about it at low tide —quicksands, in many spots. The prisoners were warned of this, but were not warned of anything else. They mocked at the warning. First, they knew it was impossible to escape. Second, all the communication between the Mont and the mainland passed over the sands when the tide was out; therefore they knew it would be possible to get away, if they could leave the prison. But even did they reach the savage woods of the Breton coast, they would be run down like wild animals."

"Not an encouraging prospect," observed Cotterel. "Still, there might be worse. If the right man tries it, if he plans each detail perfectly, anything is possible."

"So Kermen thought," was the response of old Manning. "Although he was in solitary, there was no rule against his talking. He fell into the habit of talking every day with his guard, Dupont; and of all things, they discussed escape. Dupont was a soldier, a hard, dry, merciless man. He liked to torment the prisoner. But I must tell you more about the prisoner, about his prison, about the impossibility of any escape—"



Cotterel watched those deft, slender old fingers with fascination. He never tired of watching them. Their skilled weaving of words helped to occupy his brain and kill the timeless hell that surrounded him.

Now they were more fascinating than ever, as they sketched Sieur de Kermen —that ardent, eager, hotly impulsive young Breton whose life had so suddenly ended in this cage. It was a cage of massive wooden bars two inches thick, hewed out of oak long centuries ago, a cage more for punishment than for restraint, a final prison within the very heart of a prison. At one end was the thick stone wall with its tiny window.

Kermen was black-browed, resolute, alert of eye and keen of brain. Plucked from his own chateau in the heart of the Breton forests, he knew next to nothing of Mont St. Michel, but he learned. The danger-lines of his square chin and mouth were masked by a growth of beard. His knotted shoulder muscles were masked by rags; but beneath his quiet acceptance of destiny lay a raging spirit. Like an eagle with clipped wings, he bided his time.

Twice a day, Dupont appeared, opened his cage door, gave him food; the second time, at dusk, Dupont led him out for a half-hour walk on the platform of the tower, watching him narrowly as he paced up and down the stones. From his window he had a view of the distant coast-line and the sands or water about the islet. Those gleaming sands beckoned him to liberty, three hundred feet below.

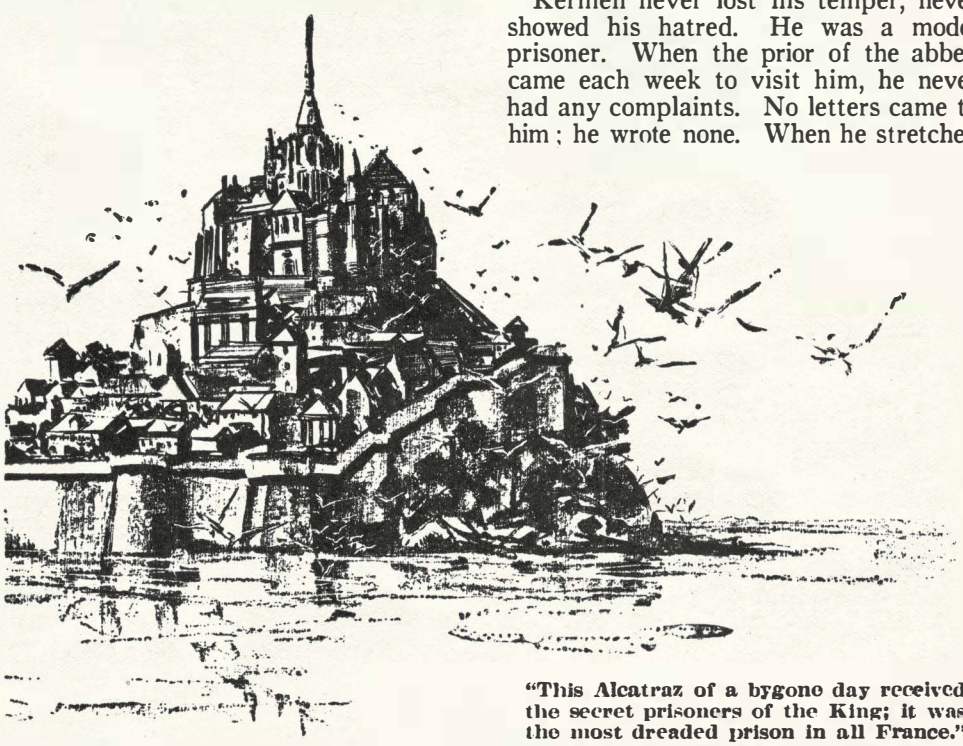
"Bah! I'll not be here long," he assured Dupont. "My sister has influence. She'll see to it that I get a pardon. Before Christmas, I'll be out!"

CHRISTMAS came and passed. The straw covering the stone floor was rotten and alive with vermin. The walls were scaly from the damp sea air. The huge iron lock of the cage door, although kept well oiled, was a rusty shell from the same cause.

Dupont liked to jeer at him. "Once out of the cage, the cell remains, my friend! Once out of the cell, there's still the tower; the walls below have soldiers. If you leave the cage, the cell, the tower, and flutter like an angel from the walls to the shore underneath—there's the sea to pass. Pleasant prospect! And if you wait for the tide to go down, you have the quicksands replacing it. Tell me when you want to try it, and I'll enjoy the spectacle."

Dupont would enjoy it, yes. His hard, cruel features backed up his words. He lost no opportunity to sear and scald the prisoner with his burning tongue. There was no kindness or pity in the man.

Kermen never lost his temper, never showed his hatred. He was a model prisoner. When the prior of the abbey came each week to visit him, he never had any complaints. No letters came to him; he wrote none. When he stretched



"This Alcatraz of a bygone day received the secret prisoners of the King; it was the most dreaded prison in all France."

out on the old bed or cot across one end of his cage, and shivered in the wintry wind under his blankets, he did not break into curses and railings against fate.

It did not occur to anyone that the silent man is the dangerous man. . . .

Christmas gone, he gave up hope of hearing anything from his sister. The jeers of Dupont sank into his soul. He had dared to mock the favorite of the king, and he would be here until he died. Unless he escaped.

He resolved to escape. . . .

From the platform of the tower, the hopelessness of such an attempt was more apparent. Suppose he stood here, free—what then? Below were watch-rooms and a massive gate, from which ran a curved descent of stone stairs to the lower walls—an immense open stairway thirty feet wide, with landings and rest-benches. Anyone gaining the upper buildings had to come by this approach. There was no other. And even if he descended it, the walls below were guarded by soldiers.

Any other descent had to be by air. These upper walls plunged straight down and down. Built as a fortress, this place had never been captured by an enemy.

The platform of the tower communicated by a battlemented approach with one flank of the abbey buildings where there was nothing at all underneath—nothing but a tremendous gulf that ended on the sand outside the walls. One evening as he paced up and down, Kermen heard a strange noise he had often heard, and now he saw the cause.

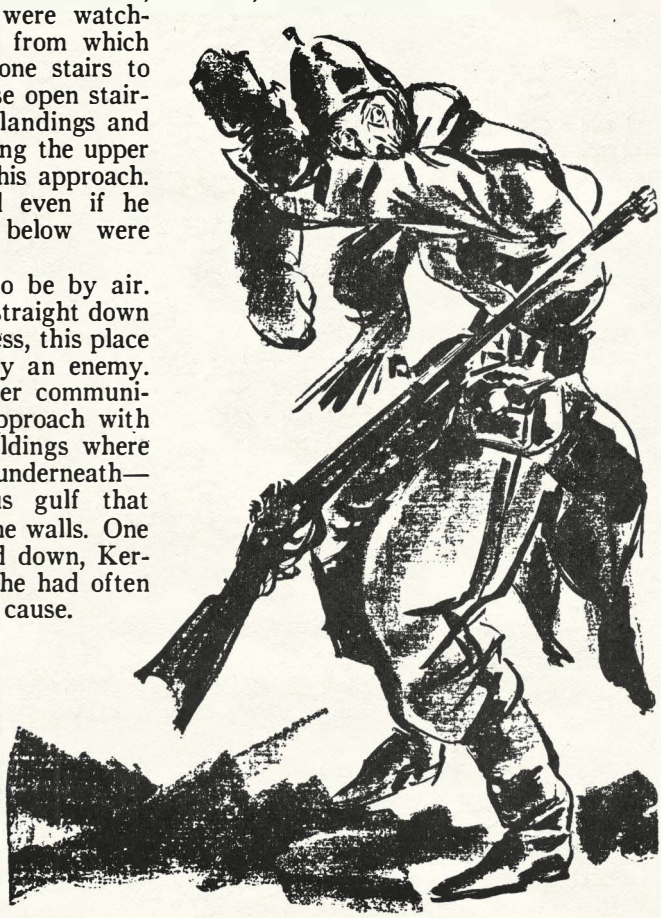
Dupont, seeing his interest, came closer to him with a thin laugh.

"That's how you're fed, my friend; that's how everything comes up here from below. An interesting invention, eh? I see the idea appeals to you. Easy to come up that way—easy to go down. Yes?"

"So it would seem," Kermen replied.

Dupont chuckled.

"A prisoner tried it once, ignorant that three men are required to work the winch in the kitchen. He went down like a plummet. There's no way of slowing up the rope, you see. Remember it, my friend, remember it!"



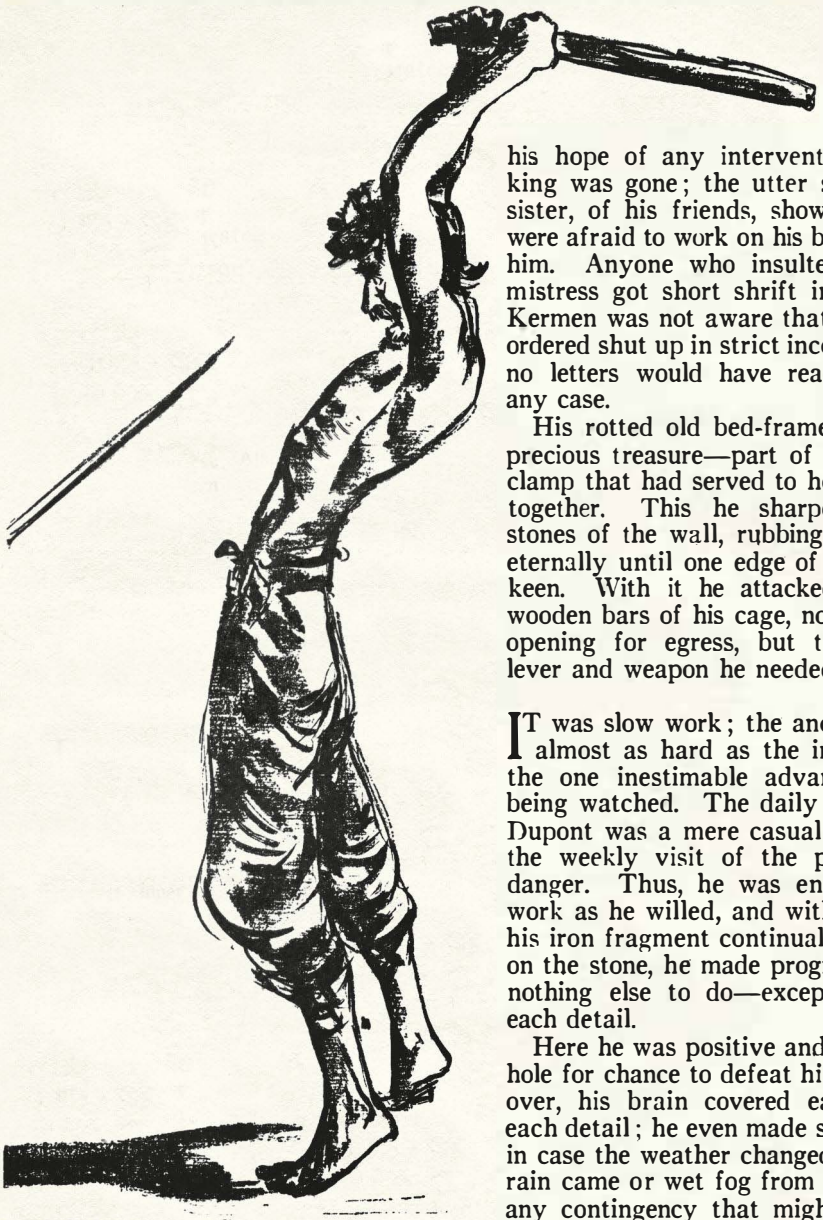
Kermen, springing up, rushed at him. The man glanced around; before he could cry out, the oak bar descended with crushing force.

A tremendous creaking and groaning filled the air—a sound sufficient to wake the dead. This squealing shriek came from the abbey buildings on a level with his tower platform, probably two hundred feet away. Here had swung into sight an immense crane and wheel, over which ran a rope. This rope, dropping straight down to the sand at the foot of the Mont, was hauling up a tremendous net filled with boxes and barrels.

Kermen shivered a little, and turned away.

"Thank you for the warning," he said in a disconsolate voice, and Dupont laughed in cruel delight at his dejection.

But, in his heart, Kermen felt a pulsing thrill that he could scarcely repress. The one problem that had baffled him was suddenly solved. Now he had only to overcome a few trifling details.



DETAILS—each one exact, carefully figured out, perfectly timed. Each day as he paced the tower platform during his little round of liberty, he eyed those ramparts leading to the kitchens of the abbey and above them. He learned every stone in them, every narrow place, every nook and cranny. He watched where the sentinels paced. He spent long night hours figuring out the time and tide. From his little window, he could tell when there was water around the Mont and when the sands were bare; no more, but this was quite enough for his purpose.

In the cold days and shivering nights of January, he settled down to work. All his hope of any intervention with the king was gone; the utter silence of his sister, of his friends, showed that they were afraid to work on his behalf or write him. Anyone who insulted the king's mistress got short shrift in those days. Kermen was not aware that he had been ordered shut up in strict incommunicado; no letters would have reached him, in any case.

His rotted old bed-frame had yielded precious treasure—part of a rusted iron clamp that had served to hold the frame together. This he sharpened on the stones of the wall, rubbing and rubbing eternally until one edge of it was razor-keen. With it he attacked one of the wooden bars of his cage, not to make an opening for egress, but to obtain the lever and weapon he needed.

IT was slow work; the ancient oak was almost as hard as the iron. He had the one inestimable advantage of not being watched. The daily inspection of Dupont was a mere casual look around, the weekly visit of the prior held no danger. Thus, he was entirely free to work as he willed, and with the edge of his iron fragment continually re-whetted on the stone, he made progress. He had nothing else to do—except be sure of each detail.

Here he was positive and left no loop-hole for chance to defeat him. Over and over, his brain covered each phase of each detail; he even made separate plans in case the weather changed suddenly, if rain came or wet fog from the sea. For any contingency that might arise, even discovery of his work and plans, he was fully prepared.

Even to the quicksands. True, he was only allowed out here on the tower platform after darkness had fallen. He could see nothing of the sands around the island. But twice he was out here at ebb tide, when the sands were bare, and he saw the lights of people going to the mainland or returning. He had only to reach the one entrance to the Mont, and then follow a straight course. He took his bearings of that course by the lights, and knew he could laugh at any quicksands. His mind was at rest there.

Thus he satisfied himself; nothing was neglected or overlooked.

When Kermen leaned over him, he found that the man had died instantly.

With breadcrumb-paste and dirt, he filled the holes he cut in the cage bar before Dupont came each day; not that it was necessary, perhaps, but he could not afford to take the least chance. The holes deepened until a mere shred of oak held the bar in place. He was ready.

His calculations were exact as to time and tide. The mainland was only a mile and a half distant, but to follow the route marked in his mind, from the entrance of the Mont to the little town of Pontorson, was farther. He must so time his escape from the cage, the cell, the tower, the island itself, that when he set foot on the sands below he would have time to reach the mainland, yet not leave time enough for pursuit to follow him. If he reached shore, and the water cut off any pursuit, he could be in safety before it really started after him. While he knew nothing of local conditions, he was certain, by universal geographical knowledge, that from ebb tide to flood tide would require six hours; and on this accepted fact he based his calculations.

These were marvels of ingenuity. He had, of course, no watch, but he had means of marking the time roughly. In minutes, by his own pulse-beats; in hours, by the voice of the sentinels on the ramparts, and by the bells from the abbey up above. Those monks were Benedictines, vowed to silence. Until they retired to sleep, Kermen knew the hour by the sound of the bells. After that, the sentinels would serve him.

There were further complications—to indicate just one, he knew he must kill or remove a sentinel. It must be done immediately after that sentinel had voiced his hourly "All's well!"; thus, his action would not be discovered for at least an hour. This action, however, must fit exactly with all the other details of his plan, lest it disarrange them. And careful figuring was needful.

He set his escape for the night of January twenty-fifth. At precisely eight o'clock of this night, he would break out the bar of his cage—after that, every least detail was figured exactly and precisely. In the event of fog, which frequently came in very suddenly and thickly, he must postpone the matter until the next night.

THE day came. Another man might have been excited, in a fever of impatience, all day long; but not Alaine, Sieur de Kermen. So great was his mental poise, so confident and assured was he, that he awaited the evening with patience; he even slept during the day, in order to be fresh that night.

At seven o'clock, Dupont brought his supper and took him out on the platform for his daily airing. Darkness had fallen; the stars were clear and cold. No fog. No snow or rain. No moon. Everything was perfect, as perfect as he could have wished.

Then, as though to give him a good omen, came a curious incident proving his own mental accuracy. Dupont's lantern flickered and went out while they were on the platform. Dupont came back into the cell, tried to relight the lantern, failed, and set it down. When he locked Kermen into the cage, he departed with his usual stinging taunt, and forgot his lantern.

Kermen called after him, called loudly, and he returned, with an oath.

"You forgot your lantern," said Kermen. "I'll not need it when I leave, tonight, so you may as well take it along."

Dupont snarled at him, in evil humor, caught up the lantern, and the cell door clanged shut again.

Kermen drew a deep breath; the unexpected had happened, and he had been equal to it. Unless he had brought Dupont back now, the guard would have returned later for the lantern, probably disrupting all his plans. He had acted well, he felt.

IN the darkness, he polished off his simple meal, and restrained himself. Until the moment set, he would not so much as touch that cage bar. As he sat, however, he began to quiver a little; trembling seized upon him, and the agony of suspense was terrible. Yet he endured it. Until the voices of the sentinels floated in, announcing that the moment had come, he did not stir.

Eight o'clock. He needed no light; he knew as though it were daylight just where each object was. He had rehearsed every move and act. He went to the cut bar, tried it, put his weight upon it—and broke it.

In his hand was a two-foot section of oak, hard and heavy as iron, two inches thick. He had selected that particular bar with the greatest care.

He turned and went to the cage door. The enormous iron lock had been bolted to the oak a good two centuries ago or more; tradition said the cage dated from the time of Louis XI. Kermen set the bar in his hand exactly as he had planned, against the side of the lock, and put his weight on it. He had judged aright. There was a crackle of rusted metal, and the entire lock broke clear.

He was out of the cage. The first step was accomplished.

He went to the door of the cell. Here his task would have been impossible, had not his careful attention to the least detail made it absurdly easy. He had a fulcrum for his lever, but here his lever must have a point in order to be of any use. So he had cut one end of the bar on a slant. He inserted this flat point with the greatest care in the spot previously selected by daylight. The lock, which was probably two centuries older than that on the cage, crumpled with a mere wheeze of ancient metal. Another twist, and it came away *in toto*, dragging the bolt with it. There was no bar outside the door.

The second step was accomplished.

Kermen tried the door, found that it opened freely—and left it closed. His iron will conquered the impulse that tore at him in every nerve. Despite the chill of the winter night, sweat streamed down his cheeks as he deliberately went back into the cage and sat down on his bed; his knees were shaking, his fingers were uncertain.

He forced himself to wait here, gradually regaining his composure. At this moment, he knew the sands around the island were dry. Possibly belated visitors were coming or going. If he could gain those sands now, he would not have the slightest difficulty in following them to the mainland. Yet, if he were to reach the sands, he must stick to his plan. And this called for taking care of one sentinel at nine o'clock, not before. He must not risk the least detail.

He waited, grimly. He had given himself this extra time in case of trouble in breaking the locks; no use taking any chances. He attempted to count the passage of time, but failed. This alarmed him. With a stern effort, he got himself in hand, quieted his brain, and settled into a cold concentration. Again luck favored him. A bell sounded; it was the abbey bell denoting that the hospice, or quarters of guests and pilgrims, was closed for the night. He had forgotten all about this bell, which very seldom reached his ears. Eight-thirty, then.

HE could begin to count the minutes now, and did so. At ten to nine, he took his bar of oak, left the cage, and went out on the platform. He turned to the ramparts, those which led above the kitchen of the abbey.

A sentinel was there, pacing up and down in the starlight; now close at hand, then to the far end of the section. Kermen crouched, immobile. Once more luck was with him. The sentinel was approaching when the first of the hourly calls floated up from other sentries on the lower ramparts.

The man came close to where Kermen waited, turned, and then uttered his own call to show that he was awake. It was taken up in turn by another, and passed on; but this sentry came to a sudden halt. Kermen, springing up, rushed at him. The man glanced around; before he could cry out, the oak bar descended with crushing force.

When Kermen leaned over him, he found that the man had died instantly.

From the dead man, he took firebox, knife, and the crossed belts of his uniform, with the belt proper. These, with his own belt, gave him four; he buckled them together and then moved on along the parapet, taking musket and bayonet.

He paused. Directly below him was the huge crane and wheel by which provisions and luggage were brought to the abbey from far below. Around one of the projections of the battlement, he passed the four belts and made them fast. Holding to this encircling strip of leather, he let himself out and down until his feet came to rest on the crane.

Ten feet below was the huge window-opening into which the net of goods was swung; it was far beyond his reach, as he had figured it must be. With the fixed bayonet of the musket, however, he could reach the rope that passed through the wheel and went into this window below.

He clung to the belt by one hand, and reached out. He stood above a sheer gulf, straining far by one hand; if that string of belts gave way, he was gone on one plunge. Even though the night was windless, air circled around him and tore dangerously at him. Twice the bayonet found the rope, only to let it slip. His arms were growing weary, the frightful strain of his position was overcoming him, when the bayonet caught the rope and drew it.

For an instant his heart leaped, as the wheel creaked; then the rope came up to him, drawn not from the wheel, but from the window. Desperately, he inched his hand along the musket, balancing its weight, until he got his fingers on the rope. Then he drew himself back to the parapet. Giddy, trembling in every muscle, he fell across the stone and let the rifle down inside.

For five minutes he lay there, weak and a little sick, but holding to the rope. Recovering, he pulled himself over and began to drag in on the line. It came up to him from the coils inside the window, below—a stout, thick rope, but flexible with age and long use.

HE pulled it in—in—until he had as much as he could carry—more than enough to serve his purpose. Then, with the soldier's knife, he sawed through it, shouldered the coil, and went back to the parapet of his own tower. He had now to manage the third step; his escape from this tower.

About one of the projections of the battlement,—a very particular one,—he passed the rope, and then lowered it. Directly below was the ascent going up to the impregnable entrance of the abbey proper, one of whose guardian towers was this on which he stood. No guards were posted on the huge, curving sweep of masonry, the giant staircase leading down from the abbey to the lower walls; but sentinels were dotted along those walls below, which rose up straight from the rocks of the sea. So Kermen had to exercise caution.

He let down the rope, and from the sense of feel, could tell that it reached the stones below and hung there. Not enough. Leaving it in place, he returned to where he had obtained it. Against just such need, he had weighted the end of the cut line with the soldier's musket. Now he hauled up more rope and more, from the tremendous lengths coiled in the kitchen opening below. Again having enough, he cut it, shouldered the coil, and went back to his tower platform.

No alarm below; his dangling rope had attracted no attention. Now he lowered the second length, came to the end, let it go altogether, slipping and slithering down through the air and over the starlit masonry below.

NO more time to kill now—on the contrary, everything depended on fast work. Kermen let himself over the dizzy edge, swung down on the rope, caught it with his feet, and descended. Easily said; but a mad thing for a man innocent of ropes to attempt. He banged against the tower, burned his hands on the rope, and the enormous strength of his arms and shoulders hardly compensated for his lack of skill. He went down the final ten feet with a rush, but lay quiet when he struck the huge stairs. No alarm was given. No bones were broken. He came to his feet, caught up the rope that lay loosely on the descent, and peered ahead.

One more step was accomplished. Now to leave the island itself.

He knew exactly where he wanted to use the second rope. In the starlight, the figure of the nearest sentry was visible; out beyond, the sands lay bare. His rope coiled, Kermen crept down along the wall of the towers until he reached the outer line of battlements. He gained them, saw the sentry a little beyond, watched him pace up and down. When the man's back was turned, Kermen crept out and swiftly made fast the rope about a parapet, sent the coil slithering over, came back to cover.

When the sentry faced about again, he himself followed, regardless of bleeding hands. He was through the embrasure and out of sight, before the sentry turned. Here was his last risk, his final gamble with destiny, as he thought. If that sentry heard him, he was lost. If not, then he won.

When he scraped and swung against the lower wall, he desperately clung to the naked stones, lest he be heard. As he slipped on down the rope, his heart turned over at a sudden sharp voice above—then came a laugh, and he relaxed. Two sentries had met and were standing talking together. Kermen's nostrils caught a faint reek of tobacco smoke. At the same instant, his feet touched something solid.

He was on the rocks below the walls. His escape was accomplished.

Now for safety! Mindful of the two guards talking above, he seized the chance to leave the walls themselves unobserved. The starlight would not betray him to these careless sentries, except at close quarters.

Without hesitation, he struck straight out from the Mont; he had to risk the quicksands here, but found none. . . . Straight out, fearing at each instant that his figure might be noticed in the light of the high stars; but it was not. No alarm sounded.

He circled around swiftly and struck into the line whose bearings he had noted, heading for the village of Pontorson on the far shore. The sands stretched dry, outspread, level for miles and miles.

And then, all of a sudden, the invisible hand clutched down. Kermen, looking at the sands ahead of him, saw a river appear where, an instant before, had been nothing. Across the night, he heard the rushing ripple of water.

The invisible hand! The one thing against which all cleverness was useless. The one unknown quantity which always obtains, when matched with men's wits.

OLD Manning leaned back; his deftly flying fingers fell in his lap; their speech was, for the moment, at an end. Cotterel, who had been following the story with absorbed intentness, spoke out impatiently.

"But I don't understand! You say he had escaped—he was correct in everything he planned! And you spoke of a message."

Manning nodded.

"Yes," said his fingers, clicking out the words. "Yes. With the next low tide, a courier arrived. A pardon had been obtained by his sister; he was to be set free. But he was already free, poor fellow!"

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded Cotterel impatiently.

"THE invisible hand had freed him—the one thing which always puts the cleverest brain to naught," came the response. "There is always something unforeseen, something unguessed, something unknown. In this case, you will remember that Kermen had based all his calculations on the fact that it's six hours from the ebb tide to the flood tide."

"Of course. Any fool knows that," Cotterel interjected.

Manning regarded him for a moment, and smiled a little.

"Of course. But Mont St. Michel happens to be one of the few places in the world where the tide may rise in an hour, in twenty minutes, in five minutes! Sometimes it comes in across the miles of level sands, suddenly fills the channels of unseen rivers, springs out of the sand itself, comes rushing and flooding at a speed nothing can escape! This was one of those times."

"You mean—good Lord! Then this fellow was caught by the tide?"

"Precisely. As every man who matches his wit with the invisible is caught—by something. The man who is so sure he cannot fail, the man who guards against every contingency, the man who refuses to accept what fate has brought to him—that man is the victim of the invisible hand, of the unexpected message. In Kermen's case, the two came together. They rarely coincide, like that, but they did in this instance."

Cotterel stared at him for a moment with slowly whitening face.

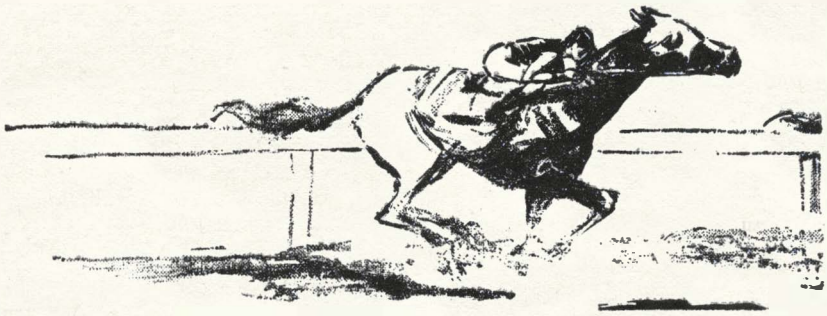
"I see," he said in a low voice. "I see what you're driving at. You're telling me there's always hope, that I may be pardoned when I least expect it?"

"That's always the possibility; but what I'm telling you is to warn you against what you can't see, my friend."

"Yeah; I get that too," Cotterel rejoined, and his head drooped. "There's always something—the invisible hand! Well—I'll think about it, Manning. Maybe you're right, at that."

And he stared thoughtfully, soberly, reflectively, at the floor of the cell.

Another fine story in this exceptional series will be a feature of the next (the March) issue.



Horse Money

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

NEW YORK'S air was fresh and clean at eleven o'clock in the fall morning, and it smelled and tasted rich after the air-conditioned train.

I put a knee on the window-sill and looked down with a lot of interest. After you have been in a town for a while, you lose your perspective, and you can't see the trees for the forest; you get a feeling of being there, instead of an acute sense of something new, an acute eye for details. It was that acuteness I had now, and it was a fine feeling, that and the care-free sensation that I was on a vacation, that I didn't have to pose, because this was another man's town, and some one else carried the badge here—not me.

There were, it seemed to me, more taxies and less private cars on the streets than I remembered five years before, and my room faced west, so that I could see a blue flash of the river.

I washed up, and went downstairs. The bars on that block were jammed in tighter than we would have allowed them at home; they made a sort of a belt, separated from each other by a theatrical costumer's dusty shop, or the show-window of a secondhand musical-instrument dealer.

I strolled along happily, like any other hick in the big city. Some of the bars were clean and more of them were semi-clean; but nearly all of them had leased wire tickers behind the bar, and purposeful loafers in front of the bar, obviously bookies. When I reached Sixth Avenue and its elevated trains, its labor agencies, I turned back. The Canoga had looked as good as any of the joints.

Before I reached it, a young fellow stepped out from a knot of idlers in front of a bar called Larsten's, and said: "Chief Van Eyck, isn't it?"

I said: "Well, not Chief—I'm on a vacation." I didn't place him.

He said: "You wouldn't remember me, but you did me a big favor about six years ago. My name's Joe McMandering, and I was—"

"Yeah," I said, "I've got you now. You were an apprentice jock, and they were going to set you down for socking old Longback Cox in a handicap."

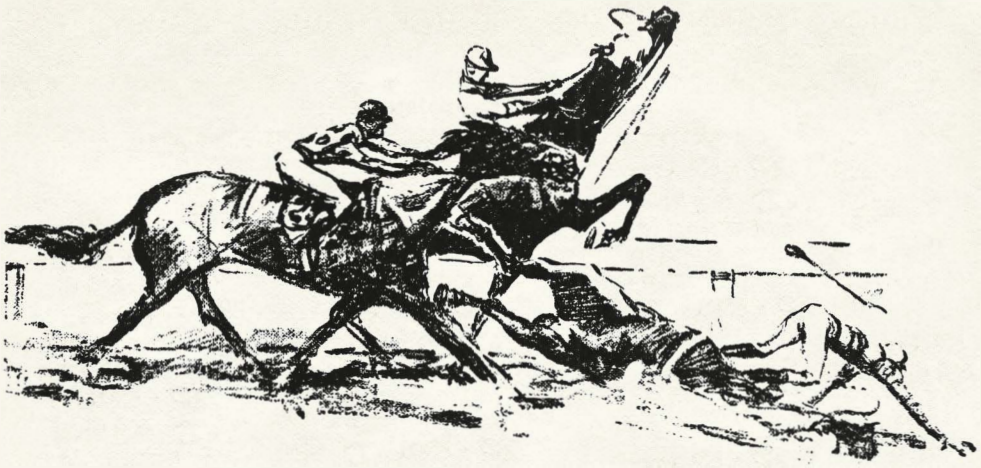
HE beamed. "That's right, sir; and you came up to the stewards and said that Longback had been roughing me from the barrier."

I looked him over. He had grown a half dozen inches, and put on twenty pounds. "You don't ride any more?"

He shook his head. "I shot up all of a sudden when I was nineteen. I'm much too big, now. I'm schooling horse-show hunters and jumpers for Mrs. Chrissley."

"Well, that's good work," I said. "Mrs. Chrissley's a nice woman, for a millionaire. She had her string out to our tracks in '33."

"I don't have anything to do with her race-horses," he said, while I began to be bored with the conversation. "She's had the same trainer for years. I just handle her show horses."



By RICHARD WORMSER

Our old friend the tough race-track detective Van Eyck tries to take a vacation, in this novelette—and of course soon finds himself dealing with a specially dangerous job.

"I'll be seeing you around, Joe," I said. "You'll probably be out at the track this afternoon."

"No, Chief, I'm working this afternoon. But look me up if there's anything I can do for you. We have a little stable in town here, but our big barns are out at Roswich."

"O.K., Joe; I'll do that."

He lifted his hand to shake good-by, and his coat moved so that I saw he wore a gun. It made the back of my mouth taste a little funny; maybe I was wrong the time I saved him his license. A kid schooling show horses—or any other kind of horses—has no legitimate business wearing a gun to town.

At home, I'd have called him on it; but this wasn't my town, and I was determined to enjoy my vacation. "I'll be seein' you," I said, a little sadly. "I hope it's not in jail." I made my get-away.

I leaned against the bar in the Canoga, pulled out a racing form, and began studying.

I liked Kioga in the third at Chicago, and the form said the probable odds were three to one. I ordered a second beer, and said to the bartender: "Can I put some money down on a horse here?"

He said: "We don't keep no horses in the bar on account of they scratch the floor, but there's a coupla guys down at the end of the bar who might accommodate you, sport."

I let the wise-crack go, and moved down the bar. "Anybody want to quote me odds on Kioga in the third at Chi?"

A lean little guy in a Panama and horn-rims said: "Five to two, Mister."

"Make it six to two?"

He raised the brim of the Panama with his eyebrows, and said: "O.K., Mister."

I pulled out my roll—which was ample—and gave him the twenty. He tossed me a business card with some cryptic symbols on it and pocketed my dough. "Want a tip on the locals?"

"I'd like a tip," I said, "but I'll place the bet out on the track."

"Oh, ya goin' out this afternoon? Look up Henry Mindler; he gives as good odds as any. Get a little of that roll down on Chlorophly in the seventh."

"Thanks," I said. "Don't go away. I may pick something at Greenfield."

"I won't," he said. "I wouldn't go away from a guy with that much dough. My name's Melles."

"Mr. Melles," I grunted, burying my nose in my form-sheet. I didn't want to give him my name; it's too well known in racing circles.

After a while, I thought I had it. "How's the track at Greenfield?" I asked the barman.

"Aint rained in weeks," he said.

I asked Mr. Melles: "Will you have a beer, and what'll you hand me on Poilu?"

LOOKING back, now, I can tell that he looked at me in a funny way when I said that, but I was off guard, and missed the warning.

"What race is he in? And thanks for the beer, but no," Melles said.

"He's in the fifth," I said, ordering myself a third beer. I like beer.

Melles monkeyed around with his notes, and then said: "We aint had a nibble at Poilu. I'll have to phone, but offhand I can offer you ten to one."

"Better phone," I said. "I'll want to put a little on him."

I turned my back to the bar, and hooked my elbows on it, whistling at a framed picture of Man o' War across the room. A lean guy with a snaggle tooth came up, and said: "You fresh in town?"

I'm a friendly guy. "Yeah," I said easily.

"You oughtn't to carry such a big roll," he said. "Or was you figurin' on getting it all down?"

This was going pretty far. I said: "You working for Walter Winchell?"

"No offense meant, Mister, no offense. Just thought—well—" He drifted towards the door, then hurried suddenly and got out. Just a barfly, I thought. I hadn't meant to scare him.

Melles came back, his face cautious. "How much was you figurin' on laying?"

"Oh, a hundred," I said carelessly. I'd been doing pretty well before I left home.

"Fifty to one," he said. I thought I heard some relief in his voice.

"Taken," I said, and put my hundred on the line. He gave me another card.

I WENT on out, and drifted down the line. I knew something about Poilu: he had the biggest feet of any three-year-old in the business. He was, in any man's language, a dog; he should have been playing the county fairs. He looked like a plow-horse, and he had legs like a spider, but his hoofs were magnificent. They would have done credit to a Percheron stallion.

And Greenfield had been having a drought, and terrific heat, which meant that the track would be like iron, for all the sprinkling they could do. A horse with big, hard feet would have himself something there; his legs wouldn't have been jolted in the daily workouts, and he'd be in better condition than the real race-horses.

That's not enough to make a slow horse fast, but it was better than a fifty-to-one chance. Poilu had to have something, or his owners wouldn't keep on dragging him around the tracks, putting up entry fees. They must expect him to win sometime.

I felt good, and I had a lot of money in my pocket, and what the hell? I stopped in at Larsten's bar, and put another hundred down on Poilu. I could only get forty to one here. If Poilu copped, I was in nine thousand dollars, and if he lost I was out two hundred. I put thirty more down on Kioga so as to cover; Kioga couldn't miss.

YOUNG McMandering wasn't in Larsten's.

But Snaggle-tooth was. He was in a phone booth in back, and when I made my bet, he shut the door of the booth quickly, and dropped in a nickel. Before he had dialed the first letter of his number, I was back in the booth, crowding in with him. I am a big man, but well-trained; he didn't get a chance to slip on the brass knuckles he fumbled out of his pocket.

I took them away from him, taking a chance on breaking his wrist, and slid them over my own knuckles. "Listen!" I growled. "I know I'm carrying a roll. But that doesn't make me a sucker. If you'd had any ideas of calling some friends to help hold me up, drop them."

"Honest, Mister, I was just calling my girl to—"

I punched him in the stomach with his own brass knuckles. "And don't follow me, hear?"

He changed his tactics, quickly, tried a conciliating whine. "Honest, I didn't know I was up against a big shot. Who are you, Mister?"

I asked him what it was to him, and left him. I dropped the dusters in a cuspidor in front of the bar, and got out.

I walked over toward Eighth Avenue where there was a place that had had wonderful flounder the last time I was here. I passed two guys, one of whom said: "I got me a fin on Marco Polo in fifth at Greenfield."

The other guy said: "That's Mrs. Chrissley's horse, aint it?"

This was certainly a betting street, I thought. If it had been in my town during racing season, I'd have seen it cleaned out; when anybody gets the urge to put some dough on a horse's nose during our season, they can come out to the track and buy an admission ticket.

Snaggle-tooth didn't follow me, because I looked back. Once it seemed to me that another man was tailing me, but I frowned at him, and didn't see him again.

I ate, then took a cab to the station to catch a race-track train. A lot of men I knew were on the train, sports and small owners, touts and gamblers, but I

had found a seat, and I kept a newspaper in front of my face.

At the track I decided against using my badge to get in, because that would have involved lots of conversation and back-slapping and sight-seeing with the cops on duty. I bought me a ticket just like any other rube, and wandered into the paddock.

This was much more of a track than anything we could boast out home. There is more to a track than a dirt oval where horses run; you've got to have color and glamour. This place had it. Big trees and smooth grass in the saddling enclosure, benches to sit on, a pretty infield with the steeplechase jumps making little lines of white color through it, all made you feel like a sportsman come to see the thoroughbreds run, instead of a mug trying to pick up some easy dough.

I leaned on the rail in front of the grandstand; I had not even bought a ticket to the clubhouse. I shoved my hat back and looked at the track and marked my card, and watched the sprinkler going up and down the track, and just relaxed like hell.

A MUG shoved up alongside me, and said: "Aint I seen you some place before?"

"Probably," I said. "I sell plumbing supplies to prisons."

He said, "Oh," not sure whether he ought to take me seriously or not. "Well, maybe that's it. I got lots of inferential friends in politics, and mebbe I seen you in their offices sometimes."

"I only sell to English prisons," I said.

"That's a fine way to talk to a guy that just comes up for a friendly chat," he complained. "No foolin', I'm sure I know you."

I sighed. "Scram!" I said succinctly. I didn't know him, as a matter of fact, so he wasn't anything very bad around a race-track. But he was spoiling my picnic. "I'm a cop out West," I said, and showed my badge. He scrammed.

I went on marking my card, and finally got a bet figured for the first, which shows the mood I was in: the first was a race for maiden two-year-olds, and I don't think I'd ever bet on anything like that before. Staring at my card, it suddenly occurred to me that I was getting a lot of attention; Snaggle-tooth, and the man I had frowned at, and this new Droopy-jaws all seemed to be following me. But I laughed it off. There was no

conspiracy against me; it was just jitters from being a cop too long.

I went under the stands to bet. There was a big ring around each betting post, and I had to shove through.

A girl hopping up and down on the edge caught hold of my coat tails as I started plowing, and said:

"I've been trying to get in there for ten minutes."

"All right," I said. "You push, and I'll pull."

Our combined effort made it. I landed up right in front of the bookie's stand, with the girl clinging to my arm. I looked down at her for the first time, and she was something nice. Chestnut hair, bay eyes, long and rangy, but with plenty of staying power.

I put my ten on my choice and she put two on the same horse. She said: "Can we get out again?" She was not brassy or over-intimate, just friendly, as though the sun was warm, and why not get along with people.

"Easiest thing in the world," I said, and dragged her through the sports to the outside.

Clear, she straightened her hat, and said: "Thanks."

"Come on down to the rail," I said. "They'll go in a few minutes, but we can still get good spots to lean."

"All right," she said.

We walked down toward the tall wire fence, side by side. She had let go of my arm. I had a girl back home, but there was no harm in this, and some one pretty to talk to would improve the day a lot. She was no race-track girl, because they wait till after the races to pick up the winners.

"Sooner or later, this State will get wise to itself," I said, "and put in pari-mutuels."

"I've never been to a pari-mutuel track," she said. "It must be much nicer. They have bookies up in the stands, too, but their odds aren't quite as good."

I suppressed a grin. The variation between stand odds and ring odds on a two-dollar bet wouldn't be noticeable.

"My name's Van Eyck," I said.

"Mine's Isabel Fraley," she said, putting out her ungloved hand. "Do you think that horse will win, Van?"

"Anything can happen in a race like this," I said. "He's got a better chance than most."

"I know," she said, seriously, "you shouldn't bet on a maiden two-year-old race, should you? But I don't get out here very often, and I hate to pass up a race. They're no fun unless you have some money on them."

"That's right," I said, finding a nice spot on the wire, and moving a couple of railbirds over with my shoulder.

She leaned next to me and accepted a cigarette. "How nice—mybrand! I had another horse picked in this race, but I was pushed around so getting in to bet, that I forgot his name, and when you bet, I thought that would be all right for me."

I laughed. "With a set-up like that, I can see you'd have to get the very best odds."

She laughed, and almost blushed. "That really isn't the reason I like to bet down there. Really, it's because I want to play like I'm a real gambler. Betting in the stands isn't as much fun, as down in the ring with the big money."

"I know how it is," I said. "I'm having as much fun as a kid at a county fair."

"Here they come," she said. "Oh, look, they're coming out to parade."

The little horses went by us, tiny and dainty. There's nothing smaller than a two-year-old thoroughbred; they have

tiny little hoofs like silver dollars, and a dainty way of going. The silks were bright, and the horses shone, and the band played, and I had a pretty girl to help me enjoy it all.

Our horse won, which was all that was needed to make the afternoon complete. We went and collected our little winnings —mine about thirty dollars, the girl's four; and Isabel said: "I ought to buy you a drink. You really picked that one for me."

"Let's go watch them saddle," I said. "I haven't got a selection in this one; you make it on looks."

We walked around the big park where they saddle the horses at that track. Each little horse had a ring of people around him, looking wise; most of them didn't know the horses from the saddles.

Isabel said: "You know what I like best?"

"No," I said. "What?"

"I like the way the trainers all wear hats, because when they go to tighten the girths, they have to take their hats off and hand them to an assistant. Do you have to have a license to hold a trainer's hat?"

"Sure," I said. "This is a well-regulated industry." I couldn't remember when I had behaved like this, talking this way, enjoying myself so much.

"There's a trainer without a hat," she said. "Let's go see what he's training."

"All right."

The horse had "7" on his blanket. "March Hare," I reported.

"Oh, no, it can't be," she said. "Let me see." I showed her the card. "But that's a tip from the gods," she said. "The *March Hare* was having tea with the *Mad Hatter*."

"What?"

"In 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

"Oh, the book."

"Let's bet our shirts on March Hare."

MARCH HARE lost, but by this time, I had something else on my mind. The mug with "inferential friends" had been following us. He had followed us when we went to watch the saddling, followed us to the betting ring, and followed us to the fence while we watched March Hare run fourth.

I said, "Excuse me a minute, Isabel," and walked back to him. There are ways a cop can strong-arm a man along without anyone noticing it; I used one of them on him to get him out of the girl's sight. I said: "Quit following me before I put your teeth through your own tonsils."

"You don't own this track," he said. "I bought my ticket just like anyone else."

"Well, use it up any place but around me," I told him, and went back to Isabel.

WE picked the next horse because his racing colors were the same as Isabel's scarf. When we went to the betting ring, Droopy-jaws was still on our tail. I picked the betting stand of Mr. Henry Mindler and got in close, leaving Isabel on the side-lines. She had had enough of placing her own bets, was letting me do the line-plunging.

"There's a mug following me," I told Mindler.

The lean, aged bookie hooked his lip back over a gold tooth, and said: "Tell the cops." He turned and gave an odds-changing order to one of his clerks.

"I don't want to bother the cops," I said. "Melles, in town, said you could take care of me out here."

"Oh, you a customer of Melles? O.K., which is the guy?"

I pointed the mug out, and Mr. Mindler nodded, snapped an order at one of his runners. "That'll fix it," he said. "You want to place a bet?"

"One twenty on Rosemary," I said, "and one two on the same pony."

He took my money himself, wrote down my badge number.

"Thanks, Mr. Mindler," I said, but he was already busy at something else.

When I went back to Isabel, I saw a Pinkerton going in after my pal. . . .

We spent the rest of the afternoon having fun, disregarding form and past performances, and playing colors, hunches and the smiles on jockeys' faces, and ending up pretty far ahead. I had won about eighty dollars, the girl about fifteen, and she was charmed.

Then the last race was over, and we headed for the train, side by side. Suddenly I was shy, me, the tough Van Eyck. I said, after some hesitation: "Would you have dinner with me?"

"Yes," she said, simply and friendly. "But you'll have to let me take you to cocktails first. Look at all I won."

"It's a deal," I said. I hoped Elizabeth would never hear about this; from being a pleasant afternoon, it looked as though I was falling in love.

I bought a paper on the way into the train, but we had to scramble to get seats, and then we talked for a minute, and the

train had started before I got a chance to open it.

"Mind if I look at the paper?" I asked. "I've got some money on a horse in Chicago that I'd like to collect."

"Go ahead," she said. I didn't try to interpret the look she gave me.

A minute later I groaned. Kioga had stopped to pick roses or something.

"Lose?" she asked.

"Frozen out," I said. I casually looked at the Greenfield results, not expecting much from my fifty-to-one shot. Then I gulped.

My big-footed Joe, Poilu, had frozen out the field. I had had two hundred dollars on him—one hundred at fifty to one, and another hundred at forty to one!

I sat back in my seat, and said weakly: "You wouldn't like a chinchilla coat, would you?"

"Rhetorically speaking, yes," Isabel said. At least, I think that was the word she used.

"I just copped a winner at fifty and forty to one," I said. "I—I feel a little weak."

"I should think you would," she said.

I TURNED to the sports-news column for explanation of the miracle. The favorite, it said, one Marco Polo, had stumbled in the stretch, jamming up the leaders. Poilu had been far enough behind the pack to stay clear, and his jockey had brought him around the pack to win. Marco Polo stuck in my mind. Oh, yeah, he'd been one of Mrs. Chrissley's string when she was out our way. Funny how things tied in; I had seen young Joe McMandering just before I made the bet, and we had talked of Mrs. Chrissley because he said he worked for the rich woman. By hunch-player's standards I should then have bet on Marco Polo. But I hadn't, and I was in a nice bunch of money.

"Do you bet on the horses much?" Isabel asked.

"Pretty steadily," I said, trying to get back to normal.

"I wondered," she said. "You looked so surprised at winning."

"I am," I said. "I didn't expect to."

"But why bet if you don't expect to win? I mean, it's different out at the track, betting on horses you see. You're out to have a good time, then. But betting on a name in a newspaper isn't fun."

I tried to explain. "Betting on these fifty-to-one things, you never expect to win. But whenever you see a horse at

fifty-to-one who should be twenty-five-to-one, you are justified in betting. If you win once out of forty times you're ahead, but you never expect this to be the time."

She said a queer thing, but I missed it at the time. "I'm glad that's all there was to it." Then quickly, she added: "I wouldn't like you as much if you were a professional gambler."

"No, I'm not exactly a professional gambler."

"What do you do, Van?"

I didn't want to tell her. Some people don't like cops, and more don't like private detectives, and my job combines the worst points of both, in a way. I liked this girl, but it wasn't going to be a lifetime friendship, so why ruin a pleasant evening?

"I'm in politics out West," I said.

"Oh. . . . Aren't you interested in what I do?"

"What do you do, Miss Fraley?"

I said: "Keep your hands on the table, all of you. There's no reason for anyone to get hurt."

She looked at me for a moment. I thought whatever she was going to say would be something serious, because she looked sad, but she only said:

"All right, Van. . . . The treasurer's a friend of mine, I'll tell him to reserve you a seat."

"I'm a dancer," she said. "I'm in the chorus, now, of 'Balloons,' but some day I'm going to be a real dancer."

"Gee," I said. "Then we won't be able to spend the evening together; you'll have to work. I had large plans."

"I know, I have to be there at eight-thirty. But we've got plenty of time for a nice dinner."

"I always thought chorus girls had a long list of Johnnies. How come you went to the races all by yourself?"

"Partly because I wanted to, and mostly because I haven't got a long list of Johnnies. I've got strict ideas instead."

"Nevertheless," I said, "can I call for you after the show?"

"Nevertheless, you can," she said, and we both dissolved into laughter. I don't remember ever laughing as much as I did that afternoon. My life is kind of grim and serious, most of the time. . . .

I took her to dinner—and then she had to go to work. "Why don't I drop in and see your show?" I asked.

"I'll go up to my hotel first, and put on my dinner jacket," I said.

"All right." She grabbed for her handbag and gloves, and said: "I've got to fly, it's a quarter past now; see you later."

She hurried off. I paid the check, and walked slowly down the block, toward Larsten's and the Canoga. I might as well collect my bets.

The bookie in Larsten's paid me off cheerfully enough. I laid a ten-dollar bill on the counter, and told the bartender to set them up for the house. "Oh, and by the way," I said, "a kid named Joe McMandering was coming out of here this morning. If he drops in again, tell him I've won a nice bet, and to come around and see me and help me celebrate."

"I don't know no one by that name," the barman said.

"Tall, thin young fella," I said. "Trains horses for Mrs. Chrissley."

"Mrs. Chrissley's string is out at Greenfield," the bookie said. "Golly, you oughta know that."

"On account of Marco Polo?" I laughed. "Yeah, I should, pal. Well, you tell this kid, if you see him, I'm at the Knickerbocker."

I went down a block to the Canoga. The time was exactly eight-twenty-six; I noticed it, because I wanted to hurry and get into my soup and fish and get to the show.

But Melles was not in the Canoga; I asked for him.

"He'll be back pretty soon," the bartender said. "He loses a big bet, and he had to go get the dough to pay off."

"Yeah," I said, "I know."

"You the guy that wins?"

"That's right. I'll be too busy later to attend to the formalities," I said, laying another ten on the bar. "Treat the house."

"You win plenty, I hear," the bartender said. "Thanks, Mister—"

I acted as though there were no capital on the title. Then Melles came in, all smiles. I wondered what his maiden name was; he was a Greek. "Say, that's some nick you take me for," he said. "Here's your dough, I got her all counted." He handed me a package.

I counted it up, and it was O.K. I gave Melles a little tip, and got out, away from the back-slappers I had treated to drinks. I took seven steps toward my hotel, and—

A guy said: "Take it easy, Mister." The gun was cold and hard in my spine.

I hesitated for a second or so. There was a cop on horseback down the block, chalking the tops of cars, very absorbed in his work. There were probably two dozen more cops within a hundred yards of where I stood. But also there were probably two thousand people in that same area, and all my pal had to do was pull the trigger, drop the gun, and step into the crowd.

He might know this, I thought, and not care if he shot me or not. So I walked toward the curb, in the direction he indicated, and said: "If this is a hold-up, pal, my money's in my hip pocket. I've got a date; don't take any longer than you have to."

His answer was: "Shut up, wise guy!"

AS he muscled me into the car, I thought, that this was a nasty wind-up to a day of sun and horses and a pretty girl.

There was another mug driving the car. I was shoved into the back seat, and the gunman said: "Don't go too fast, Jake; we don't want to contact no cops."

"In that case," I said, "you've got a poor guy here. I'm a cop."

"So's my Aunt Emma," said Jake. "Bop him if he don't shut up, Al."

"Wid pleasure," Al said.

Jake was trying to back the car out of its parking space. The mounted cop rode up, and held the traffic for a moment, so we could get out. I tried to get near enough to the window to speak to him, but I couldn't make it. Al's gun was in his pocket, out of sight.

We got out into the stream of traffic, and Al used his free hand to take my roll from my coat pocket. Nine grand went, just like that. I stared at the floor, and sat still. There was a dab of red clay on Al's left shoe, and I could see Jake's swarthy face in the mirror. There was a box of matches tucked in each back ash-tray labeled: *"Rose Mills Garage."*

I saw no percentage in struggling. The gunman's hand went along my hip and got my wallet, and another four thousand —my vacation money—joined the day's winnings. I had about a one-to-four chance, I thought, of turning and socking Al; but not having five lives, I couldn't afford the bet.

WE turned a corner, went into Times Square, ran south, then west again. At Forty-third, Jake made a right turn, and when the street was clear ahead, Al opened the door and shoved me out, almost under a paper truck parked by the New York *Times* office. The car went down the street and away, its license-plate showing so clear that I knew there was no use recording the number.

I sat on the running-board of the paper truck's cab, and took off my right shoe. Inside the sole there was two hundred bucks, put aside for just such emergencies. I got it out, and went up to the theater where "Balloons" was playing. The box-office had a ticket reserved for Mr. Ten Eyck, which is the usual mistake made with my name; I paid for it and went in, just as the curtain rose.

Afterward, standing at the stage door, I felt a little silly. This was me, the tough Van Eyck, the guy who rejoiced in how hard he was; being held up and standing at a stage door waiting for a chorine, all in one day!

Isabel arrived in what I think they call a dinner dress. It was black silk or some-

thing, with white glass trimmings, and a little black jacket over it.

She said: "Oh, you didn't wear your dinner jacket."

"No," I said. "It was all wrinkled from being in my suitcase."

"Sometimes I think you must be a professional gambler, from the funny way you talk."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Like—I think they call it a poker face. Only you have a poker voice."

"I don't make my living by gambling," I said. "I'm a cop, a race-track detective." I showed her my cards.

"But a Chief!" she said. "Why didn't you tell me that before. You said—"

"I said I had a political position. Well, I have. . . . But the real reason I didn't tell you was that some people don't like policemen. I wanted you to like me."

Her hand fluttered against my cheek for a moment. "You're nice, Van—" Then she laughed. "I feel very safe, going out with a chief of police. Do you know the Glowworm Club?"

"Any place you take me is O.K."

Four hours later we stood in front of her apartment-house, and I said: "Good night. I've never had such a good time in my life." I shook hands with her.

"Aren't you going to ask for a good-night kiss?" she asked.

"The proposition was 'nevertheless,'" I said.

"You are nice, Van," she told me, and put up her face to be kissed. I kissed her, and then I said: "Are you crying?"

"The wind's cold on my face," she told me, and ran into her apartment-house.

I looked after her, and then counted my money. I had over a hundred left; I was all right. I flagged a night-owl cab, and said: "Police Headquarters."

JAKE, it turned out, was John Waters, alias many other names. Al was Alberti Giavooni. Red clay, according to the cop in the identification bureau, could be found in Jersey. So could a town called Rose Mills. I told the headquarters men as little as possible, and chartered a cab for the rest of the night for twenty-five dollars. . . .

The Hudson River towns we hit were like the industrial section of any large city. They were named Weehawken, Hoboken, Jersey City. Finally we hit Rose Mills, which smelled only of coal-dust, and had many more bars than I had expected. I had no luck, although I was cagey and theatrical in a couple of dozen.

By three o'clock in the morning, I had reached the point where I had to hand my driver a five-spot every five minutes to keep him from quitting. But this, I felt, was the time to corner my birds; they would have enough money to bribe some bar into staying open; the closing hour long had passed, and any bar that I found that was open would be a good prospect. So we could go faster; most taverns were dark.

At four, Providence operated for me, and I found them. Even found the car they'd used, though it had new license-plates—Jersey ones—on it now. I peered through a dirty white curtain in a bar window, and saw them sitting at a table behind the barroom with a couple of dames.

The front door of the bar was locked; I considered pounding on it, but then decided that if I did, they would think I was an enforcement officer and turn out the lights. I didn't want to walk in, in the dark.

I PAID off my taxi-driver; he was grumbling again, and I was tired of five-spotting him.

Then I prowled alleys until I found a men's-room window that wasn't barred. I climbed through—soaking the knee of my pants in the wash-basin.

When I opened the wash-room door, the soft music of a muted phonograph sounded off. I peered at their table, and swore; there were red wine bottles all over it, half full, and empty. I'd hoped they'd be drunk, but you can't depend on Italians getting drunk on *vino*. Jake's name was "John Waters," but he looked Italian too.

However, a guy who has lost several grand doesn't hesitate over a little thing like that; I reached for my gun.

Then I stopped and planned this thing. There are ways to crime, regular methods and ways of procedure that spell a lot to a cop or to a man who has been around crooks very much. This had been no ordinary hold-up.

If it had, a lot of things would have been different. In the first place, I never would have seen Al and Jake's faces so plainly. In the second place, the match boxes that the garage had tucked so neatly in that car would have been removed; and in the third place, the car, even with its license-plates changed, would not now be standing in front of this bar.

So it was no ordinary hold-up, yet it was a hold-up—and that left only one

Smitty tried to jump me: I knocked him into Mike, on the sofa.

solution. It was a gambler's hold-up; they had figured me for a professional, and therefore a man not likely to run to the cops. So when I went in, I kept my gun in my side pocket, where they could not see it.

If I was wrong, they would shoot hell out of me the moment they saw me. If I was right, I would get information as to where my money had gone.

I let the door slam behind me.

They all turned. I said: "Keep your hands on the table, all of you. There's no real need for anyone to get hurt."

Al was drunk; Jake not so much so. Jake used a little profanity, and then said: "What are you doing here?"

"Getting my money back," I said.

Al slipped a little in the puddle of wine that was his brain. "We spent most of our share, already, sport."

Neither he nor Jake seemed particularly afraid of me. So I was right.

I sat down at the table, said to one of the girls: "Don't I get any wine, Mabel?"

"My name's Rosa," she said. From her face and her clothes she probably worked in a factory; I think she was respectable enough, if not used to too much wine. She poured me a glass, and I lifted it to my lips with my left hand. "Here's to a sensible business talk with no fireworks."

Jake nodded, lifting his own glass. "That would be all right with me," he said. "If you'd put your hands on the table too."

"O.K., Jake." I brought my right hand up from my empty pocket, and we drank.

"Any hard feelings about this evening?" Jake said. "You know how those things are."

"He was a little tougher than he had to be," I said. "But we'll let bygones be bygones. *Votre sante!*"

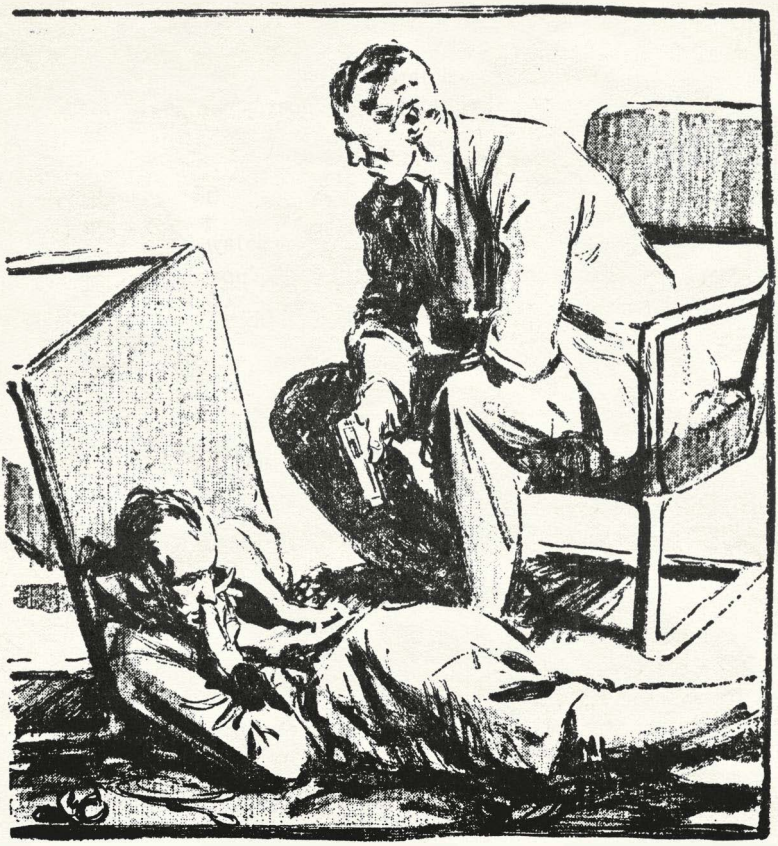
"Saluto," Rosa said. "I like him, Jake."

Jake said: "Sure he's a sport. Mister, I don't know your name; this is my sister Rosa."

"My name's Van," I said.

"I'm glad to see you," she said. "This is Al; he pulls the cork on the Chianti bottle, and then he doesn't say nothing all evening. And we were going to celebrate a big business deal that Jake and Al pulled off. Was you in on it?"

Jake and I had a good laugh about that. "Was I in on it?" I asked. "I'll say. I was the man they held up."



"Hold-ups are not nice. I could call the cops and have you all pinched."

Jake's girl spoke for the first time, her eyes wide. "Oh, Jake, did you hold up a man? You promised me—"

Jake said: "Aw, now, Phoebe, this was different. This was just a gambling deal. Van here aint a sucker, he's one of the boys. Mr. Mindler just hired us to equalize the deal."

I gulped. My work here was done; I might as well go; they would have been paid fifty or a hundred bucks to do the job, and let them keep it.

"Sure," I said. "I got a little out of line." My voice wasn't angry at all. "You mustn't be mad at Jake, Phoebe."

"You're a swell guy, Van," Jake said. "I'm sorry Al was rough with you."

"Beat 'em all up," Al mumbled. "Shove their teeth down their throats."

"He's not a very nice guy to make dates with your sister, Jake," I said.

"Yeah," Jake said, "I know." He sounded a little worried. "Him and me was going to buy this joint, a cousin of mine owns it now, and he'll sell it for two grand. We was saving up together, but now, I don't know. I don't like rough stuff."

"Talking about two grand," I said, "Henry Mindler sent me out. After you equalized me—naturally I went to see Henry. Some of that dough you took was really mine."

"Sure, it all looks like dough," Jake said. "We couldn't tell."

"I've got a job I may want you boys to do; Henry recommended you."

Jake leaned across the table. "Listen," he whispered, "call me up tomorrow."

"I get you, pal," I said.

I rose to go. This was kind of funny, like a movie in slow motion. "Well, I'll be shoving back to town."

"Let me drive you to the Tube," Jake said. "Or you got a car?"

"I had a cab, but—"

Heavy hands pounded on the front door. "Open up," a voice yells. "This is the cops."

Jake and I looked at each other. Distrust was showing openly in his face.

Al swung up from his drunken stupor, and before we could stop him, had pulled his gun and sent a slug through the door; wood splintered, there was a thudding sound, and then a man screamed: "They shot me, the rats! Let 'em have it!"

Jake knocked the gun out of Al's hand, and I picked it up, cracked him judiciously over the head with it. Al hit the

floor. Jake grabbed the girls and pushed them under the table. He was either praying or swearing in Italian.

I said: "We'd better try talking to them." I knew what had happened; my idiotic cab-driver had gone to the nearest police station and reported that he had brought a suspicious-looking fare over from New York. So here were the cops.

Rosa said: "Oh, Jake, now they'll never give you your liquor license." She began to cry.

Jake rolled his eyes, and said: "Maybe when we go to talk, they shoot. We better put the girls in the cellar."

I nodded. While he steered Phoebe and Rosa to a door, and shooed them down cellar steps, I went over to Al. Whatever money he had was, properly speaking, mine; there was fifty dollars of it. I would need cash, and I did not want to wire home; that was too undignified.

Jake came back, and I said: "Jake, this blood-simple partner of yours got us into this jam. He might as well take the rap, if there's going to be one."

"Yeah, but how? For a smile from an old lady, I'd see him in the electric chair, but how we gonna do it?"

I said: "I'm going to use Al for a shield and go up to the back door and parley with the cops. Then if they shoot, he gets it."

"O.K.," Jake said, sweating hard.

I shoved my hands under Al's armpits, and walked him to the door. "Hey!" I shouted. "Hey, you cops."

"THEY'RE awful quiet," Jake said. "Maybe they're setting up machine-guns."

I had thought of that.

But it was more likely that there were just two cops, a pair of Dolly sisters in a radio wagon sent around to investigate a suspicious stranger.

I said: "There's probably just two men, counting the one he shot. Hey, outside there," I yelled. "We got the guy that wounded your man. You can have him!"

A deep voice said: "Wounded, hell! He just died."

I stepped back, but not soon enough. A revolver put four slugs through the door, and Al's body jumped a little in my arms.

Behind me a wave of cold air came up and nipped the back of my neck, and I knew that Jake had run away through the cellar door with the two girls and left me holding the bag.

A high voice some place shouted: "There they go, Officer!" I thought the voice sounded like my cab-driver's.

Feet ran away from the punctured door in front of me. I let Al drop, and cautiously tried the door; it came apart in my hands. I stuck my head out. The big car was gone from in front of the bar, and about two blocks away, a siren screamed. Running out into the street, I saw three tail-lights: one looked like the cab I had chartered before, one of them was surely the cop car, and the front one was probably Al and Jake's big sedan.

There was nothing to keep me here.

I WALKED down the deserted street. I had done nothing wrong, I had not shot a cop, nor killed Al, and still I felt bad and conscience-stricken about the whole mess. I told myself, after all, I didn't ask to be held up, but that didn't do much good, and I resolved to see Mr. Henry Mindler in the morning.

By dropping into ditches every time a car went by, I made it to the Tube at seven in the morning when the factory hands were going to work. My dirt-stained clothes were not conspicuous till I got to my hotel, where the clerk on duty looked at me, and then looked away with the expression of one who is thinking: "When these out-of-towners come to New York!"

I bathed and put on fresh clothes and went and put my knee on the window-sill while I stared down at New York. It was a dirty, noisy city, I thought. Harsh, with no trees and too many people, and buildings so tall they shut out the sun.

My breakfast downstairs was poor, the eggs not boiled long enough, the bacon too fat, and the coffee bitter. I got it down, and then looked at my watch. It was only a little after nine o'clock.

I strolled down the street to the Canoga Bar. A puff-eyed flunkey was sweeping up. I said: "Bar open yet?"

"I s'pose so," he said indifferently, going on with his mopping. He raised his face to expose an unshaven throat, and called: "Henry!" The mop sloshed around on the floor.

The barman who had been on the day before came out of the back room, carrying a napkin. "Yes sir?"

"Beer," I said.

He said: "It may not be very good yet. Hasn't had time to chill."

"Give me a bottle, then." I named my brand, watched him uncap and pour it expertly, set it in front of me, the while

he thought about his breakfast. I gave him his money and he started away.

I said: "No harm in my waiting here for Melles, is there?"

"He won't be in till ten-thirty," he said. "But wait if you want to. Soapy there'll run get you a morning paper." The curtains fell behind him.

I tasted the beer tentatively. I didn't feel much like drinking, but it tasted all right when it got down. Outside, the street was beginning to get that brassy look New York wears when it is going to be a hot day. A midget passed, walking a tremendous Russian wolfhound.

I finished my bottle of beer, and walked four or five doors to Larsten's place. It was going to be a hot day.

Larsten's was a little more active, perhaps because they served food to the customers as well as to the help. Three or four men sat on stools at one end of the bar and read form sheets.

I climbed up and ordered a small beer. The bartender looked at me, and said: "Oh, you're the sport wins all that dough yesterday."

I nodded. The bookies all looked up. One of them said: "If you'd like to get something down today I can give you as long odds as the next guy."

"Sorry," I said. "But I'm placing my business through Henry Mindler."

He said, "Oh!" losing all interest. "Bobby here takes Mindler's bets."

BOBBY said, eagerly: "Yeah, that's right. If—"

"Well," I said, "I've got only one horse figured out today." I fished in my pockets, brought up what was left of my cash; about sixty bucks, counting what I had taken from Al. "Just a small bet; but I might as well get started. Only how do I know you work for Mindler? See, I'm a stranger in town, and I want to make sure I'm in good hands."

Bobby said: "I work for Mindler all right."

"How do I know?"

"If I didn't have to stay here and see my customers, I could take you right up to Henry's hotel room, and you'd see. Henry and me, we're just like that; I call him Henry and he calls me Bobby."

"Go on," I said, pushing my money around. "What hotel does he live in?"

"The Grant. See? I know Henry since we was both kids on—"

"Yeah, I guess you do." I laid ten bucks down, gave him the name of a horse to put it on.

"I'll be back later," I said. "I got some figuring to do."

Then I walked the three blocks to the Grant, paying a good deal of attention to the mirrors in shop windows. Nobody was following me, I was sure. I went into the Grant and asked the desk clerk for Henry Mindler.

HE waited for a nod from a chap holding up one of the lobby pillars, then told me: "Penthouse A." I had not realized I was dealing with such a big shot; in New York, you have to be some one before you can afford to sleep on a roof.

The elevator that took me up must have gone too fast, because I got a cold, nasty feeling in the pit of my stomach. There were two doors on the elevator landing, marked A and B; I rang A with a firm thumb that was the only calm and controlled part of me.

A fellow in a blue shirt and pink sleeve garters opened the doors and looked me over. "Yeah?"

"Henry in?"

"Who wants to see him?"

"Tell him Van. On a gambling proposition."

He said carelessly: "I guess it's O. K. Come on in."

I strolled through a big room with four or five telephones and as many young punks using them. Henry evidently combined a legitimate bookie business out at the track with an illegitimate poolroom wire business; something I already knew, or suspected.

I went on through this room, and into a back one, larger, surrounded by terraces on three sides. The lean man with the gold tooth whom I had taken for Henry Mindler the day before on the betting stand out at the track was working with paper and pencil in a corner; the snaggle-toothed man who had tried to pump me at the track was leaning against a sideboard; the bum who had tried to pick me up in the Canoga was sprawled on a couch.

A little fellow, who looked like an ex-jockey—thirty years ex—was eating breakfast in the middle of the room.

I said: "You're Henry Mindler, eh?"

He said: "Yeah. You know these guys? My brother George,"—that was the one who ran the track stand,—"and Mike Pellaro, and—"

"O. K.," I said. "Yeah, I know 'em." I sat down, calmly. The one named Mike and the other bum obviously had guns, and obviously had instructions.

I remembered my promise, and called: "Police!" Then I fired, shooting low.

"You took me for plenty yesterday," said Mindler. "But no hard feelings."

"Why should there be?" I asked. "By the way, do you people know my name?"

"Van Eyck, isn't it?"

My heart sank. There were two ways they could have found that out. One of them was Joe McMandering, and the other was—Isabel. Of course, they could have asked at my hotel, but—

"That's right," I said. "G. T. Van Eyck. Sometimes known as Chief Van Eyck."

Mike Pellaro let out a squawk, and I knew I was on pretty safe grounds. Where I am known I am never in any great danger. I drawled: "You guys sort of made a mistake. Taking that money back from me was funny enough, as a gag; the only trouble was, you got about four grand that I hadn't won from you. It happened to be counterfeit money that was shoved on our tracks; I'm in New York trying to trace down the guys that shoved it. I had the queer in my pocket for professional reasons."

Henry looked up, and said: "George, take those figures in the other room. Smitty, go help—"

"They can go in the other room," I said, "but if they're going to use your Jersey phone to get in touch with Jake Waters and his pal Al Giavooni, save your time. The cops killed Al last night, and Jake's in hiding."

"Go on," Henry said. "Get out of here, George." When the door had closed, he looked at me, and said gravely: "I wouldn't have had this happen for the world, Chief. You see, as you guessed, I run a little wire system on the side; but I don't like my brother to know about it; he takes care of my legitimate business and—"

I leaned forward. "I can be plenty tough when I want to, Henry. And when people try and give me the runaround, I am tough. In my business, I cannot afford to let mugs gyp me and get away with it. In a couple of minutes I am going to shoot you and frame my story while the cops are on their way up here. I can get away with it; my standing is very, very good and cops stick together."

Henry said: "If you feel you have been cheated, lay your cards on the table. I run a legitimate betting business, and I would rather give back money than have disgruntled customers. But it was my impression that you won, not lost and—"

I knocked him out of his chair with one swipe of my open hand. His breakfast-tray went flying. Mike Pellaro jumped up, his gun out; I whipped the sights of my own gun down on his wrist, and his automatic clattered on the tiled edge of the floor. I kicked it under a sofa.

Smitty came back again and smiled his snaggle-toothed smile. "It's on the level, Henry," he said. Then his dim wit took in the scene, and he tried to jump me; I knocked him piling into Mike, on the sofa, went over, locked the door, and picked up the phone. "No calls for fifteen minutes," I said.

I SAT down in a chair, and covered the room with my gun. I guess my face wasn't pretty.

I said: "Hold-ups are not nice things. I could call the cops and have you all pinched, and Jake Waters would crack when they questioned him, and involve you all."

Henry Mindler looked at me, and said: "You're an awfully big shot back home, but this is New York."

"Where the rules still hold," I agreed. "You won't believe me," I said, "but the reason I don't work it that way is: Jake Waters has a darned decent sister that's trying to keep him straight. I—after a couple of things I've seen lately, I feel like maybe there ought to be a premium on decency. That may sound sappy, but it's me that's telling it and you'll believe it, if only because I carry the gun. I want that money back; I'll take your check, Henry."

Henry chuckled: "Haw, that gal really had you—"

"Shut up!" I barked. "Your check for—make it ten grand, even. Keep the change."

"And if I don't?" Henry asked.

"You will, Henry, you will," I said.

THERE was a brisk knocking on the outside door. Henry said: "All right, Van, it's fair enough." He reached for his checkbook and pen, and began writing, while the knocking went on: "It's a dirty deal, because you're taking advantage of being a cop. And we're going to fix that young punk that works for Chrissley, too, the one that tipped you off. You can't stop us there."

"Oh," I said. "Was that how it was? You had Mrs. Chrissley's jockey fixed to stumblebum the favorite, and when I came in and put a bet on Poilu right after talking to the kid who works for Mrs. Chrissley, you thought—" I began to laugh. "Listen," I said. "Do you really think I'd only bet two hundred if I had a fifty-to-one sure thing? Why, I had over four grand—"

"In counterfeit money," Henry said. "I know. Or was that a story you told me to try and get the dough back?"

"It was a story," I said. "Don't take after that kid, he had nothing to do with it. Check up on me, I put a hundred with Melles, and another with a boy in Larsten's and no more."

Henry handed me his check; it was for nine thousand. Then he handed me some cash that he got from Mike. "Here's the money we took from you that you didn't take from us. We were holding it because we thought it was hot, maybe."

I walked to the door, said: "Thanks," and unlocked the door. Isabel Fraley was pushed in from the outside. She cried, "Van!" and her face got scarlet.

"It's all right, kid," I said. I lied a little. "I knew last night you set me up for that hold-up."

"That—" her hand fluttered in front of her face. "I thought they hadn't succeeded. When you were there after the show, when you had money for us to go on—"

"Two hundred hidden in my shoe," I said. "Come on, kid. They just gave me my dough back. One of the boys that stuck me up was killed by the cops last night, and it gave them cold feet. He wouldn't have been killed," I said, "if

you hadn't done such a good job of bird-dogging."

She said: "Oh."

Henry Mindler said, nastily: "We won't need your lady friend today, Van. Take her to the races."

"I might do that," I said. I took Isabel out. I suppose they had sent for her to use if I continued tough.

I steered her out to the elevator. "I won't hit you," I said, disgustedly. "Don't worry." She was just as pretty as she had been.

We rode down in the elevator together. "They gave me my money back," I said. "They didn't know I was *the* Van Eyck. You should have told them, or were you selling them out, too?"

"I—I didn't know who you were. Are you—"

"I should think you'd know everything about people on the tracks when you're steering suckers for a gang like that."

"I never did it before," Isabel said. "I owed them some money I couldn't pay, and—"

"At least," I said, "I'm glad you weren't trying to keep your poor, dear old mother out of the poorhouse. That's a break, anyway."

"Oh, Van, I'm so— Who was the boy who was killed?"

"Just a mug," I said. "Just a dirty, gun-carrying rat. Only maybe he liked to live. And then there's a cop shot—all in the day's work."

"Please, Van—"

"They are going after another boy, too," I said. "They think he sold them out. He's innocent; just happens to work for the same woman as a jockey they bribed. I hope they don't kill him."

"Please, Van. Don't act so—"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Let me think."

WE were in the lobby of the hotel now. She went over and sat in a big chair, her face turned away from me. I lit a cigarette with hands that shook.

Finally she stood up, and walked unsteadily over to me, put her hands on my wrists. "Take me down to police headquarters, will you please, Van? If I give myself up and sign a complete confession, they'll arrest Mindler and then he won't be able to do anything to this boy you were—"

"All right," I said. "Come on." I held to her wrist as she walked very quietly out with me, and got in a cab. I leaned forward and gave the driver an address. The cab started off.

She said: "We're not going—police headquarters is downtown, isn't it?"

"We're not going there," I said. "We're going to find young Joe McMandering. Find him and save him. I wouldn't have done it, I think, except—well, I was beginning to believe there were no decent people in the world, and maybe Joe had really sold Mrs. Chrissley out. But I've changed my mind again."

She said: "I'm glad."

AT Mrs. Chrissley's city stable—all white tile and green painted wood, and empty stalls—they said Joe McMandering was out at the farm. "We only got a couple of horses in here, now. Miss Chrissley uses them in the park."

I didn't want to take the time to get a Drive-your-self. So once again I was leaving New York in a taxicab.

We crossed Queensboro Bridge, and went along boulevards to Flushing, where they were setting up the huge grounds and buildings for the World's Fair.

"That'll be a tough policing problem," I said judiciously. "I'd sure hate to have it."

"Oh, Van," Isabel cried, "stop it. Swear at me, or scold or—but don't just go on talking in that cold way. I can't stand it!"

"Sorry," I said. "I'm not really sore, you know. It's a hard world, and everyone has to make his own way."

"I—I didn't know what they wanted me to do. Mindler said—said you were from out of town, and betting a lot of money, and they wondered who you were. If I could find out for them, they'd forget about the hundred dollars I owed. . . . I thought you were going to be a gambler, a loud mouth, and I'd let you buy me a drink, and you'd brag a lot, and then I could slip away through the crowd, and tell them. Only, I liked you, and when I went to wash at the place where we had dinner last night, I called Mindler, and said you were a politician. And I said you were all right, and we were going out together after the show."

"And you told them where we were having dinner, and they sent a couple of mugs over to hold me up. And they might have shot me." But I was getting over being mad. What she had done was not bad—not so very bad, anyway.

Greenfield spread around us, and now some horses began to appear in fields. The driver stopped at a gas station and

asked for Mrs. Chrissley's place, and then we drove on again.

It was a pretty place, old oak trees and white brick fences. We went along the fence for half a mile before we came to a gate, and then we went in and had to ride another half a mile to the stables.

There was a pretty exercise-ring, a quarter-mile, and some brush-jumps and water-jumps in the field. A bunch of colored boys were polishing up bay and chestnut horses in front of a long barn.

A white man came along. "Is Joe McMandering here?" I asked. "I'm a friend of his."

"Mc—" The man frowned.

"He schools the jumpers," I said.

"Oh, yes." The man looked at the two of us intently, taking off his felt hat in Isabel's honor. "Over there," he said. "I'll show you."

He led us around the edge of the ring to a little office built between some loose boxes. He opened the door, and showed us into a room walled with cup-bearing shelves. "Just wait here?" he said, making it a question.

"Sure," I said.

We sat there, and after a while, Joe McMandering came in the same door we had used. He stopped short when he saw me, and yelled: "Hey, it's O. K."

THE man who had shown us in, and a big Irishman in stable clothes came out from a back door, the Irishman carrying a shotgun. Two Pinkertons in gray uniforms and a local cop, a rangy kid in blue, popped up in the windows.

I said: "What the—"

"Sorry, Chief," Joe said. "Boys, this is Chief Van Eyck, the head cop of the racing commission out West. An old friend of mine."

I said: "Joe, what's going on?"

"I didn't quite tell you the truth yesterday, Chief," he said. He was being polite about not speaking to Isabel until he was introduced. "I'm assistant manager of all Mrs. Chrissley's horses, not just the hunters. Maybe you've noticed, Chief, the Chrissley horses haven't been running much? Some one in our racing stable has sold us out. Yesterday," Joe said, "one of our best runners, Marco Polo, went down with a horsehair tied around his fetlock."

"So that was how he lost?" I said.

Joe said: "Yeah. Well, I've been in New York, hanging around the betting belt, trying to get a line on where the money was coming from; trying to find out who stood to make a lot on our horses losing."

"I know who it was," I said. "It was Henry Mindler. He runs pool-wires in a couple of States, and has a bookie stand and a few—"

JOE whistled, and said: "So he's the heel! Chief, you and Mrs. Chrissley been better to me than anybody else in the world; I'd die for that woman, Chief. I—I'm going to New York and—"

"Easy," I said. "Easy, Joe. You don't have to go to them: they're coming to you." And I told him what had happened, leaving Isabel's name out of it. When I finished, I said: "All you have to do is go to New York, and they'll pick you up. They know you work for Mrs. Chrissley, and they know you were talking to me just before I bet against Marco Polo. They think you're in with whoever it is in your stable that's fixing things for them, and they don't like double-crossers."

One of the graycoats said: "You don't leave this place, Mr. McMandering. We'll get some more men out and—"

I said: "You'll do nothing of the kind. Joe, you go to New York. Tell the cops there that there have been threats against your life, and then go down the street, past Canoga and Larsten's. I'll be right behind you, ready to jump them. You already having told the cops will explain our part after it happens."

Isabel said: "Oh, no. They'll kill him."

"Oh, I forgot," I said. "My assistant, Miss Fraley. They won't kill him, Isabel; because I'm going to be there."

"Wait till I change my clothes," Joe said.

"We'll start," I told him. "Our taxi isn't very fast."

Isabel and I walked back to the cab, and suddenly I knew that as soon as I wiped up this one little piece of business, I was going to catch the train out of New York. Because the sun shone on the exercise-track and on the horses' backs, and the colored boys were singing, and the air was a little salty from horse-sweat, and I was homesick. I didn't want to go back into the city's brassy heat, not at all.

But I went, and an hour later, I was sitting at the bar in the Canoga, making small bets and sipping beer, when Joe McMandering went down the street.

I got up and walked out. My gun was tight in my armpit, and my legs had a springy feeling, such as a prize-fighter

must have when he is going into the ring after a long, hard period of training. I walked slowly, staying behind Joe. I was right there when Pellaro stepped out of a car and shoved up against Joe.

I remembered my promise to the hotel-squad men, and called: "Police!" Then I fired at Mike, shooting low, because it was crowded, and if I hit a bystander, I didn't want it to be fatal.

But I didn't hit a bystander; I couldn't, the way I felt.

Mike's legs went out from under him, and he reeled around, and Joe McMandering hit him on the jaw when he went down. Mike's gun burnt cloth from his pocket, and a plate-glass window crashed in a store, and the man who had been driving Mike's car tried to start.

But the traffic held him for a second, and by then I was on him, in the car, slashing at him with my gun. He hit out at my jaw, not much of a punch, it seemed, but just as it connected, I felt that he had brass knuckles on, and I saw things getting black, and the last thing I saw, some one reached over my shoulder and slashed the driver down.

"YOU out-of-town cops and private amateur detectives," the Inspector said to Joe and me. "You come to New York and try to settle your own troubles. . . . Not that I'm not glad you got Pellaro and that other plug-ugly; they're nuisances around town, and good riddances. But if you've got any more police business to transact in New York, I wish you'd let the New York police in on it."

"As for me," I said, "I'm catching the next train." I was in my hotel room.

"Come back some time for a friendly visit," the Inspector said. He rose to go. "How about you?" he asked Joe.

Joe said: "Huh?" Then he blushed. "Oh, I wasn't listening, Inspector. Miss Fraley here is going to leave a ticket at the box office for her show for me tonight. Want to go along? I'll—"

"I'm a married man, and a working one," the Inspector grinned, winking at me. . . .

The kids saw me down to the train; I got in my car, and waved to them through the window. Then a telegraph-boy came down the aisle; I called him over and wrote a wire to Elizabeth, back home: *"Hurrying home, be at the station, vacation no fun without you."*

The train started, and I leaned back against the cushions. . . . It seemed good to go home.

A vivid drama of the South Seas, by the famous author of "The Eerie Island" and "The Flaming Sword."

Twenty

CLOUDS trailed low, like steam from a passing train, over the agate mirror of Bamo Bay. Gray and moss-green, with pictures of palms inlaid upon its flawless surface, it spread within the horns of the blue headlands, incredibly lonely and incredibly still.

The beauty of it took your breath. The wickedness of it sneered at you, whispered sinister threats. . . .

Creed the Queenslander, coming for the second time to Bamo, with his cargo of trade-goods and light steel tram-rails and his two passengers, said to himself, as he conned the ketch through innumerable reefs, that it was a cursed sort of place; and as for the loveliness of it, it made him think of the beauty of Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"—poison.

By which one may understand that Creed, sea-gypsy, rebel against regular jobs, temporary master of a crazy little island ketch, and conductor for the moment of other people's brides to other people going to marry, was better-read than most of his wandering kind. . . .

The girl, Linda Williams, a sparkling little Sydney maid with well-waved ash-blonde hair, and a discreet make-up that emphasized the almost lilac blue of her eyes, came out of the cabin and seated herself upon the hatch-cover. It was fearfully hot; the sea lipped in oily swells about the *Coral Queen's* shearing bow. In the forest at the back of the trading store, the Sheba men were dully drumming—*pm, pm, pm, pm*—a sinister sound that seemed to express the very soul of Bamo.

By
BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Pieces of Silver

Illustrated by Oscar Howard

Linda sat silent for a time. Then: "So that's my home," she said, staring with all her eyes at the bone-white beach, the iron store that glittered like metal hot in the crucible, the brooding peaks beyond.

"I reckon," Creed said to her, his eyes fixed on the reefs ahead, "I reckon you were pretty well in love with Bert Woodie, when you agreed to risk it in the Shebas."

Linda asked "Why?" She knew, but she wanted to hear Creed speak again. There was something in his voice—she had noticed it when she first came aboard from the Sydney six-weekly steamer, the day before yesterday. . . . There was something in the lean, brown-golden

look of the man, in the humorous turn of his gray eyes, that strangely caught and held you. A man who could have laughed when he was dying, but who wouldn't laugh at living, because life had done something to him—Linda didn't know what. She wished she could know.

Creed did not answer immediately. The notorious reefs and horseheads of Bamo were occupying all his attention. He had chosen high noon to enter, knowing that no later or earlier hour would give him the light he needed to see the reefs through the water. Creed wasn't a qualified mate, but years of sea-wandering had taught him many things. As Bert Woodie, his friend and partner, soon and surprisingly was to know.

PRESENTLY Creed answered Linda: "Fevers. Head-hunters and cannibals. Loneliness. And general cursedness. Of course that's what has given Woodie his bit of luck. That, and finding a place to trade where the going was good. Not easy nowadays."

He gave the wheel a skillful twist, and added: "Not with the big firms cutting out the individual."

Linda said almost violently: "Of course I was—am—in love with Bert. He's bonzer. He's just *it*. And it's not because he has a decent business, either. There are other people. If you talk of the big firms—"

Creed, with his eyes on the passage through the reef, said: "Sh—shut up!" Behind him, as his keen ears informed him, somebody was slowly climbing out of the cabin.

The second passenger, fattish, reddish, middle-aged, stumped aft, and addressed Creed.

"That Woodie's store?"

"What," said Creed sweetly, "did you suppose it might be?"

As Woodie was well known to be the only white settler on the big rich risky isle of Bamo, the passenger's question seemed superfluous.

He did not wait for an answer, but stood staring hard at the buildings. They were large and fairly new; the shell-house, the copra-house, the store, were obviously the center of good trade; the sheet-iron cottage alongside was neat and prosperous.

Now, on the seaward end of a well-built stone jetty, waving a handkerchief and both hands, a short white-clad figure —Bert Woodie—was visible.

Creed went on juggling the ketch through the reefs, his native crew standing by for orders.

"If it wasn't such a damned difficult passage—" the other man said, half to himself.

They were past the reefs now; the jetty lay ahead.

"Well," said Creed suddenly, "if it weren't, what would you do?"

The other man shrank. "Oh, nothing, nothing," he said, with a white-toothed grin, directed chiefly at Linda. He was a very well-dressed man; the quality of his ducks, his helmet, his white boots, compared with the rough khaki and sockless sand-shoes worn by the Queenslander, proclaimed to any observing eye that Harbord Jones, managing director for the new South Sea trading firm, was a man of position in the Shebas; and that Creed, sea-gypsy, temporary shipmaster, wasn't.

Linda gave back the smile with interest, and then, dodging behind the cabin skylight, impishly put out her tongue. Harbord Jones didn't see the action. Creed did, and it warmed his heart. The second passenger had been annoying Linda with crude attentions all the way from the Sheba port of entry; and Creed knew enough of the inner affairs of the islands not to be pleased with that—for several reasons.

BERT WOODIE, nearly frantic by now, was dancing his small solid person up and down on the jetty. "The parson's coming next week," he yelled as Creed worked in the ketch. "His wife's here now. He had to go to—" Creed didn't hear where the parson had gone to, but it might have been hell for all he'd have done to stop him, when he heard. . . . So it wouldn't be over straight away, after all. So she would be hanging on, like a ripe fruit on a tree, unplucked and dangling. After the fruit was gone, you didn't care. But to know it was yet obtainable—

The girl was in love with Bert Woodie, a decent little fellow if ever there was one. Granted. But she was trembling on the stalk—ready to be shaken from the tree perhaps, by another hand, if—

Woodie had her in his arms, was half laughing, half crying with joy. Linda was kissing him openly and determinedly. The missionary's wife, thin and yellow-pale, as were all the women in the Shebas—as Linda herself would be by and by—stood on the wharf, hands

"If it wasn't such a damned difficult passage—" the passenger said, half to himself. "Well," said Creed suddenly, "if it weren't, what would you do?"

folded, head a little on one side, like a picture of Mrs. Grundy in an unusually beneficent mood, chaperoning.

In ten minutes, they were all on the veranda of Woodie's cottage drinking warm beer and lemonade, looking about, and talking, and talking. Only in the Islands, and the far-out Islands at that, does talk, nowadays, flow free as talk once flowed the quiet world over.

Woodie said by and by, "Did you bring the rails?" and Creed answered casually: "Yes, I got the Resident to hand them over. They'll never make a wharf there that would carry tram-rails; it was sheer waste, leaving them lying about."

"I dunno what spell you put on him," Woodie joyfully declared. "He never would give them to me."

Creed, over the rim of his beer-mug, said: "A very simple one." But nobody was listening.

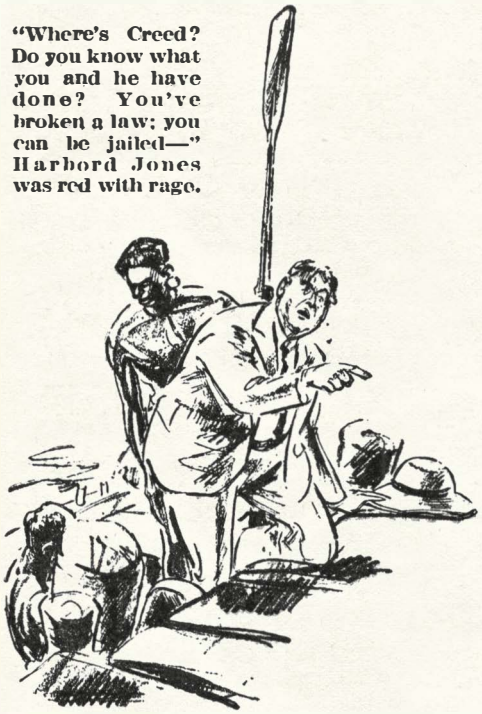
Harbord Jones had turned and was talking to Woodie. "What in—on earth did you want tram-rails for down here?" he asked; and Woodie, full of malt liquor and of sudden joy, said carelessly: "For beacons."

"Beacons? You going to beacon the bay? The captain ran her in like a motorcar."

"Creed's a rare one; and at that, even he couldn't do much with the ketch in an afternoon sun. You want noon light for this place. And you don't always get in at twelve o'clock. And any other hour's the devil. In thick weather or heavy seas, it's—it's—" He looked sidewise at the missionary's wife, and lamely added: "It's inconvenient."

LINDA didn't listen to the men. They were talking trade, of course; until they'd done, nobody—she knew—would talk love to her, which was what she wanted. Girls, white girls, are rare as diamonds in the Shebas, and much more dearly prized. But even so, trade—copra, pearl-shell, trocas-shell, snail-shell, ivory nuts, tortoise-shell, fungus—comes first. Because to have the girls, you must have the trade. Wives are costly in the Sheba Islands, known sometimes as the Sorrowful Isles. Steamer trips south, school-bills from two thousand miles away, civilized furnishings brought from Sydney or Melbourne—all this eats money; and it is only the beginning of cost.

Linda knew. She had been writing to and hearing from Bert for a year. She had listened to rivers of trade talk, since



"Where's Creed? Do you know what you and he have done? You've broken a law; you can be jailed—" Harbord Jones was red with rage.

landing from the steamer. She waited her turn, meantime discussing with the missionary's wife the most recent wedding fashions.

And the men went on talking, about trade, incidentally deciding, without knowing it, the course of love: the fate of Linda and Bert.

IT was noon again when Creed took the ketch away. If he had a sore heart —if he looked back, as soon as the passage was made, to the wharf where nobody now stood, whence Bert and Linda and the missionary lady had departed as soon as the ketch made sail—no one knew it.

Harbord Jones went with him, bound for another island. He was by no means silent, but his jealous criticisms of Bert the bridegroom, and his coarse approval of Linda the bride, irked the Queenslander before long, and caused him to steer the ketch along the windward side of the next island instead of the leeward, thereby lengthening his trip, but ridding himself of the presence of the passenger, who made for the cabin, gasping, and was no more seen that night. . . .

More or less recovered, he was left next day at an adjoining island, where he would meet his boat—the new and swift ninety-ton steamer, *Kanimbla*, that was doing the round of the Sorrowful Isles, and sweeping up whatever it and its enterprising owners could find. As moving spirit of the little company, he had studied and applied, the lowest forms of "big business" methods with considerable effect. By this time, there were some hundreds of wild Sheba natives in the enjoyment of unwonted kerosene, calicoes, and tinned fish, obtained at prices that seemed to them a black man's dream. And the hold of the *Kanimbla* fairly stank with copra and with shell of three kinds, not to mention ivory nuts, tortoise-shell, a stick or two of sandalwood, and a bit of ambergris—all reaped from the ruin, the despair, of scores of little, honest traders.

Creed, taking the *Coral Queen* on her usual round, deliberately made slow time. He did not wish to get back to Bamo until the missionary had arrived; until Linda and Bert had irrevocably been made one. The fact that he wanted Linda for himself influenced him little; her plucky acceptance of island conditions influenced him—or would have influenced him had she been free—a good deal; but most of all was he moved by the knowledge that Linda was almost certainly to be had. That decided him, in an upside down sort of way, not to try and have her.

"If it had been Harbord Jones," he thought, sitting on the cabin hatch, and barking an order now and then at the native steersman, "if it had been that blanked et-cetera of a you-know-what, I'd have pulled her out of his arms while he was putting the ring on her finger, Just as he'd do to Bert if he could. But me and Bert—no. She'll forget me all right. Other girls have." . . . And he thought of the other girls, and did not see, although he looked at it, the searing beauty of the amethyst mountains hanging sharp-toothed over cruel seas of white and green. The Shebas mouthed at him; they had got many a man as good as he, but Creed didn't mean that they should get him, soon or late.

Nor did they—for a reason that he could not have anticipated.

WHEN he ran into Bamo Bay, a day or two after the week was over, he saw at once that there was something wrong. The beach was full of natives, drumming and dancing; quite a long way off, you could see their colored headfeathers tossing, like flowers beneath the wind. ("Only they don't smell like flowers," thought Creed reminiscently.) Piles of food were visible, laid beside

smoking fires; it wasn't native food either; it was tins and sacks and cases—trade-stuff. . . . A feast on trade-goods? Had they looted Woodie's store? And if so—what had happened?

SAILING more quickly than usual, through the guiding lane of beacons newly set up, Creed took the ketch to the jetty, made fast and leaped ashore. He didn't think there had been a raid. Everything about the house was quiet—too quiet, perhaps.

Bert Woodie—Bert coming down from the house; not in a hurry. Bert, with slow steps and a heavy countenance. Not the look of a bridegroom.

Creed's heart gave a jump. Hadn't they married, after all?

Bert was shaking hands. "Old chap," he said dismally, "we're done for here, business smashed."

"Oh?" said Creed, waiting.

"The *Kanimbla*—curse her!" And he stopped to carry out the suggestion.

"Same here," agreed Creed. "Mopped up your trade?"

"Every nut and shell. Coming back again. Place bound to smash. They sold their stuff for quarter nothing to those confounded nigs. If I'd had had another six months,—with market prices skyrocketing as they are,—I'd have retired, taken Linda to Sydney. But—"

"Are you married?"

It seemed a long time before Woodie answered the question.

"No," he said unwillingly. "Parson's here and all, but Linda's jibbing a bit. Says she didn't come to the Shebas to be a beggar. Don't know what's going to happen, but I wish I were dead."

"Do you think," Creed asked him, looking at the windows of the house and store (no, there was no one visible), "Harbord Jones had anything beyond the usual motive in smashing you up?"

Woodie cursed Jones again. "Just as likely. Linda laughs at him, but—well, I don't know. Girls are queer things." He paused a minute and went on: "If it had been all right, she'd have settled down well enough. She liked me, you know. She'd come back to it; they do."

Yes, thought Creed, they did, with a man who knew what he was about; and Woodie was no fool with women; he didn't rate them too highly, which was always a mistake. But now, with the future of the business all in the mud—

It was his own chance, if he wanted it. Did he? Did he want it so much as that?

Woodie was watching him with the look of a boy who sees something good in the hands, of another boy, a boy in a senior class. "You're cleverer than me," he said. "If you can think of anything—"

Creed took him up sharply; he was suffering somewhat, and it didn't tend to soften his words, although he had made up his mind not to care. "You say that—but will you trust me without questions—let me do as I damn' please, and never open your gob to yap about it?"

"Of course I will—I mean I won't—I mean—"

"Very well, then. Keep to it. Stay in the house and pet Linda."

"Aren't you coming—"

"No. I'll stop with the ship. Get on."

After Woodie was gone, Creed sat with head on hand, elbow on knee, posed like the famous "Thinker" of Rodin, and like the Thinker, considering things to come. Ashore, the savage men of Bamo, the men whom Woodie, in years past, had worked with, conciliated, braved and finally tamed, went on dancing and drumming and eating up the bribes provided by Harbord Jones. The chief already had told his subjects that if they wished to keep their heads on their bodies and their personal tripes out of the stewing-pot, they would henceforward reserve shell, copra, and anything else that was salable, for the calls of the "beeg kettle-canoe." It was coming back in a day or two to collect the last scatterings of trade-stuff; and after that it would make regular calls.

Creed knew all that as well as if he had heard every word of it; he was familiar with the villainies, legal and otherwise, of many seas, and half a thousand isles. And he knew quite well how to put an end to it. But there were—there might be—repercussions.

After a good while, he rose. He was muttering something to himself as he strode forward, to call the dozing crew. It sounded, had there been any to listen, like a line from Kipling, a breath of spindrift blown from the "Seven Seas."

And out at sea, beheld the watchlights die,
And met my mate, the wind that tramps the world.

"Rouse out there, you unspeakables; show a leg, show a leg! . . . My mate, the wind that tramps the— And a good mate, too. . . . Up with you, you black et-ceteras—get to work!" . . . .

The air was heavy with the drowsing scent that hangs about the Shebas, drift-

ing like smoke from woods that lie, mysterious and cruel, behind the endless beaches. The seas swept, huge and empty, before Bert Woodie's store; they were blue opal, they were green peridot, they were silver-webbed with spreading, reefy foam. And the reefs sang.

LINDA, not so pretty today, for she had been crying, looked through wet eyelashes at the painted landscape, and said: "It gets you, just as you told me, Bert; it jumps up and shouts at you, and it's scented and all colors and—and like things in a sort of fairy play. But it's all in a hurry, as if it wanted to show you everything before things had time to happen to you—or to some one else. There's ill luck in the looks of it; and I thought that the first time I saw it; and look what's happened to us!"

"Nothing's happened—if you don't make it," Bert protested sulkily. "The *Kanimbla's* only been here once, after all."

"And ate up nearly all your trade; and next time she comes 'll eat the bit that's left. If you hadn't gone and beaconed the place—"

"It wouldn't have mattered. Harbord Jones would have lightered his stuff from outside. It's having the ship that matters—he and his damned little pirate company. They're that certain of their profits that they're even doing their own insuring, so I heard."

Linda passed that, as one of the uninteresting things that men said; that you only pretended to listen to. "What was it Creed told you he was going to do for you?" she asked. "You told me, you know, he said he'd do something. Yesterday, before he went off without a by-your-leave or are-you-there, to the other side of the island."

She fanned herself indignantly, and not all on account of the mosquitoes, which, as usual, were raging round the veranda. She had been feeling strangely dull, deserted, since yesterday afternoon.

Bert said, "Oh, I dunno. I don't see how he can do anything."

"Creed," pronounced Linda, working the fan still harder, "Creed, I reckon, is one of the sort of people who *do* do things."

There was nothing to say to that. The heat shut down like the lid of an iron pot. The mosquitoes screamed. Nobody spoke for a minute, and then—

It was the missionary's wife, coming round the corner of the veranda. "Now I don't want to disturb you two lovebirds," she said coyly, "for I suppose you must have made up your little quarrel by now—but Mr. Woodie might like to know that there's a ship in sight."

Mr. Woodie, it seemed, did not like to know, judging by what he said, under his breath. But he got out of his long chair, and went down to the end of the jetty, whence one could watch, from quite a long way off, that rare event, the arrival of a ship to Bamo Bay.

He returned, white, despairing. "It's all up," he said. "You might as well know, so as you can go and burn your wedding-dress and throw the cake into the sea. It's the *Kanimbla* coming back."

Bright and new, black above the waterline, intermittently red as she rolled to show anti-fouling paint below; smoking the jasper sky, and leaving a mile-long wake behind her, the *Kanimbla* came—confidently, because she knew the way; Bert Woodie and his captain had kindly beaconed it for her and for all other ships arriving at Bamo. In she came, and—

"May-I-go-hopping-to-church!" cried the bride, "if she isn't going to strike!"

Bert Woodie said nothing, because—to his eternal credit—he was running down the jetty as hard as he could, yelling and waving his arms. Fruitless warning, as it seemed. For the *Kanimbla,* confidently steaming through the dazzle of late sun upon the water, heading for the anchorage as if she had been in Sydney harbor, went bow-on upon the biggest reef in Bamo, leaned horribly aside, and with a jangle of engines stopped.

"They'll be drowned," cried Linda, and began to dance with affright.

"No, dear," the missionary lady calmly told her. "They won't—because that Mr. Creed is coming in in the ketch just behind. But I think they'll get wet," she said, "so I'll go and see to the kettles."

IT was remembered about Linda in after years—and attributed, somewhat unkindly, to fabulous Aberdeen ancestors—that she went straight back into the bedroom, shortly after this, unpacked a recently packed-up trunk that contained a white satin dress, and pulled out into full view a square box lately shoved away under the bed. The box had a confectioner's name on it.

Aboard the *Coral Queen,* the crew, half-caste captain, and part-owner of the *Kanimbla* were being brought to the jetty and landed. The *Kanimbla,* meanwhile, had saved dispute and trouble by slid-

ing off the reef into deep water, and gently going down.

"What's the depth?" Harbord Jones yelled, before his foot was fairly on the wharf. Bert seemed to understand. "You got on the outer edge of the reef," he said, "and you slid over; it's out of soundings there."

Harbord Jones began to express his feelings fervently. "Ladies are present," Bert warned, and the managing director seemed to choke himself. "I—I," he began, and then: "Where's Creed? Where's that wrecking villain who went and altered the beacons? Do you know what he and you have done? You've broken a law; you can be jailed, you—"

HARBORD JONES, red with rage, was no redder than Woodie was white, in that moment. A man of the islands and the seas, he well knew the heinousness of such a crime. Altering leading marks; removing or changing beacons—why, you had the whole Board of Trade and the Admiralty and for all he knew, the King himself, down on you!

Creed—Creed must have been mad. He'd seen him out in the bay with his boys, doing things to the beacons, but he'd supposed—of course—that Creed was only setting right some one or two of the rails that hadn't been firmly driven into the reefs. And the Queenslander—his mate, his friend, had been wrecking!

Linda appeared now; Linda, who knew which side her bread was buttered, and what relation the sugar had to the cake on which it was spread. Creed was sugar; she liked sugar—but in the long run, solid cake was best.

She didn't doubt for a moment—not being handicapped with exact knowledge, as Jones and Woodie were—that the golden Queenslander, handsomest man she'd seen for many a day, understood what he was about. She just knew!

"Suppose," she said to the angry, arguing men, "you ask Captain Creed himself about it."

Creed was coming up the steps of the jetty, in the late sun, with his hat in his hand, and his head ashine like the brazen casing of a compass. Linda had to swallow, and remind herself that Creed was broke, and Harbord Jones worse than broke, and Bert, kind old Bert, up again, before she could take her eyes away from that head.

Woodie, worried and hopeless (for why on earth had Creed done it?) turned to him as he came level with the wharf, and asked him, despairingly, what he had been doing with the beacons he'd got from the Government?

"Didn't you know," he demanded, "that when you used Government property to put up those beacons, you made them Government owned and public owned in a manner of speaking, and hadn't any more right to mess them about than to go and smash the lights of Sydney Heads?"

Harbord Jones cut in before Creed had time to reply: "It'll be jail for both of you," he proclaimed. "Wreckers, that's what the two of you are!" His voice was triumphant, and he cast a covetous and calculating glance at Linda—which Linda was prompt to answer. "That for you!" she said. "Let him speak."

Creed wasn't in a hurry; he had his eternal cigarette to light and his cigarette-case and lighter to put back into his pockets. It was a minute or so before he spoke, answering only Woodie.

"Why, yes, I did know. Perfectly."

"Well then, why—"

"Well, how the devil did you dare—"

The cigarette was well alight now. Creed tucked it into a corner of his mouth, to answer.

"I had an idea—a hunch, you might call it—that things might maybe be going on here. So, as we had to have the beacons anyhow—"

CREED paused; the cigarette was damp; it had to be re-started.

"So, I—bought them—from the Resident, as he didn't seem to want to give them away. Twenty.... Nominal price, but I didn't happen to have very much, and he just took what there was. Shilling apiece. And that," Creed went on, "made them Bert's property, and mine, acting for Bert. And the beacons are private marks. A man can do what he likes with his own private marks on his own property. Look up your marine law."

"Look up the devil," shouted Harbord Jones. He was very angry, because he had to suppose Creed might be right.

"By all means. In the nearest shaving-glass," Creed civilly suggested. "Bert, if you'll excuse me—"

"You're not going," Woodie remonstrated. "Stay, old chap—for our—"

Creed broke him off. "I have to catch the tide," he said. "Always catch the tide when it's time."

He knew that, now, the tide was bearing him away from the Shebas.

The Dead Strike

By **H. BEDFORD-JONES and**

The master of the *Gray Cockerel*—from an etching by Yngve Soderberg

Back

This fourteenth story in the Ships and Men series presents a pirate, a merchant, two British bowmen, a pretty lady and a new kind of ship—all in a most colorful story.

CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

IF you hang around a certain club in Hollywood long enough, you'll run into writers and diplomats and foreign correspondents and clairvoyants and what-not. The monthly stage shows draw a lot of what-not, because anyone with an act is tickled pink to put it on at the club, in the hope it will catch a producer's eye and step into the screen. It has to be good, too. . . .

One night a Dutchman with a broken nose and a wide grin and a title blew in with a couple of correspondents who introduced him all around. In no time at all he was popular. He had plenty of money, and he wanted to put on an act for the fun of it. Let us call him Jan Rubens and leave off his title.

He put on his act. It was a puppet-show, of all things, called "The Merchant of Venus," and it created a mild riot. Rubens gave a monologue as the show went on, and this helped the riot.

After the show we crowded about the bar, and Rubens held us spellbound. These puppets constituted his hobby; he did not go in for the usual sort of puppet-show either, but had all kinds of adjuncts.

"I like to teach something by the dolls," he said, beaming at everybody. "Every one of my acts teaches something, about men or history or whatever you like to name."

"One thing you can't teach about with puppets," I said, "is ships."

He chortled and waved his cigar.

"Hollanders, the greatest seamen in the world, not teach about ships? You make fun of me, my good friend. Of course I can. With puppets, too. Did you ever hear of the cog?"

Cog-wheel, cog in a wheel—yes, we had heard of cogs. Rubens beamed, chuckled, and puffed at his cigar. Not that kind of a cog at all, said he amiably.

"A long time ago, a very long time, you know," he said, gesturing with his cigar, "Bruges and its seaport, Sluys, were the centers of commerce for all western Europe, the way Venice was in the east. And in all the world nothing was known like Sluys, or Bruges either; the two were only seven miles apart in those days. Why, at brisk seasons seven and eight hundred ships a day cleared out of Sluys—a *day!*"

"Yeah," said somebody. "But what kind of ships?"

"Cogs, for the greater part," Rubens answered promptly. "The cog, my good friends, was a portly ship with a great square sail, and an enormously high forecastle and poop. It was not pretty. It was awkward; it was ungainly; it was a poor sailor: but it could carry a world of freight. It was the great cargo ship of northern Europe. King Edward of England embarked an army of fifty thousand in one day, men and horses—because he had cogs to ship them in. Well! Who started this cog? Where did it come from?"

"I'll bite," some one offered. "Who?"

"That is what my play will show you," said Rubens triumphantly. "Look! All the commerce of western Europe centered here. And off these coasts were the birds who preyed on that commerce—pirates: Moors and Genoese, English and German, these and others lay in wait. Well, well! Today Bruges is a city of the dead; but six hundred years ago it was to Europe what New York is to America. Shall we go and see? A private show, eh?"

We were all eager enough for another taste of his magic, and trooped into the club theater. His had been the last act of the evening, and all his apparatus was in place.

The lights were turned on, and the curtain was rung up. A dozen or more of us gathered in the front seats, and Rubens disappeared into his perch above the puppet-stage.

"This, my friends, is not like other plays," his voice came to us, sonorous and vibrant. "I tell you this as we go along, yes; but first there is a panorama. You must realize what sort of city this was, with its canals coming up from the seaport of Sluys, its harbor, its multitude

of shipping! For it was a free and open port, open to all men alike on the sole condition of peace; and any man who might break this peace was straightway hanged."

The peculiar bronze timbre of the Dutchman's voice, no less than the expert manipulation of his puppets, was gripping. It had a hypnotic effect. Further, he had a sort of moving background and scenery that was new to us—panorama was perhaps the name for it, but it kept on the move through his entire show.

None of us cared about his cog at first; we did before he finished. Here was a wine of wizardry that thrilled us—not in the voice alone, or the moving, speaking puppets, but in the perfect timing of motion to the story that unfolded. Now the puppets spoke, now their master; he used a rolling monotone as subtle and as powerful as the throbbing background of kettledrums to music. Further, his scenery or panoramic setting was as exquisite in detail and lighting as could be desired.

Bruges in its olden glory flashed before us: The great Waterhalle astride the canal, where all ships were unloaded that came up from Sluys; the churches and streets, the vast bazaars of merchandise, the churches and streets and the taverns, famed for their excellence. The people too, all kinds of them, painted and puppets, who moved with a gabble of talk. Suddenly the scene halted before the rich counting-house of a great merchant, the greatest merchant in Bruges.

"*Bras-de-fer!* Iron-arm!" he said, a testy graybeard with deep voice. "The most damned pirate in Christendom! Iron-arm, the accursed Norman—"

They were discussing piracies off the coast. The scene ran on: A road, carts, wagons; the great canal that ran down to Sluys. And here was Sluys itself, walled and moated and bursting with foreigners and merchandise, so that booths were put up outside the walls. But the eye passed on to the wondrous harbor of this town. If the town were marvelous with its people drawn from all nations and races, the harbor was an astounding sight.

Here lay so mighty a fleet that it seemed half the world must lie in leaguer before these walls. Up to the very walls, indeed, were ships; with the ebb tide they lay aground, careened over, in so soft and firm a bed of sand that they were as well off as though afloat.

Galleys from Italy and Spain, wineships from Bordeaux and the Garonne, sloops and busses from the German ports, pinks and flutes from the English coasts, whalers and decked galleys from Norway. And out beyond them all, by the sandbanks, a huge gray shape like nothing ever before seen on land or sea; a monstrous ship, ungainly and massively towering of stern and bow, all of a gray hue.

THIS misshapen wight had provoked the hilarity of seamen and townfolk alike. Crews lined the rails; burghers and merchants thronged the walls; boats went out and rowed about her, with mirth and comment and jest. From the French coast, it was said, though nothing so monstrous was known to any of the French pilots here. Her crew had stayed aboard; they spoke French, at least. Her master alone had gone ashore, with bales of goods. A bronzed, foreign-looking man with a patch over one eye and oddly assorted garments; but he spoke good Spanish and Flemish and French. Some said he had gone up to Bruges; others, that he was bartering in the town here. People thought less about him than about the monstrous ship out yonder; the *Gray Cockerel* she was named in French.

Captain Dubois had indeed gone on to Bruges, with his bales and a leather

chest that rode ever close to him. Well ahead of him had sped tales of the *Gray Cockerel,* and there was talk of nothing else. Jests flew fast and wide; seamen from stout busses and swift handy galleys heaped derision on the ungainly thing. Some guttural German shipmaster found her name harsh on his tongue, and called her the *"cog."* The name stuck. It was ugly and blunt and awkward, like the ship herself. Amid gales of laughter, it spread over the city.

COMING into Bruges of an afternoon, Dubois went straight to the office of Messer Leonello the great merchant, near the Grand Place on the canal. In his youth, Messer Leonello had come out of Italy into Flanders. He was a citizen now, and a burgher, and had a Flemish name; but men still called him Messer Leonello. He had a thin gray beard, an eye like steel, and was a most vigorous and hearty man. He was, indeed, newly married; and if there were any softness in his heart, which men doubted, it went toward his wife.

Captain Dubois saluted the clerks courteously and brought in his bales and his chest. Messer Leonello came forth, greeted him, and eyed the bales aslant.

"I don't buy cloth by the ell," he said harshly.

Dubois laughed a little.

"Indeed? These are mere samples for your convenience. Perhaps you'll buy jewels by the yard? The leather chest may accommodate you, good messer."

One of the clerks whispered. Oh, the master of the cog, eh? The gaze of Messer Leonello swept his visitor curiously; then he bowed with gravity.

"Will you come into my private office?"

Dubois entered, and the little chest was brought in. The merchant took one glance at the jewels and trinkets therein, and repressed a gasp. He took the paper Captain Dubois handed him, the list of goods aboard the *Gray Cockerel,* and stupefaction came upon him. Goods of the richest, from silk to cut Genoa velvet, in enormous quantities.

"This is no matter of hours, but of days," he said slowly. "Your goods must come ashore; we must bargain carefully. The town is so filled that you can get no inn-room. May I offer you accommodations in my own house? It will be an honor."

Dubois, with his queer silent laugh, accepted. Then he showed that his left arm was in a sling.

"The yard fell, killed a man, broke my arm," he said. "I may be a trouble to you—"

"I have servants," Messer Leonello said curtly. "They are yours."

So Dubois was lodged in the merchant's house, and the merchant's wife made him welcome. When his one eye fell upon the lovely Eva, it glittered, and a flush came into the dark thin cheeks; when he saw how her gaze touched upon her graybeard husband, he laughed in his silent way, and became very merry. That evening he told many a strange tale of foreign lands, and presented Eva with a little case in which were three enormous matched emeralds.

So courteous was his speech that the girl, stammering refusal, scarce knew how to decline. Messer Leonello bade her accept the gift, and his eyes glinted with avarice, as he thanked the good captain handsomely.

With morning, Dubois slept late, shaved and dressed carefully in new garments of fine gray wool, and finding the merchant gone to his office, talked with Eva. As they talked, he took the patch from his eye, showing a lean brown hawklike face.

"But your eye is sound!" she exclaimed; and he laughed heartily.

"Certainly it is. I made a vow to St. James of Compostello that during a whole year I would wear an eye-patch, unless I were alone with the most beautiful woman in the world. This is the first time the patch has been removed, dear lady."

She blushed, but showed no anger, and Dubois talked on. Without the patch, he was an eager, handsome man, very gay and of a blithe heart; no mere trader, indeed, but a man of high knightly air and bearing, with all the magic of the wide world at his tongue's end. When he departed for the counting-house, she was in a glow, and her deep blue eyes were all set on wonder and delight; but when the eye-patch was on again, Dubois was a very different person in looks and manner.

UNLOADING the cog, getting the goods up to the city, was a slow business. No man save port officials was allowed aboard the cog; nor did any of her crew come ashore. Master's orders, they said to the lighter-men, and that was an end to it. They seemed to hold Captain Dubois in stern respect and awe. They were a hard lot, too, the stories ran: men

of all nations, apparently, weaponed and armed even while at their work.

Then, after the goods came up to Messer Leonello's warehouses, they had to be examined and appraised; and the little leather chest of gems and trinkets made slow business in itself. Dubois was unhurried. He spent much time with the merchant, and more time with Dame Eva, so that her eyes came to light up when he appeared, and color grew in her cheeks at his word.

As for Dubois, what had begun in pleasant gallantry grew into most deadly earnest. Pity for this lovely girl, tied to an unloved graybeard of iron heart, passed into something deeper as he came to know her better. She had a radiance and a quiet tender bravery that drew his admiration and compelled his respect. Too, she had a delicate clear soul untouched by any stain, so that her blue eyes looked out upon the world with sunny faith, like the eyes of an angel who sees no evil, or refuses to recognize it.

Dubois loved her, and knew that he loved her, and shrank back aghast. He knew, also, the dark and terrible depths of his own evil heart, and this was torment unutterable. For him there was no redemption on this earth—and none beyond, when he reflected on the matter....

Now, there were two English archers carousing in a tavern of Bruges—Long Wat and Tom o' Devon. They had served a year under the Count of Flanders, and had started home with full pockets; but the lasses of Bruges and the good Spanish wine tempted them to fall from grace, and the fall was not by any means light.

UPON a day, they saw Captain Dubois walking with Messer Leonello, and blinked. Long Wat nudged Tom in the ribs; and Tom o' Devon nodded and stared. When they were a trifle sobered, Long Wat made inquiries here and there. Being very blunt and honest men, master bowmen both, they came early one morning to the counting-house and asked private speech with Messer Leonello, and were taken into his office and the door closed. They nudged one another; and Long Wat, fingering his hat, took up the word.

"Master, two years ago we sailed from Southampton with Sir John Calverly's company in many small craft; and a storm came up, and pirates fell upon us. They laid our craft aboard, and the chief of those pirates was one they called Bras-de-fer, or Iron-arm, because one arm ended in a hook of iron. He fought like a devil, and killed good Sir John with a foul blow; and we took oath that if we lived, we would some day put a shaft through that villain. Our other craft rallied, and he drew off, and we're alive; and by our Lady, he's here in this city and calls himself Captain Dubois and is your friend; so we came to give you warning of him."

Messer Leonello's shaggy gray brows drew into a line over his keen eyes.

"How do you know this man is Iron-arm?"

"He looks like him," said Long Wat. "Dressed different, but has a profile not to be missed twice, a high nose and a twist to his lip, and his left arm in a sling to hide the iron spike he wears instead of a hand."

"YOU'RE honest men," said Messer Leonello slowly; and he laid out gold. "Here's a rose noble for each of you, with my thanks. Let me know where you may be found, in case your evidence is needed against this rascal."

They complied. "But mind," said Long Wat, "we've sworn to put a shaft through him for the memory of good Sir John; so if it comes to weapons, give us the first chance."

To which Messer Leonello assented very gladly.

Instead of laying information against his guest, he had a very curious conversation with Captain Dubois in the privacy of his office, that same day. The great amount of rich goods coming ashore from the cog, no less than the quantity of jewels, came to a figure higher than any one merchant could handle, he said; therefore he had formed a syndicate of merchants to take care of these goods.

"My colleagues," he went on, "think it odd that you should own so vast stores of goods, instead of handling them on consignment for English merchants. It has even been hinted that you might be acting for some one else—perhaps for sea marauders."

"What?" exclaimed Dubois. "You suggest that I might be acting for pirates, that these goods might have been gained by base piracy? Well, well—and would that make any difference to the purchase of them?"

"No," said Messer Leonello. "But it might cause a discount for cash—eh? And it might lead to future business of a mutually profitable nature."

"I see that we understand one another," said Dubois, with a thin smile. "Suppose that some enterprising captain of free-booters, with several galleys to swell his business, collected large quantities of plunder and fetched them to Sluys—let us say, twice a year. The facts of the matter wouldn't be generally known, of course."

"Naturally," said the merchant, his avid eyes keen. "Nor could his piratical galleys show up with the goods. But this odd ship of yours might do so. In such case, what's to prevent other pirates from pouncing on this ship of yours and seizing the plunder?"

Captain Dubois chuckled. "Why, the ship herself! I built her, planned her, put her into the water, for just such a purpose. With the size of her, she has incredible cargo-space. With the enormous poop and forecastle and thick bulwarks, she overtops any galley made; they can't pour men aboard her. With a stout crew, a catapult in the bows, and a mangonel aft, she can fight off a dozen pirate galleys. D'ye see?"

Messer Leonello stared at him, and clutched with thin fingers at the table.

"By the saints! I see more than that," he said slowly. "Why should not I send out such trading-ships myself, which are proof against pirate galleys?"

Captain Dubois laughed. "You'd have to build 'em. Who'd do it for you? Not I. Not your Flemish shipyards. It'd take them years to make the experiments, the plans, the model ships, to figure strains and stresses, weight and displacement. It took me years to make her." He slapped the merchant on the shoulder and turned to the door. "No, no, my good friend! The secret of the *Gray Cockerel* is mine, and is safe with me."

Messer Leonello sighed. "You're right. Don't forget, the port captain of Sluys is dining with us tonight. *Au revoir!*"

Left alone, however, the merchant fingered his thin gray beard, with eyes that were very bright and fiercely calculating and eager. Ships reasonably safe from sea-marauders spelled fortune for a merchant, if one but had a model on which to build such ships. What was more, an astute man who went about obtaining that model in the right way, might well find a more immediate fortune within his grasp. And it was clear why no one was allowed aboard the *Gray Cockerel:* Captain Dubois wanted no shipyard men prying into his secrets and obtaining measurements of his ship.

"How do you know this man is Iron-arm?"

"But," said Messer Leonello softly, "there's always a way! In fact, there are usually several ways."

He sent a clerk on an errand, and the clerk brought back Long Wat, reasonably sober, who sat in talk with Messer Leonello for a long time, and at length drew a long face.

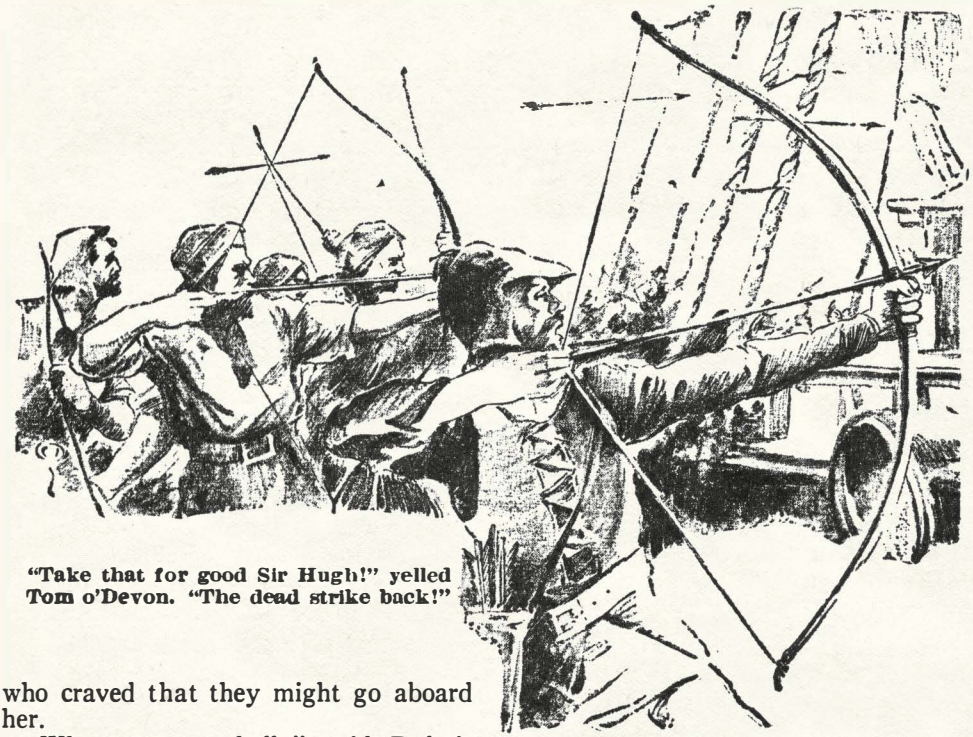
"By Our Lady, messer, you read me a tough riddle! The laws are strict, and devilish severe; any man who bares weapon or looses shaft in Sluys harbor is straightway hanged, and no talk about it. That Captain of Sluys is no man to tempt, either."

"No; but he's my very good friend." And the Italian smiled slowly. "Suppose you get your dozen men together and select the proper boat. Here's money, to make everything ready. Then await word from me. There's no hurry, remember. The right moment may be slow in coming; when it comes, don't fail me or you'll repent it."

"No danger, messer!" said Long Wat, and departed joyfully.

THAT evening the Captain of Sluys, who had been aboard the cog as his duty demanded, complimented Captain Dubois highly. Never had he seen so stout a ship, quoth he, nor so well manned. Indeed, her outward looks of awkwardness belied her inner excellence. Messer Leonello said little, but his quick eyes darted and lingered shrewdly; a stab of color came into his gray cheeks when he surprised occasional glances between Captain Dubois and his lovely wife.

Dame Eva had a strong desire to see that ship, and so had Messer Leonello,



"Take that for good Sir Hugh!" yelled Tom o'Devon. "The dead strike back!"

who craved that they might go aboard her.

"Why, so you shall!" said Dubois heartily. "Later, when the freight's out and the water and stores shipped, and she's been made all clean and fresh to behold, we'll go aboard her, and my hospitality may repay a fraction of yours."

"It may indeed," said the merchant with his dark smile. "And I'm sure, my dear Eva, you'll have great pleasure of the visit."

THE bartering and bargaining went on, day after day; the rich goods were gradually disposed of; the jewels sank lower in the leather chest, and in their place grew hard round money and bills upon bankers and merchants abroad. Until, as Messer Leonello said with a jesting laugh, the *Gray Cockerel* would prove an empty prize, but a rich one, for any pirates who might master her.

"If any could, they're welcome!" Dubois replied cheerfully.

In these days, he tried to see little of Eva, but could not; and they were greatly together. The love between them became deeper and firmer, though he fought against this also.

"I must tell you this," he said to her one day, desperation in his eyes. "It has come to frankness between us; I love you, but you are another man's wife. I love you, yet I respect you with all my heart and soul. And you must not think twice of me, for I am no good man. I am the opposite, a pirate and a thief and a recreant knight."

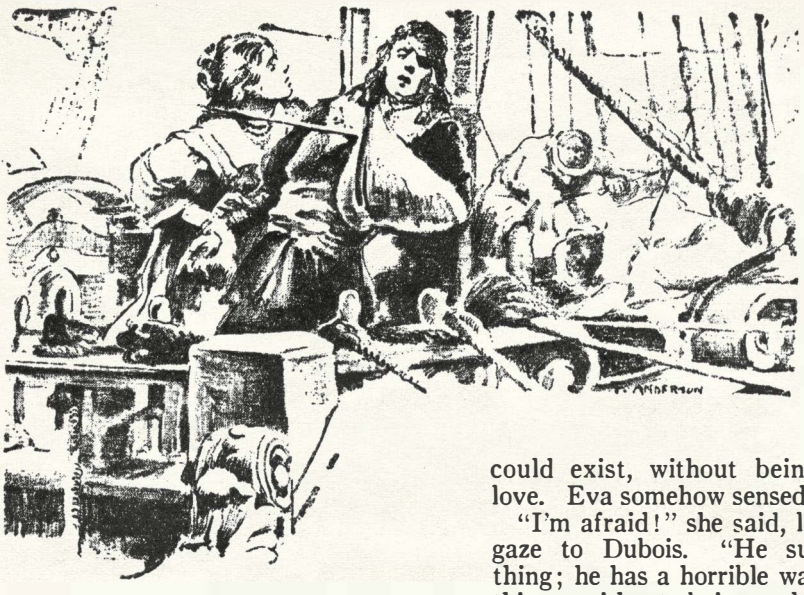
She looked at him, and smiled.

"I do not think people are ever fit and ready for heaven each day of their lives," she said gently. "What of it? So much the greater chance for repentance and for good works. I could not love any evil man; and if I hold you in regard, it is because I know you are not evil now. The past is of no account."

"It is of great account," he said hoarsely. "Do you know the story of Iron-arm the pirate? He was once a Norman knight, but he went from better to worse—"

She smiled again. "If you were Brasde-fer himself, what is that to me? Because I loved him, he would be no longer Iron-arm, but himself once again. No, my dear, don't try to shake our friendship down. This is the one beautiful thing that has ever come into my life. I say no ill of my husband; but my marriage was a matter of buying and selling, and not of joyous happiness. As I think you know well, I would not dishonor either my husband or my love; thus, for the little while you are here, let life be beautiful."

Dubois questioned himself, how would this thing end. She, in her innocence, thought she could be wed to one man and



Drawings by Frederic Anderson

love another, in all goodness. Perhaps she could, being little short of an angel; but it was otherwise with men. Suppose he wakened her from this childish and immature dream-life of hers—suppose he carried her away in the *Gray Cockerel.* Would this flower-woman droop and fade, or wax strong and blooming?

"By my soul," said he, looking into her eyes, "you are right about it. If the man you love was ever a pirate and a rogue, he is so no more; I swear it! The wealth he has thus won goes to his men, and they go their ways. He'll have none of it, and none of them, henceforth. Instead, there are ways of honesty and good emprise open to him. With this ship of his, he can do great things, for your husband has shown him the way."

Her eyes were starry and very beautiful to see, as she put out her hand to him.

"My dear, I understand; and you make me very happy," she said softly. Dubois pressed her fingers. Then, hearing a step outside, he clapped the patch on his eye.

"By God, I'll open all of life to you, and make you more than happy!" he said quickly.

And yet he knew he could not. He knew that if he yielded to this temptation, the best part of their love would be smashed and broken.

Messer Leonello came in, and smiled upon them thinly, noting the glorious starry eyes of Dame Eva and the alert gayety of Captain Dubois. Presently he went his way again without comment; it was not in his nature to believe that love could exist, without being a criminal love. Eva somehow sensed this.

"I'm afraid!" she said, lifting startled gaze to Dubois. "He suspects something; he has a horrible way of knowing things without being told. And he'd never understand."

"No, he'd never understand," echoed Captain Dubois with a grim smile. "But we've done no wrong, my dear, and we'll do no wrong under this roof, so be of good cheer. He doesn't suspect anything—how should he? Forget it."

DUBOIS struggled with himself, but could reach no decision. His own future seemed clear: He would sail the *Gray Cockerel* and make an honest living with her, and a fortune to boot; that is, if Eva sailed with him. If she sailed not, then devil take the future! But he must seize her away, carry her off, cause an irrevocable break.

At times it looked simple and logical. Other times, the prospect was impossible; he was afraid for her; and the thought of hurting her, even for the moment, was intolerably tormenting. Yet he must come to it, for the day of his departure was drawing close. The traffic in goods and jewels was about done.

During this while, he had not neglected occasional visits to the cog. His men were well content to stay aboard; carouse would come soon enough elsewhere. Secretly, he had one of the cabins made ready for a lady, sending aboard rich silks and gear that was honestly bought. He could not do otherwise, if Eva was to use it. But he had no suspicion that every move he made was watched and reported to Messer Leonello. . . .

Upon a sparkling summer's day the accounts were settled, and evening saw all finished. With next morning, Dubois

was departing; and with noon Messer Leonello and Dame Eva would come aboard, to view the cog and to enjoy his hospitality ere she sailed.

ON press of business, the merchant went out that evening, and Dubois saw his lady alone, for the last time. He looked into her eyes and almost did his heart fail him; for he had made his decision now.

"It will not be easy to sail the seas honestly, and alone," he said. "They're too wide for a lonely man, my dear, or for a lonely future."

She smiled a little. "What's easy is not worth while. You need no help; you have all strength within you. Yet it will be hard to think of you—"

Her voice failed, and her eyes fell.

"Why, then, sail with me, always!" said Dubois huskily.

"I will, my dear," she said, not dreaming that he meant his words literally, or that decision tore his heart. "I will, always; you'll have my prayers; you'll have me near you—the best of me, while the worst of me stays here with duty."

Captain Dubois turned away, and put the eye-patch in place again.

With morning, the merchant and Eva saw him off. Messer Leonello pressed his hand warmly, promising to follow to Sluys within an hour and to come aboard in his own barge, that would take them back to shore again.

"You'll have to take your ship outside the port," he went on, "or else you'll not be able to sail later against the tide. Do so; it won't trouble us, for there's no sea running today. And another thing! It is said that the good wishes of men about to take the sea, bring good luck. I'm sending with you a cask of Italian wine from my own cellar, as a gift to your men. Let them drink to my health, and that of my lady, and drink well, so that when we come aboard, all hands will be merry."

For this kindness, Captain Dubois thanked him with right good heart, and so departed. . . .

When they two were about to follow, Messer Leonello smiled upon Eva and bade her wear the three great emeralds Captain Dubois had given her.

"It would do him honor thus to show his gift," said he. "And I beg you, put on that new sarcenet-trimmed dress which so richly sets off your beauty."

So she did. All the way to Sluys, Messer Leonello beamed upon her, and never since their wedding-day had she known him so kindly and intent upon her pleasure.

When they came to the port, the Captain of Sluys met them, and spoke apart shortly with Messer Leonello, and then escorted them to the merchant's wharf houses. Here at the landing-stairs waited a barge, which Messer Leonello had rented, with a dozen men at the long sweeps. Long Wat had the stroke, with Tom o' Devon behind him; and the others were Englishmen also, straight-eyed, hard-bitten master bowmen. At their feet, over the bottom of the barge, a large tarpaulin was laid.

Eva settled herself on soft cushions, under the gilded canopy in the stern. Messer Leonello, beside her, took the tiller, and the barge swept out with oars dipping.

Wide as the harbor was in those days, before it was silted up, the merchant had no little trouble avoiding the ships, so thickly did they lie on every hand, by the hundred; a forest of masts pierced the sky; and as the tide was on the ebb, the outer sandbanks were solid with careening hulls. To the girl, all this was a marvel to behold—strange men and foreign tongues, ships from half Europe, even two galleys filled with Moorish men from Seville, their dark faces alight with mirth and gayety.

On and on the barge threaded its way, coming at length to open water. There, outside the bounds of the port, the cog was at anchor. The gray enormous mass of her was gayly decked with flags and pennons; as they approached, Messer Leonello eyed her with sharp and calculating gaze—the huge square stern, high-crowned with poop, the high side bulwarks, the rising tall forecastle. Ugly, awkward, uncouth—but what a ship wherewith to set all the pirates of the world at naught!

HER ladder was out, and Dubois waved them welcome as they came in under the high side. Two of the rowers made fast the ladder; and laughing at the adventure, Dame Eva fought her way upward. Dubois caught her two hands, lifted her, and swung her in to the deck below; though he had but one arm for the work, it was enough.

And if their lips met for an instant, there in the sunlight, Messer Leonello could not know of it as he jerkily toiled his way upward.

Dubois met him gayly.

"Will your barge return for you, or wait? If the latter, let the men come up."

"Nay, let the rogues stay," said the merchant. "They have their orders, and are well enough off."

"As you like. We've just broached your cask."

The crew, grouped in the waist about the open cask of wine, shouted lusty greeting. Messer Leonello surveyed them narrowly; a hard lot, a bad lot, by their looks. They were quaffing the good Italian wine right heartily.

"Will you come to the poop for the view?" asked Captain Dubois. The merchant assented, but the girl laughed and shook her head, as she eyed the high ladders.

"I'm still out of breath from the climb," she responded. "Let me wait here, I beg!"

Dubois shrugged, and accompanied the merchant to the poop, pointing out to him the various features of the cog. Dubois' arm was still in its sling, the patch still over his eye.

WHEN they came down, Dame Eva was among the group of sailors, one of whom was just taking back a huge silver flagon from her hand. Laughing, her eyes sparkling, she turned to Dubois.

"I was joining in the toast to your health, good captain; but I could not drink the half of that huge flagon. My dear husband, I didn't know you had such glorious wine in the cellar! It's magnificent."

"No, *no!*" A hoarse cry broke from Messer Leonello, as he thrust forward. "No! It's impossible—you didn't drink of that wine—"

"Bah! Why not?" Dubois laughed heartily. "Wine never did anyone harm. But come along and see the cabins; the table's laid, and my cooks are busy in the stern cabin."

"Eh?" Messer Leonello, in sudden agitation, swung on him. "I'd like to see the cabin you've furnished for a lady, yes!"

"For a lady?" Dubois eyed him narrowly. "What mean you?"

"Rumor, gossip—God knows!" The Italian turned away. He cast one terrible and inexplicable look at his wife, and wiped sweat from his face, though the sea air was cool enough. "What's done is done, and there's no help for it."

"Say you so?" Dubois laughed harshly, moving aft toward the poop entrance. "If I had a mind, now, I could carry you and your good lady away to sea and hold you both to ransom—eh? What could you do about that, Messer Leonello, and how cure it?"

"Easily enough," said the Italian, throwing a glance forward. There was confusion among the men there; one of them had fallen; the others were grouped about him.

"What? How, then?" And Dubois laughed again, clapping him on the shoulder. "Come, man! How to save yourself from villainous hands?"

"Why, like this!" So speaking, Messer Leonello put a whistle to his lips, and blew a long shrill blast.

Dubois stared at him curiously. Some of the men swung around, looking. Others were crying out, a sudden fear in their voices. Another of the men had pitched forward as though drunk. Messer Leonello went to his wife, and took her hands, and looked into her eyes. His face was gray and drawn. His own eyes were filled with a strange agony.

"God forgive me, and you, my dear!" he said quietly. "I had not intended this; it is too late. Once that wine passed your lips, there was no help for it, indeed. Give me your pardon, I beseech you—"

She shrank a little, not comprehending, but terrorized by the look in his face. Other of the men were bawling out something; they were staggering, clutching at their throats, lifting their voices frantically. Captain Dubois, in wild alarm and perplexity, stared at them, then broke into a run and started for them. Midway, he whipped around, as men came over the rail.

FOR at that whistle-blast, the rowers in the boat had leaped into life. The tarpaulin was jerked away, to reveal long yew bows and quivered arrows. Long Wat, snatching up a bow, deftly strung it, caught up shafts, and leaped for the ladder, with Tom o' Devon at his heels and the rest trailing.

They came over the bulwark. Some of them leaped to the deck; some stood there on the bulwark, notching their shafts. The voice of Long Wat blared forth shrilly:

"For Sir Hugh! Here, ye damned dogs, the dead strike back at ye!"

The bowstring twanged and hummed. Captain Dubois groaned deeply, and caught at the clothyard shaft, driven to the very goose-feathers through his body.

He staggered back against the farther bulwark, and another bowstring twanged, and the second shaft went through his body and pinned him to the oaken bulwark.

"Take that for good Sir Hugh!" yelled Tom o' Devon. *"The dead strike back!"*

No one heard, or cared, that Eva had uttered one screaming cry of grief, and breaking from her husband, rushed across the deck to Dubois. For now men died fast.

"Poisoned! The wine was poisoned!" Too late the cry, too late the swift snatching at arms. Long shafts were hurtling, fast as those dozen bowmen could notch shaft and let fly; hurtling and whistling death across the decks at the staggering, yelling crew.

Some few of these, despite wine and shafts, darted forward. A few men came running from the rear cabins. They died, most of them, as they came. Two or three reached the group of bowmen; and swords flashed, and knives bit; and two of those Englishmen rolled in the scuppers. That was all. Death twanged and whistled until there were no marks left, and the crew of the *Gray Cockerel* lay stretched about the wine-cask or sprawled on the red decks.

Messer Leonello moved to where Captain Dubois hung pinned to the bulwark with eyes already glazing, the black patch gone now. He looked down at his wife; she had fallen to the deck, quivering as those fallen men had quivered about the wine-cask. Then he spat into the face of the dying Dubois, and spoke with a snarl of hatred.

"Thrice-damned dog! Even so, she's better off than gone overseas with you and leaving me shamed. Take the blame to your own soul, for I wash my hands of it."

"Judas!" said Dubois, very faintly.

HIS eyes flew open. He made a sudden, spasmodic effort, and tore his arm free of the sling. Steel glittered; the spike he wore in place of hand drove out, squarely to the breast of Messer Leonello. And with that one last effort, he died.

The Italian staggered. That sharp, hard thrust had torn his mantle away, revealing the chain-mail beneath. Unhurt, he gathered the mantle around him, turned to meet the wondering Englishmen, who knew not how his wife had died; and his gaze lifted along the decks. He caught sight of a barge approaching, and a smile touched his bearded lips.

"Ready, men! The Captain of Sluys is coming aboard, and you're outside the harbor bounds and in no danger," said he. "And mind, there's reward enough for the killing of these pirates to send you all back to England rich men. You did well."

Long Wat met his gaze, looked down at the sweet dead face on the deck, and looked up again with a low oath.

"I'm not so sure of that," said he. "But our vow's fulfilled, and plague on your money!"

THE lights went up. A stage, the puppet-show, the beaming features of the broken-nosed Dutchman—we all of us came suddenly and awkwardly back to the present, and to where we were.

"And that was the beginning of the cog, the great cargo craft of northern Europe!" said Rubens, as he joined us. "Messer Leonello founded a trading company, built ships, died a man of tremendous wealth and power—"

"And went to hell, if your story's true," said somebody with an oath.

It was a tribute; and Rubens took it as such. The utter mastery of his little show had left us all shaken. Still, there was one point that remained vague.

"Rubens! One thing I didn't get: Did Dubois intend to run away with the girl or not? What decision had he reached?"

Murmurs of assent showed that others had the same doubt. Rubens beamed around at us, and chuckled softly.

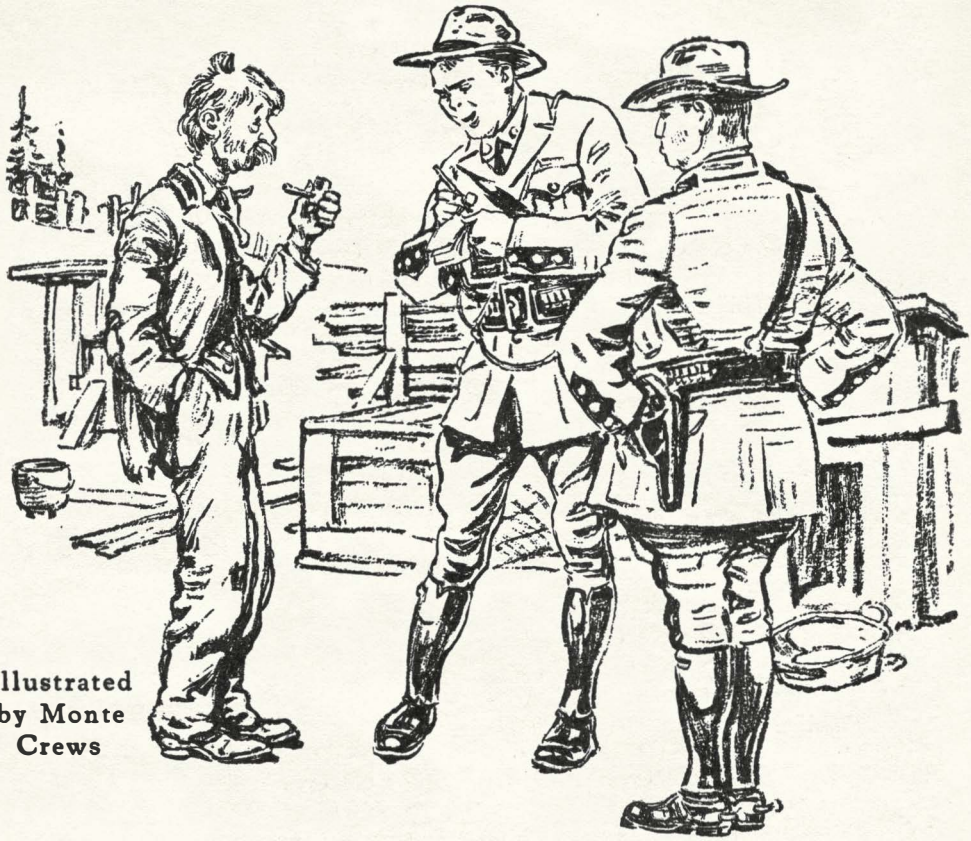
"My good friends, I thank you; this is a compliment to my art, and I am very proud of it. You see, gentlemen, all great art leaves something to be desired. Frustration, the agony of the heroic soul, is the theme of great epics. This little epic of mine brings to life the people of a past day and age; it teaches you something about ships, maybe, and it leaves you asking a question."

"Well, answer it!" I blurted. "Did Dubois intend to carry off the girl?"

Rubens spread his hands wide in an eloquent gesture.

"My dear sir—I do not know. History and legend fail to say. You must answer that question yourself, after the dictate of your own heart. The show is over; shall we have a little drink all around—just a tiny drink?"

Storm and pirates, Moors and knights, burning gunpowder and a lovely lady join to make the next story in this great series (in the March issue) specially interesting.



Illustrated by Monte Crews

Routine Patrol

Tiny David and the other officers of the State Police profit by the significance of trivial things.

By ROBERT R. MILL

BREAKFAST was some moments past in the barracks of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police. Officers and men milled about the halls, pausing for brief conversations, or stolen and hasty glances at the morning papers before taking up the tasks of the day. Lieutenant James Crosby, his head deep in an opened newspaper, spotted the item. He began to read aloud, and almost at once had an interested audience:

"'Albany, Aug. 11. Assemblyman Carl Brunock today launched a bitter attack on the bill containing the regular appropriation for the Department of State Police. He declared that the average trooper divides his time between loafing and investigating trivial complaints, the majority of which should be forgotten.

"'The attack was interrupted by Assemblyman William Collings, who somewhat tartly asked Mr. Brunock if he would be willing to do the work of a trooper, even for one day. Mr. Brunock accepted the challenge. He said that over the week-end he would report at one of the barracks, don a uniform and go to work. He promised a fair and impartial report on the experiment when he returns next Monday. Action on the bill was postponed until that time.'"

Mr. Crosby tossed the paper aside.

"Mr. Brunock," declared Sergeant Linton, "has the soul of a politician."

But this verdict drew a protest from a huge man known to his comrades as Tiny, and carried on the rolls as Lieutenant Edward David.

"Not the soul of a politician " he corrected. "The soul of a—"

Captain Charles Field appeared in the doorway behind Mr. David. He was accompanied by a civilian.

"*Psstt!*" was the warning sounded by Mr. Crosby.

"Don't '*psstt*' me," countered Mr. David. "I am a taxpayer. In that capacity, I reserve the right to pass judgment on any public official, who, in that capacity, is a servant of the public, just as I am. Exercising that right, let me point out to you mopes that whereas a pig, for example, is a useful animal, I can't think of anything, except a hanging, that a politician, is fitted—"

"Lieutenant David!" snapped Captain Field.

Mr. David straightened automatically.

"Yes sir."

Captain Field and his companion entered the hall. The commanding officer did the honors. The civilian, much to the delight of the crowd in the hall, proved to be Assemblyman Brunock.

"Mr. Brunock," Captain Field informed Mr. David, "will accompany you on a routine patrol. First, see that a uniform and all necessary equipment are issued to him."

"Yes—yes sir," said Tiny David.

SOME minutes later Mr. David and the supply sergeant surveyed the results of their combined efforts. Barring about twenty pounds of excess weight, which appeared to be massed about his gunbelt, the Hon. Mr. Brunock shaped up fairly well as a trooper. He made no comments, and had no protests, but followed Mr. David meekly. Tiny paused at the window of the office and accepted from Max Payton, the top sergeant, the complaint-slips designated for the patrol. Mr. David shuffled through the slips, and then passed them over to Mr. Brunock.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Brunock.

Mr. David peered at the slip in question.

"That means that one David Tebo has lost property; to-wit, two chickens—said chickens believed to have been stolen."

"So what?" demanded Mr. Brunock.

"So we see if we can find them for him."

"Humph!" sputtered Mr. Brunock. "What's this?"

"One Gerald Lamb reports the theft of one shovel, one hoe and one rake."

"And this?"

MR. DAVID glanced at the slip. He gave Mr. Payton a hard look, but that gentleman was a picture of mingled innocence and nonchalance.

"According to this complaint-slip," Mr. David declared, "one Beatrice Patnode has lost her step-ins, said step-ins having been stolen from a clothesline at the rear of her home. The color of said step-ins is pink. The size—"

"Say, is this a joke?" demanded Mr. Brunock.

Mr. David looked injured.

"It's no joke to lose your step-ins. How would you feel if you lost—"

"Never mind," Mr. Brunock interrupted. "What other great tasks confront us?"

Mr. David inspected the final slip.

"One Elizabeth Towers reports an act of vandalism. Garden trampled. Flowerbeds dug up, and ruined."

"So that's our day's work?"

"Yep," Tiny David admitted. "But don't overlook one thing: it keeps us out in the air. Good for us."

"And the taxpayers pay for it," Mr. Brunock added.

"Yes, indeed," Mr. David asserted. "I certainly wouldn't go chasing around after chickens and step-ins unless I was getting paid for it."

Mr. Brunock maintained an ominous silence as Mr. David led the way to a troop-car. Their first stop was at the home of Mr. Tebo, a weather-beaten shack situated in barren and stony ground. At one side of the house was a small and discouraged-looking garden.

Mr. Brunock surveyed the scene without favor.

"Probably on relief," was his verdict. "Won't even plant enough vegetables to feed himself and his family."

Mr. David gave the problem his attention.

"Maybe that's all the garden his wife feels she can handle."

"His wife! Is he a cripple?"

"Nope."

"Have a job that keeps him away from home?"

"Nope."

"Well, then—"

"Maybe," Mr. David suggested, "he doesn't like to work in a garden."

Mr. Brunock's patience was wearing thin.

"In that case," he declared, "he should join the State police."

Mr. David honked the horn, and mentally gave Mr. Brunock credit for one round. Then he turned his attention to Tebo, who emerged from the shack.

The color and size of the chickens were duly noted. The coop from which they had been taken was duly inspected.

"Any idea who took them?" asked Tiny David.

"Nope. I aint."

"Any strangers around?"

"Nary a one."

Mr. David led the way back to the car.

"We will let you know if we get anything."

"Thanks. But I aint counting much on it."

"Neither am I," contributed Mr. Brunock, when the car had moved some distance along the main road. "What are those chickens worth?"

"Call it a dollar," said Tiny David.

Mr. Brunock did some figuring on the back of an envelope.

"Up to date," he announced, "those chickens have cost the taxpayers of this State just eight dollars and forty cents."

Mr. David pondered over this information for some time. Then he made the casual remark:

"I reckon the taxpayers have paid eight dollars and forty cents for other things that weren't worth as much."

Mr. Brunock contented himself with asking:

"Which great problem do we tackle next?"

"Elizabeth Towers, the lady who has some high-grade vandalism on her hands."

Mr. Brunock's voice dripped sarcasm:

"I was hoping we were going to do something about the step-ins."

"We'll come to them," Tiny David said. "But they must wait their turn."

NOW the troop-car pulled up before a neat house, and an attractive-looking woman appeared.

"Good morning, Mrs. Towers," said Tiny David. "Understand you have had a little trouble."

"A little trouble?" the woman repeated. "Step around here."

They followed her to the rear of the house, and stood surveying a scene of havoc. Originally this cleared ground had been an attractive garden. Here and

"Say, is this a joke?" demanded Mr. Brunock.

there the outlines of the formal beds of flowers were visible. But some agency of destruction had swept over the garden.

Flowers and vines were uprooted and scattered about. Even the turf had been mutilated.

"I don't get it," Tiny David admitted.

"Neither do I," said the woman, her eyes flashing.

"Did they take anything?"

"What was there to take?" Mrs. Towers countered. Then, answering her own question: "Just the ordinary garden variety of flowers."

Tiny David nodded.

"Hear anything during the night?"

"Not a thing."

He surveyed her with frank approval.

"My only guess is that somebody doesn't like you." His crooked grin robbed the words of any offense. "Can't understand why." He chuckled, glanced at Mr. Brunock. "But don't worry about it. Some people don't like me."

She met the challenge.

"That's hard to believe. . . . You know, I didn't want to bother you people about this. Of course, I hate to have my garden destroyed, but it seems such a trivial thing to make a lot of fuss over. But my husband insisted. He said that you like to know everything that goes on in a neighborhood."

"That's right," Tiny David approved. "There are times when things that seem little by themselves add up to something that isn't so small. Not always, but occasionally. And we sort of like to keep up with what is happening."

Mrs. Towers nodded assent.

"That's what Ralph—my husband—said. He heard a talk one of your men made before—" She broke off as a bell sounded in the house. "There's the telephone. Excuse me a minute."

"I don't get it," Tiny David admitted.

When they were alone, Mr. Brunock asked:

"Is speech-making another one of the ways you fellows manage to put in your time?"

"Yes, we all take a crack at it," Tiny David admitted. "The skipper is great on telling the public just what we are trying to do, and on getting them to try to help us."

Mr. Brunock had a pertinent answer, but it was halted by the reappearance of the woman.

"They want Lieutenant David."

Several minutes later Tiny emerged from the house.

"We will let you know if we get anything, Mrs. Towers."

She thanked them, and waved as the car pulled away.

Mr. Brunock was figuring again.

"That garden," he announced, "has cost the taxpayers three dollars and sixty-five cents. The chickens and the garden represent a total cost of twelve dollars. Can you think of anything to enter on the credit side of the ledger?"

Tiny David regarded him slantwise.

"Lots of things."

"What are they?"

"We will skip them," Tiny David asserted. "You wouldn't understand."

The car left the main road, and began to follow a broad path through the woods.

"Are we now on the trail of the stepins?" asked Mr. Brunock.

Tiny David silently counted to ten before he replied. His fingers itched for the throat of the man at his side. His blood boiled with the thought that policemen, honestly trying to do their jobs, and risking their lives in the doing, were dependent upon the whims of men of this type for the means of carrying on their work. He did not discount the power of this man. Mentally, he kicked himself because he had allowed his prejudices to cause him to antagonize the legislator even more. . . . If his own job depended on this man, he was willing to lose it. But for his own questionable pleasure he had made things harder for the outfit.

So he contented himself with the simple statement: "Not yet."

"Then where are we going?"

TINY DAVID removed one hand from the wheel, produced a slip of paper, and consulted it.

"To the camp of one Gerald X. Monkaren."

Mr. Brunock whistled.

"What does he want with a trooper?"

"He didn't say," Tiny David declared. "He called the barracks, and asked to have a man sent to his camp. They knew we were in the neighborhood, so they called us at Mrs. Towers' house."

Mr. Brunock glanced at the trooper.

"Ever hear of Gerald X. Monkaren?"

"Nope."

A note of smug satisfaction crept into Brunock's voice, as he explained:

"Big Wall Street man. He always has been known as a daring speculator. About a year ago that alphabet reform crowd got after him. They debarred him from the Exchange. But I guess Gerald X. Monkaren can afford to laugh at all that."

There was anticipation in every word, as he said:

"I always have wanted to meet Gerald X. Monkaren."

"This," said Tiny David, "is your chance."

The car proceeded along the private drive.

"By the way," said Mr. Brunock, "you might explain to Mr. Monkaren just who I am." His self-conscious glance took in the uniform he was wearing. "I wouldn't care to have him think I was a common trooper."

A dull flush spread over Tiny David's face. He thought of men who had worn that uniform, who had worn it proudly, and who had died wearing it.

"Neither do I," said the woman. "What was there to take?"

"I will be very glad to tell him you don't belong to the outfit," he replied.

Then, despite all his good resolutions, he added:

"I'll explain to Monkaren that you are just a politician playing cop."

The dirt road led out of the woods to an open clearing, at the far end of which was an attractive log building of rustic design. A man who had been standing in the doorway advanced to meet them.

"Mr. Monkaren?" Tiny David asked.

"Yes." He was a man in his early fifties, but lean and athletic-looking.

"Lieutenant David." The trooper indicated his companion: "Assemblyman Brunock. Mr. Brunock is investigating police procedure at first-hand. You sent for us? What is the trouble?"

Monkaren, paying scant attention to fulsome expressions of pleasure from the legislator, waved them to chairs on the veranda of the building. They seated themselves, and the financier, visibly affected, leaned forward.

"Lieutenant, I am afraid we have a kidnaping here."

Brunock sat rigidly in his chair. Tiny David slumped deeper in his.

"Suppose you start at the very beginning," the trooper suggested.

"We came here about eight days ago," Monkaren began. "I have owned this place for some time. It is only one of—"

"You said, '*we*,'" Tiny David prompted.

"Yes. My daughter, Miss Shirley Bakalt, came with me. Shirley really is my stepdaughter. When Mrs. Monkaren and I were married, it was her second marriage. Mrs. Monkaren, as you may know, has passed on. Since then Shirley has been all I have. I—"

"Who are the other members of the household?" Tiny David asked.

"Miss Pitts, a trained nurse, who takes care of Shirley."

"Your stepdaughter is ill?"

Monkaren hesitated.

"Shirley—she is twenty-two—has been an invalid for many years. I—" He made a gesture of impatience. "I might as well be frank with you. It is a mental case. Quite hopeless. Her mother spent thousands. I have spent—"

"And the other members of the household?" Tiny David prompted.

"Just the servants. Two. We live simply here. There's Monahan, an eld-

Tiny David's left arm knocked Brunock flat. Then the trooper fired from the hip.

erly woman, who does the cooking; and Cochrane, a sort of man-of-all-work. But they were not on the place at the time. They sleep at—"

"You said, 'at the time,'" Tiny David interrupted. "At what time?"

"Let me tell this my own way," Monkaren begged. "Last night, after the servants were gone for the day, Miss Pitts asked permission to spend the night with friends in the village. I gave my consent. Shirley had retired. She always sleeps soundly. I—"

"You were alone after Miss Pitts left?" Tiny David asked.

"Yes."

"And then?"

"I retired early. That is my custom—here. I was up early this morning. That also is my custom. I busied myself with little tasks about the place. I am a great believer in exercise."

"You look fit," Tiny David declared.

Monkaren flushed with pleasure.

"Yes. I was at work when Monahan reported for duty. Cochrane straggled in about an hour later, which is not unusual for him. Then Miss Pitts arrived from the village, and went to Shirley's room. She came running down almost at once. Shirley was gone."

There was a pause. Brunock uttered conventional expressions of sympathy. Tiny David was silent; and the financier, after a glance at the trooper, continued:

"We searched the woods, but even as we did that, I knew it was a futile gesture. You see, Shirley hated the woods. I know that if she entered the woods, and particularly at night, it was because she was forced to do so."

"All right," Tiny David admitted. "But even so, that doesn't definitely establish the fact that your stepdaughter was kidnaped. Have you had any communication from the kidnapers? Any letters, telephone-calls or messages?"

"There hardly has been time," Monkaren pointed out. "Cochrane is in the village now to get the mail. But there are other things. Come with me."

He led the way across the clearing to the start of the woods. He indicated a point where the undergrowth was crushed

and broken. Impaled upon a twig was a fragment of pink silky material.

"Cochrane found that. I made him leave it as it was. Now that you are here, I assume we may examine it."

Tiny David hesitated just the fraction of a second.

"I reckon so."

Monkaren removed the silk and handed it to the trooper.

"Can't you get fingerprints from silk?" demanded Brunock.

"Sometimes," Tiny David admitted. "But I don't think they would help here." He turned to Monkaren. "You mean that this proves your stepdaughter went by this point?"

"Nothing of the sort, Lieutenant," the financier protested. "Did you examine that material?"

Tiny David twisted it in his fingers and a puzzled, almost foolish expression crossed his face.

"That," said Monkaren, "is cheap rayon. My daughter hardly wears materials of that sort."

"Then?" Tiny David's voice expressed bewilderment.

"Then," said Brunock, with an air of triumph, "somebody was with Miss Bakalt, and that somebody was a woman."

"Exactly," said Monkaren.

Tiny David's indecision vanished.

"Where is that nurse?" he demanded. "That Miss Pitts? She was away from here last night."

Monkaren shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid that won't help us, Lieutenant. In the first place, Miss Pitts is beyond suspicion. As an added precaution, I have checked with the people she visited. They played cards until midnight. Then Miss Pitts slept in the same room with another woman. I can give you the names of the people, if you think it necessary."

MR. BRUNOCK stepped forward, his eyes aglow with purpose.

"This case is away over this man's head, Mr. Monkaren. His specialty seems to be hunting for stolen chickens. I would suggest that you have me call Captain Field, and use my influence with him. Perhaps they can send along a competent investigator."

Monkaren hesitated.

"You are very kind, Mr. Brunock." His somewhat metallic voice became more human. "But I wouldn't care to go over the head of the Lieutenant. It hardly seems necessary—at this time."

The look of consternation on Tiny David's face vanished.

"That's mighty decent of you, Mr. Monkaren. I sure will do the best I can. Suppose we take a look at your daughter's room."

THE financier led the way to the front room on the second floor.

"Miss Pitts sleeps here." He indicated the room to the rear, which was connected by a door. "That is Shirley's room. It adjoins the bath."

"And your room?" Tiny David asked.

"At the head of the stairs."

"Suppose we take a look at that."

The door of Monkaren's room was ajar. Tiny David closed it, and stood looking at the openings at the top and the bottom, where the rough boards failed to meet the sill.

"That door doesn't deaden sound much. Wonder you didn't hear them on the stairs. But perhaps you are a sound sleeper?"

Monkaren's attitude suggested that he was being very patient.

"I might have heard them if they used the stairs. But isn't it possible that they used the window?"

Tiny David gave the question some thought.

"We will go down and look at the ground beneath the windows," he declared.

They walked around the house, and followed the side wall. Before them was a flower-bed approximately ten feet long and four feet wide, which was planted with nasturtiums, some of which were in flower, but all of which sagged and appeared almost lifeless. The flowers were directly below the window of the room the girl had occupied.

Tiny David dropped to his knees and examined the dirt.

"No footprints," was his verdict. He pushed some of the plants aside and examined the ground carefully. "No marks of a ladder."

There was a touch of acid in Monkaren's voice as he declared:

"Perhaps I can explain that. That ground wasn't spaded until this morning. That was what I was working on before Miss Pitts returned. I prepared the ground and transplanted the flowers. But there was sod there when—when this happened."

He lighted a cigarette, and then continued:

"Shirley liked it here. We intended to stay until cold weather drove us out. So

I decided to beautify the place a bit, make it a little brighter. Nothing like flowers for that. Shirley always—"

"Be back in a minute," Tiny David interrupted. "Want to get my notebook out of the car. Better get some of this down."

He walked along the side of the car away from the house. In his right hand was a knife, the blade of which was open. While his left hand fumbled in a compartment, his right hand drove the knife into a front tire.

TINY DAVID continued to fumble about in the car. Then he stepped to the ground. His whistle indicated consternation.

"That's nice!" He studied the deflated tire. "Flat as a pancake."

He walked to the porch.

"Won't take a minute to change it. You gentlemen stay where you are." He turned to the financier. "May I use your shovel? My jack isn't all that it might be, and I better get some of that loose dirt away so it will take hold."

Monkaren hesitated for the fraction of a second.

"Where did I put that blamed thing? Oh, I remember. You'll find it in the coalbin behind the house. We don't use coal, so I thought that might be a good place to keep it. Cochrane has sticky fingers when it comes to tools."

Tiny David disappeared. In a few minutes he returned with a shovel, and went to work. He had the spare tire almost in position when a car appeared, came to a stop beside him, and the driver, a man wearing work-clothes, stepped out.

"Hello, Cochrane," said Tiny David.

"Hello, Lieutenant. Bit of tire-trouble, eh? Want a lift?"

The trooper grinned.

"Aren't you glad you came too late?" He straightened from his task. "You can do something for me, though. Take your shovel, and put it away. It sure came in handy. Thanks a lot."

Cochrane stood holding the shovel Tiny David had thrust in his hands. A look of astonishment was on his face.

"My shovel?"

"All right—Mr. Monkaren's shovel, if you are going to go technical on me."

"Mr. Monkaren's shovel?" Cochrane lowered his voice. "Say! Devil a tool do we have on the place. And devil a tool will the old miser buy."

"Okay." Tiny David spoke from the corner of his mouth. "Come along with me. No matter what happens, keep your mouth shut. Got that?"

"Yes sor," Cochrane said. "But I am hoping you are not thinking I have—"

"I am not thinking anything—about you," said Tiny David. "Come along."

They stood before the two men on the porch. Tiny David shifted the weight of his huge body from foot to foot.

"This thing has me stumped," the trooper admitted. "Don't know just what I should do next."

Mr. Brunock took charge.

"I know what I am going to do. I am going to call Captain Field." He turned to Monkaren. "May I use your telephone?"

Monkaren pointed to the door.

"You will find it in the living-room."

Brunock entered the house, and Tiny David stood looking at Monkaren. Cochrane stood to one side, a silent witness. The trooper sighed heavily.

"Well, that sort of takes things out of my hands. Skipper'll be here before long, and that lets me out. Can't say I am sorry."

An afterthought seemed to come to him.

"But I better have everything all ready for him. Make him right sore if I don't. Cochrane!" A note of command crept into his voice. "Take that shovel, and begin digging up that bed of nasturtiums. You'll find it at the side of the house."

Monkaren changed color, but otherwise he kept control of himself.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded.

"That's one symptom of insanity," Tiny David admitted. "Thinking other people are crazy." His right hand rested near the butt of his revolver. "Only a maniac would try to get away with what you have pulled here. Put up your hands, Monkaren!"

WITH a crash the door of the house opened. Brunock rushed out, and stood directly between the two men.

"You must be crazy!" he shouted at Tiny David.

The trooper, looking over the shoulder of the legislator, saw metal flash in the light as a revolver was whipped out of a pocket.

"Get down, you fool!" roared Tiny David.

Brunock started to take a step forward. Tiny David's left arm shot out and knocked him flat. Then the trooper, now staring into the muzzle of a revolver, fired

from the hip. The gun before him went up, then down, and then fell to the ground as Monkaren's knees sagged and he tumbled forward.

IT was some hours later when they sat in the office of Captain Field—the commanding officer, Tiny David and Mr. Brunock, a much-changed Mr. Brunock. Mr. David, under orders, told just how it came about.

"In the first place, Captain, no kidnaper wants a crazy girl on his hands. Then, when a crazy girl disappears, the logical explanation is that she has wandered away. But Monkaren was so sure she was kidnaped. He tried to justify that belief by declaring the girl dreaded the woods; in the next breath he said she loved to live in the heart of the woods."

Tiny David sighed wearily.

"The bit of silk on the branch was obviously a plant. It was so far from the house that the road was safer and easier to use. Only fools would have floundered around in the woods there.

"The flower-bed obviously had just been dug and planted. I waited to see if he would tell me that. He didn't until I pinned things down so that the kidnapers had to use the window of the room in order to keep things plausible. Then, reluctantly, he tossed in the admission about digging the bed and planting the flowers that morning."

Tiny David stretched and yawned.

"Let's assume we had a body on our hands. Disappearance or kidnaping, the woods would be searched. But under ordinary circumstances, nobody is going to look under a bed of flowers."

"Good enough," Captain Field admitted. "It turned out just that way. But what made you so all-fired sure?"

Tiny David grinned.

"If it please the Captain, Mr. Brunock and I started out with a bunch of complaint-slips. Man lost some chickens. Vandals destroyed a woman's garden. Mr. Brunock figured it cost the taxpayers about eleven bucks for us to check those two items.

"But we had some others just as bad. Somebody pinched a dame's step-ins. Another guy missed a shovel, a hoe and a rake. More trivial stuff. In lots of places the people wouldn't even bother to report it, but we have our people trained that we are here to help them, and we want to know what is going on."

Tiny David chuckled.

"Soon as I saw that silk on the tree, I made a bet that the mystery of the step-ins was solved. When I saw the nasturtiums, newly planted, I was right sure I knew who visited Mrs. Towers' garden, and tried to make that visit look like a simple act of vandalism. When I asked for a shovel, Monkaren was on the spot. He didn't want to admit he had one. But if he hadn't, how did he plant the nasturtiums? He thought it was more natural to allow me to get the shovel from the place he told me. I found a rake and a hoe there, too. That looked as if another complaint-slip was checked off. Cochrane made it definite, by saying the shovel didn't belong on the place."

Tiny David shifted about in the chair in an effort to find a more comfortable position.

"Yes, Captain, Monkaren was a right busy boy last night. He is from the city. He couldn't believe anybody would make a fuss about a few tools, or one piece of cheap underwear. And he needed them in his business. But that trivial stuff was what really tripped him up."

A NOTE of apology crept into Tiny David's voice.

"Of course, chasing around after that trivial stuff costs money. And it takes time, and it takes effort. I don't want to do any more chasing around than I have to do."

Mr. Brunock's face was slightly red.

"Even after all this chasing around," Tiny David continued, "we hadn't established any motive. But since then, Mr. Brunock has remembered that when Monkaren's wife died, she left a fortune to her daughter, with the provision that in event of her daughter's death before the death of Monkaren, Monkaren was to get the money."

Tiny David's voice was stern.

"If Mr. Brunock had thought of that sooner, it would have saved me a lot of chasing around, and saved the taxpayers a lot of money. The way I figure it out, it cost the taxpayers about eighteen—"

Captain Field was grinning.

"You aren't a bad cop," he admitted. "But for God's sake, don't go in for accounting."

"That's right, Captain," said Brunock. "Make him stick to trivial things." He extended his hand to Tiny David. "Trivial things like saving the life of an assemblyman."

Another fine story by Robert Mill will appear in an early issue.

A PRICE on His

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

A stirring novel of the West when it was wild.

The Story So Far:

BLAKE FORREST stood reading the reward poster tacked to the post-office wall: *"One Thousand Dollars Reward for the Arrest of Blake Forrest."*

Beneath the photograph Forrest read a very accurate description of himself. The only known mark to distinguish him was a scar on the back of the right hand, from base of thumb to wrist. He was wanted for robbing the president of the bank at Rosedale, old Jake Gildea, of six thousand dollars; and for the hold-up of an express-car on the Texas and Pacific.

"Can't be more than fifty thousand guys in Texas the description fits," commented Forrest when a young Texas Ranger in the store commented on the resemblance.

"With that scar on the back of his right hand," the ranger differed.

Blake offered to go with the ranger to the Sheriff's office. Outside, he casually asked the ranger to hold a sack of flour he had purchased while he tied his other purchases on his horse. And with the ranger's hands busy holding the sack, Forrest vaulted onto his horse and was out of range before the young officer could get into action.

Forrest was about to make camp that night in the brush far from town when he came upon a young woman almost exhausted from thirst. She proved to be Janet King, daughter of a prominent rancher; on her way to town to sign important papers, she had been thrown from her horse; the beast had run away, and she had nearly abandoned hope when Forrest found her.

The wanted man cared for her that night, and next day took her back to town on his own horse—with the result that he was recaptured by the ranger and placed in Sheriff Waggoner's jail. The Sheriff, however, was an old friend of Blake's—who knew, indeed, a thing or two about Waggoner's own past. And Forrest persuaded the Sheriff to allow him to escape in order to round up evidence to clear himself of the false train-robbery charge—this on Blake's promise to give himself up again in two weeks.

In the town of Deer Trail, however, Forrest was recognized by his enemies the Terrell gang, and had to shoot his way out when they trapped him in a wagon yard. . . . Riding away afterward in the rain, he was stopped by flooded Funnel Creek. Making his way to the bridge, he found it washed out—and heard the whistle of an oncoming train. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE sight and sound of the train crashing into Funnel Creek was something Forrest never forgot. He had faced death earlier in the night coolly enough, but that had been a personal adventure, with all his being attuned to the swift excitement of peril close and immediate. Here he was an insignificant atom seeing helplessly an appalling catastrophe.

HEAD

Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff

As the engine smashed down, dragging cars after it, he sat in the saddle sick to the very core of his being.

The cries of the injured and the drowning beat through his inert weakness and brough him back to urgent life. From his waist he unbuckled the heavy belt, and from his feet dragged the high-heeled boots. The loop of the lariat he fastened under his armpits, then tied the other end securely to the saddle-horn. The rain had ceased, and now too late the moon broke through the clouds. Two cars had gone down; a third hung precariously on the edge of the broken bridge. Passengers were trapped in the coaches. Others struggled in the rushing water. Borne by the current, wreckage tossed like chips on a windswept lake.

His gaze picked up a girl clinging to a hand-rail. The pounding waves submerged her, and even as Forrest leaped into the stream, she was swept away.

With powerful reaching strokes he drove through the flood that flung itself at him like a moving wall. He went under—came up again. In the tossing billows the girl had disappeared. Blake thought her gone, but something soft thrust against him beneath the surface. His fingers caught an arm. The pressure rolled him over. Still clutching the arm, he was hurled downstream as far as the taut rope would permit.

Caught in an eddy back of a projection in the bank, he fought his way to a plum tree partially uprooted by the inundation. By gripping branches, he pulled himself and the girl ashore.

Her eyes were shut. Whether she was alive or dead, he did not know; nor had he time to find out. For the head of a man showed in the turbid waters. Forrest saw him—lost him—caught sight again of a hand lifting feebly. The swimmer was trying to bring a child ashore.

Forrest steadied himself; his overhand stroke was still powerful. Somehow he reached the man.

Above the noise of the roaring river, words could not be heard. Forrest reached for the boy, just before the leaping scud tore them apart. The clutch of the undertow carried him to the end of the rope as before, and into the less furious waters behind the promontory.

He saw that good old Maverick was standing on the bank, front feet braced, doing his job as he had learned to do it from a hundred experiences at the end of a tight rope fastened to an angry longhorn. Clinging to the plum tree, Forrest rested in the chill current while he gathered strength.

The girl he had rescued was sitting up. She crawled toward him on hands and knees, reached down, and took the little boy from his arms. Forrest turned, kicked against the bank, and headed out into the river for the third time.

When Forrest reached the swimmer in the creek, the man was sinking. . . . To get him to land was a long hard struggle. More than once Blake thought he would have to give up. Cold and exhaustion had nearly sapped his force. He set his teeth and slowly fought to the bank.

By gestures he told the man to hang on to the plum tree while he dragged himself out inch by inch. Kneeling on the slippery bank, he managed to help the rescued man from the water. Then both of them collapsed.

Presently the man said weakly: "My little boy?"

The girl spoke, a sob in her voice. "He's sick from swallowing water, but he'll soon be all right."

Still breathing deeply, Forrest looked across at her. He judged she was fifteen or perhaps sixteen, a slim immature adolescent, still in the gawky years. In her wet clothes she had the slinky look of a drowned rat. She was, unless he missed his guess, fighting against hysteria, and it was perhaps fortunate that she had the small boy to look after.

The rescued man moved with leaden feet across the few yards that separated him from his son. He had the look of one mortally stricken. Forrest did not then know that there had been three members of the family in the coach that had crashed.

The roar of the Funnel was still heavy as thunder. No longer could one hear cries and screams. The coach poised on the edge of the bank still hung suspended there, but people were being helped out of the tilted upper end of it. They could be seen plainly, but their voices were lost in the sound of the flood.

Forrest rose. "I'll light a fire and we'll dry off," he said.

A cry from the girl stopped him as he was walking toward Maverick to get the hatchet.

"Look!" She was on her feet, pointing across the Funnel, fear vibrant in her voice. "It's Myra—little Myra Hunt. She was on the train."

A child not more than two or three years old was clinging to the branch of a tree on the opposite bank. Her perch was far out over the rushing water, the waves of which lapped up to her feet and at times covered them. It was plain that she had been washed there and flung into momentary safety.

FORREST stared at her; and a cold wind of despair chilled his heart. His job was not done. If it was possible, he must save that baby. If not, he had to go under trying.

Since the rope was not long enough to reach across the swollen creek, he unfastened it from his waist.

"I won't have time to light the fire," he told the girl.

"You're not going in there again," she cried.

"Got to get the kid if I can," he said harshly.

"Let the men on the other side get her."

"They don't see her."

"Call to them. Point her out."

Blake shook his head. "Wouldn't be any use. They couldn't hear us for the

noise of the water. And if some one gets her, it will have to be soon. She won't hang on much longer."

He did not like the job. Heavy floating timbers from the bridge and the wrecked cars were pounding down the creek. Twice he had just missed being hit. Moreover he would have to reach the other side without the rope as a safety-belt. Tired as he was, he doubted if he could make it.

"I wouldn't go," the girl begged. "Some one may see her."

"And they may not," he replied grimly. From an inside pocket of his shirt he drew a small oilskin packet. "Matches," he explained. "Get a fire going if you can, and dry your clothes. Wear my slicker in the meantime."

He pointed for a bluff on the opposite shore that jutted out about thirty or forty yards below them. As his body shot out into the river, he realized that the flood had passed its high-water mark and was decreasing in volume and in violence. In another hour its fury would be spent.

A wave rolled over him. When his head emerged, he caught sight of one of the bridge-piles leaping straight at him. He tried to dive and succeeded in missing the direct impact. Wrenched sideways by the current, the log struck his shoulder and sent him under again.

More than halfway across, he fought with all the strength in him to span the raging twenty-five or thirty feet between him and the bank. There were times when he felt it could not be done, that the torrent was too powerful to be

Forrest caught sight of a hand lifting feebly. . . . Once more he dived.

breasted. But his weary arms still reached forward, and at last he was swept against the bluff. He clung to a root for a few moments while he gathered force to drag himself ashore.

A minute later he was calling to the little girl in the tree: "Hold on, sugar; I'll have you out of there in a second."

The child stopped sobbing to watch him climb the tree. He crawled out on a limb below the one on which she rested. The branch gave with his weight so that he feared it would break. He leaned out as far as he could, and his fingers just touched her dress.

He smiled at her. "Inch this way just a mite, honey, and give me your hand," he said cheerfully. "Then we'll shin down together and go back to the folks."

The child did as he directed. His grip closed on her arm just below the shoulder. Carefully he edged back toward the trunk of the tree, his legs dragging in the swirling water. Presently they were safe at the stem of the tree, dry land beneath them. He slid down, the child in his arm, and carried her to a group of people standing beside a car that had not been torn from the track.

A brakeman stared at this battered specimen who was coming out of the darkness from nowhere. His face was grimy from the muddy waters. He wore no boots. The shirt had been torn from his back, and a bloodstained bruise covered the left shoulder. His feet dragged, as do those of a man who has come to the end of his strength.

"Goddlemighty!" the trainman cried. "Where in Mexico did you come from, brother?"

"Some one take this little girl and get her into dry clothes," Forrest said.

A woman stepped forward and took the child. "Your baby?" she asked.

"No. I was on the other bank, and saw her in a tree."

"You swam the river?" the conductor asked incredulously.

"Yes. Had to." The woman was disappearing into the car with the infant. "Reckon she was in one of the front cars and her parents were drowned."

THE conductor's memory functioned. "No; she was traveling with a colored nurse, to her folks. They own a cattle ranch somewheres near Fair Play." He let his gaze linger on this stranger wonderingly. "Pardner, how did you ever make it across that damned Niagara?"

"Don't know. It nearly beat me."

"This has been a terrible business," the conductor said. "Lucky the first two cars weren't very full. I had about eight or nine in them. Not sure which. Counting the engineer and fireman, we've lost either ten or eleven."

"Not quite that bad," Forrest corrected wearily. "I fished three out alive. They are on the other bank."

"That's fine," a passenger said. "I'd like to know the name of our hero. My name is Jonathan Stevens, and I'll see personally that you are rewarded for this. I'm a banker—from Kansas City."

The outcast looked at him. For a moment there was a flame of contempt in the tired blue eyes. It faded, and Forrest turned away without answering. It was not worth while holding anger, not on a night like this.

A man thrust a flask into Forrest's hand. "Drink, stranger," he said. "You need it."

Blake Forrest was no drinking man, but he drank now. . . . Presently he noticed that a fire was burning on the other side of the creek. The rescued passengers must have been able to ignite the brush they had gathered.

"I'm going to sleep for an hour," Forrest said to the conductor. "Wake me at the end of that time, if you please."

He went into the smoker, made himself comfortable in a seat, and fell asleep. It seemed to him he had hardly closed his eyes, when the conductor shook him awake.

"Hate to wake you, but your hour is up, young fellow," the conductor said.

Forrest stretched himself. His muscles were stiff and his shoulder ached. He rose and followed the railroad man out of the car. As he had foreseen, the creek was now running at almost normal flow.

"Sent for help?" he asked.

"A brakeman hoofed it back to Lang's Crossing. A wrecking-crew will be here before morning. I'll have to make a report on this. Like to have your name as a witness, if you don't mind."

The outcast drawled, a faint sardonic smile touching his eyes: "Call me Anon. I've seen that name considerable in my McGuffey's reader."

JUDGING by the puzzled look in the conductor's eyes, he was struggling to get this clear. "That's the fellow that wrote all those poems, aint it? Like 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' and 'Young Lochinvar' and 'The Assyrian Came Down like a Wolf on the Fold.'"

"You don't get the idea, Ed," explained the brakeman. "When McGuffey didn't know who wrote a poem, he just put the word *anon* under it, short for author unknown, as you might say. This gent here means, I reckon, that for reasons of his own he aint mentioning his real name."

And the eyes of the brakeman grew big with excitement. It came to him that there was another name by which he could call this stranger—that would be worth cash in the box to anybody who spoke it at the right time and place.

But the conductor was too busy for persiflage.

"There are some folks on this train won't ever forget you, Mr. Anon," he said.

"Hard to forget a night like this," Forrest answered. "I'll remember it myself for quite a while. . . . How's the kid I got out of the tree?"

"She's all right. Sound asleep in the last coach. The ladies are looking after her."

"Good. Got to get back to my boots and my horse. See you later."

The crushed cars and the engine were piled up in the bed of the stream. Forrest waded out and used the débris as a bridge on which to cross.

The girl he had rescued rose from her place beside the fire and came to meet him. He noticed that the little boy was sleeping on the man's lap.

"We saw you got across to the baby," the girl cried eagerly. "It was the bravest thing I ever saw. You almost didn't make it. When that log hit you—"

She did not complete the sentence. Her meaning was clear.

"I've heard it claimed I can't drown because I'm all set to be hanged some day," he answered carelessly.

"How can I ever thank you!" she said, her voice breaking. "My folks will want to—"

He interrupted, his voice gruff with embarrassment. "Don't try to thank me. I've been going into creeks all my life after cow critters, so I figured I might as well yank out a human or two for a change. You pretty well played out?"

She caught sight of his shoulder. "You've been hurt!" she exclaimed.

"Just a bruise. If I were you, I'd lie down and get some sleep. I tucked away an hour of it myself. Exactly what you need."

"I can't sleep." Her long-lashed eyes rested on his. "I keep thinking about those poor people. . . . If it hadn't been for you, I'd have been one of them." She dropped her head on her arm and began to cry softly.

He patted her arm. "Now—now, don't you cry. It's all over. You didn't lose any folks in the wreck, did you?"

"No. I've been away at school, and I'm on my way back home."

"Good. Well, I'm the doctor, and my orders are for you to lie down and sleep while I dry my clothes at the fire."

His matter-of-fact voice brought existence back to normal. She smiled at him wanly, and said: "All right, Doctor;

but can't I be nurse and tie up your shoulder?"

He saw that would please her and distract her attention from the horrors through which she had passed. "What with?" he asked.

She bent and ripped a strip from a petticoat. It was a waste of energy and petticoat, he thought, but it might do her good anyhow.

He replenished the fire while she tried to find a soft spot on the ground. With his hatchet he chopped branches from trees and dragged them to the fire. The girl was already sound asleep.

THE sun was up when she awoke. She sat up, startled, then remembered what had happened. She looked around and shuddered.

"Where is the man who saved us?" she asked.

"He left an hour and a half ago," the remaining man made answer.

"But we don't know who he is," she cried, dismayed. "We don't even know his name. Where has he gone?"

"He didn't say. Just mentioned he had important business."

"Didn't you ask him his name? Or where he lived?"

"Yes. He said his name didn't matter and that he lived under his hat. Once he did mention that he was riding the grub-line."

"I meant to thank him properly. Now I can't find him."

"He didn't intend for us to know who he is. As for thanks, he's the sort of man who doesn't want to be reminded of any good deed he does."

"Why not?" she asked with spirit. "He can't expect to save my life and not have me say even thank you. I don't think he ought to have gone like that."

The man did not say what he suspected, that their rescuer was living outside the law.

His little boy began to cry. "I'm hungry," he wailed. "I want Mamma."

Hastily the man moved over to his son to comfort him.

A brakeman picked his way across the creek over the débris, wading through the water when it was necessary. He carried a pail and a pot of coffee.

"I've brought you some food," he called; "the wrecking-crew just got here."

The unhappy father asked a faltering question. "Were any others in the wrecked cars rescued except us and the baby in the tree?"

The man in uniform shook his head. "No sir. That's all."

"Not a black-haired woman about thirty—in a brown dress?"

"No. I'm sorry."

The bereaved man turned away despondently.

"One man rescued all of us," the girl said. "The same man who swam across and got the baby out of the tree. Do you know who he is?"

"Said his name was Anon. Isn't he here with you?"

"No. He left before I wakened. I don't see why he didn't stay."

"Finished his job here, hadn't he?"

The girl flushed. "I want to thank the man who saved my life."

"He's some hero all right—but he's a hard citizen too."

"How dare you say that?" she cried, and turned away indignantly.

From a poster he had seen, the brakeman was doing some guessing.

CHAPTER VII

BLAKE FORREST leaned against the door-jamb of the line-rider's cabin and looked out into a night lit by a sky of stars. He rolled and lit a cigarette, then immediately dropped it to the ground and pressed the fire out in the sand with his boot. The faint rhythmic beat of a horse's hoofs had come to him. Swiftly he walked across the open to the nearest brush, some clumps of prickly pear. Behind one of these he crouched. He was expecting a visitor, but wanted to make sure this one was not self-invited.

The *clump* of the galloping horse came closer. Some fifty yards from the house the rider pulled up abruptly. The call of a coyote sounded.

Forrest stepped out from the shelter of the cactus.

" 'Lo, Bill," he called. "Come on up and rest yore saddle."

Crabb rode forward. He crossed his hands on the saddle-horn and looked down with a derisive grin that masked friendliness. "You doggoned old horn-toad, I come to collect you and a thousand pesos. I hear you done held up a train and robbed it."

"Want to talk with you about that." The outcast put a hand on the mane of the cow-pony. "But first off, did you bring me any grub?"

"Grub? Why, no! Was some one telling you I'd started a feed-store for jack-

asses?" asked the cowboy, a dry chuckle in his throat.

His friend caught him by the arm and hauled him from the horse. Before Crabb could set himself to resist, he found himself on the ground, Forrest astride him.

"I was mentioning grub," Blake suggested.

"So you was, you ornery old vinegaroon!" The man underneath flashed white teeth in a smile. "You win. It's in that gunny-sack back of the saddle. Best I could rustle unnoticed from Old Man Blevins' chuck-wagon. If you don't like it—"

"I'll like it. I ran out of food last night. My belly-button and my backbone are saying how-d'ye-do to each other."

Crabb picked up his hat and brushed the dust out of his red hair. He was a homely freckled man with big protruding ears, a large mouth and faded blue eyes. For years Blake Forrest had been his

He was expecting a visitor, but wanted to make sure this one was not self-invited.

hero. He had been captivated by the man's reckless courage, his generosity, and the surprising largess of his friendship. Bill was a humble soul, and there welled out of him a great loyalty toward this man who had brought to him a warm and happy pride in their comradeship.

"I'd ought to know better than to play Good Samaritan to a locoed criminal who holds up banks, robs trains, and assaults innocent cow-pokes," he said. "Beans and bacon and a jag of flour I borrowed from old Blevins, unbeknownst and feloniously, and the skunk I'm bringing the chuck to, bites the hand that feeds it! When you're in the pen, fellow, and I'm outside looking in—"

"Where do you get that idea about you being outside?" Forrest asked. "When that Texas & Pacific train was being robbed, you were right by my side. But you're right about me and the pen being likely to get acquainted. Every place where I poke my nose I jump up a bunch of guys looking for that thousand pesos you mentioned. . . . Sit in the doorway, Bill, and admire the scenery while I fix me up a couple of stacks of flapjacks and a frypan of bacon. I'm kind of particular who drops in on me tonight."

"Think you would be, with all West Texas reading reward posters," Crabb jeered. "If I was in yore jam, I'd be making myself an absentee fast as my bronc' could drag it."

FORREST lit a lantern and set about making supper. Crabb stared at him. Usually Forrest took pride in his appearance. He not only had a good horse and saddle, but wore expensive clothes.

Now he looked as if his clothes had been salvaged from a dump. The shirt had been half torn from his back, and on the left shoulder there was a great livid bruise. A dusty, torn and floppy old hat drooped over his head. He would have looked like a disreputable tramp, if it had been possible for one who carried himself as Blake Forrest did to convey that impression.

"Say, have you been bucking a cyclone?" Crabb asked.

"Well, a cloudburst," Forrest substituted, putting a match to the kindling he had already set in the stove.

"Craig Shannon was telling me, Blake, you had a rookus with some of the Terrell crowd at Deer Trail. Did they do this to you?"

"No. But I had a little mix-up with them. Nothing serious. They kind of crowded me."

His friend grinned at him admiringly. "You're the doggonedest cuss I ever did see."

"But after our little party I thought it best to go over the hill and hunt the turkeys for a while."

"Hmph! The way Craig told it, you had the damnedest bearfight with a whole mess of them."

"There were some fireworks," Blake admitted, lifting a stove-lid to make way for a frying-pan. "Nothing serious."

"Nothing serious! Hmph! What d'you call serious? Wes Terrell and Webb Lake have took to their beds account of having some bullets slapped into them. Pres Walsh was most scalped, and young Phil Decker had plenty stitches sewed in his head."

"Phil Decker. . . . What kin is he to Miss Helen Decker, the schoolmarm at Deer Trail?"

"Brother. You know the lady? She's pretty as a new-painted wagon."

"I've met her. She wouldn't tell you I was one of her best friends. What is the story going round about our fracas in the wagon-yard?"

Bill opened his wide mouth in a grin. "Depends on who tells it. Seems by the Deer Trail *Journal* you attackted these peaceable citizens when they was teetotally unprepared. I reckon they was just going home from prayer-meeting. The sooner the State is rid of such miscreants as you, the better it will be. And what the hell are the rangers doing anyhow that they don't collect you?"

"So that's the way the *Journal* sees it? And what's the other side of the story?"

"All I know is what Craig Shannon says. According to him, these nice gents went for you all spraddled out, and you kinda showed them up. I will say Craig says his piece real loud and often. What did you ever do for that guy, Blake?"

"Not a thing. He just happens to be a white man. Bill, I'm out of jail hunting evidence. In about a week I've got to give myself up to Buzz Waggoner, so I'm in a tight to round up my witnesses. I've got to gather them and prove an alibi on the Texas & Pacific robbery. First off, where is Stone Heath?"

Bill scratched his head. "I dunno, exactly, he sashays around so dadgummed much—but I reckon we can dig him up somewheres in the brush. Likely those two line-riders we spent the night with are still at the Circle Three B. But you never can tell."

"My trial will be set for some time during the next term of court, unless we can convince the district attorney that I was more than sixty miles away at the time the express was held up."

"I'll get my time from Old Man Blevins, and help you run down these lads. When we all come through with our testimony, they can't do a thing to you. But what about that Valley Bank business?"

"I'm in a tough spot there." Forrest grinned ruefully. "I must have been

plumb crazy that day when I saw that old scalawag Gildea counting the money he owed me and Mother Holloway, and persuaded him to let me keep it for him."

"Why don't you light out, Blake?" Crabb asked. "No use you hanging round here. You can't stay on the dodge all yore life, and if you give yourself up, you'll land in the pen sure."

His friend poured some batter into the frying-pan. "Keep your trap shut, Bill, and don't ever mention this, but Buzz Waggoner gave me a chance to break jail on my promise to show up in two weeks. So I've got to go back."

BILL rasped his stubbly chin with the palm of a hand. "Doggone it, that's sure too bad," he lamented. "Now you can't light out."

"No sir, I have to go through."

"You haven't told me yet about that bruise on yore back, Blake."

"Oh, that. I tried to swim a creek, and a floating log hit me."

"When? What creek?"

"Funnel Creek, when it was bank-full."

"What did you do that for, you crazy galoot? Whyn't you ride round to a bridge?"

"The bridge was washed out."

"So it was. The railroad bridge too. That was a terrible accident."

"Yes. I was there next morning and saw the wreck."

"I hear two-three were saved from the flood."

"Yes. They managed to get out."

Forrest sat down at the table to a meal of flapjacks and bacon and black coffee. He ate with the appetite of a healthy man who has fasted for twenty-four hours.

For a few minutes Crabb watched him, then drew his chair up to the table. "Seeing as I rounded up this grub, I'll sit in and sample yore cooking. It has been most two hours since I had a whack at any food."

FORREST drew back with a sigh of contentment. "A notion's been roaming around in my nut quite some time," he told his companion. "Maybe there's nothing to it, but on the contrary other hand, as old Jig Fisher says when he is making oration, I call it to your attention for your consideration, gentlemen, as a possible solution of this vexing problem."

The outcast brought the front legs of his chair to the floor sharply and looked across the table at the cow-puncher. "Ray Terrell claims he recognized me as the leader of the gang that held up the Texas & Pacific express at Crawford's Crossing. Why did he do that?"

"I go up to the head of the class on that one, Blake," his companion said, rolling a cigarette. "He did it to get even with you—because you bumped off Brother Buck once upon a time."

"That's one reason, but it may not be the only one. I'll ask another question. Why did Wes Terrell and the rest of his gang try to put me out of business Monday night?"

"Same answer—Brother Buck; though that's only part of it. The whole outfit have hated you ever since you made them crawfish in public when they were all set to wipe out Stone Heath because he had whaled the stuffing out o' Pres Walsh."

"True enough, but half a dozen times since then I have met up with the bunch, and not one of them lifted a hand to his gun. They bristled up like strange dogs all set for a fight—and didn't make the jump."

Crabb considered that. "Maybe this time they had been chewing the rag together and were all set for trouble. Maybe they were drunk. Maybe they thought that in the dark they could get away with it."

"Or just possibly, having shifted the blame for robbing the express from themselves to me, they figured it would be hunky-dory to have me dead so I couldn't prove myself innocent."

Bill stared into the cold hard eyes of his friend while his mind wrestled with the suggestion just made. "Meaning that the Terrell gang pulled off the hold-up themselves? By granny, they might have done it. They're poison bad, the whole kaboodlum. The devil and Tom Walker! Till right now I never suspicioned them, but I'll bet my time-check against a 'dobe dollar you've shot a bull's-eye."

"Let's say they did it. How did they know there was a big money shipment that night—unless some one gave them the tip?"

"Ray Terrell," guessed Crabb.

"Why not? He could have wired his brother from up the line—sent a blind telegram, perhaps addressed to somebody else, after he had made sure the money was on board."

The faded eyes of the cowboy gleamed. There was a chance this might turn into an exciting adventure. He had his own personal grudge at the Terrell outfit, and if they could get something on them, he would be no end pleased.

"You mean—send the telegram after he had seen the loot loaded in the express-car?" he asked.

"He'd wait till then, I would guess, even if he had a confederate in the office to tip him off."

"Wouldn't do any good to wire to Deer Trail. The gang couldn't reach Crawford's Crossing before the train got there."

Forrest nodded. "Might have been sent to some station on the line of the Texas & Pacific within twenty miles of where the train was to be robbed, or twenty-five at most, say. If we could run down such a message and could show that Wes Terrell, Webb Lake and Pres Walsh were away from Deer Trail on the twenty-second and twenty-third of last month, why, we would have picked up sign on a cold trail worth following."

"WE'LL start right here from the chunk," Crabb said, with a little whoop of enthusiasm.

"Don't expect too much, Bill. This is only a hunch. May not amount to a thing. But we'll get busy and see where it takes us. Dig up Stone Heath if you can. I want you and him to cover the Deer Trail end of this, since I can't show up there. Find out all you can about the movements of these birds, around the time of the hold-ups. If they were out of town, check up the horses they rode and get a description of the mounts. But do it all absolutely on the *q.t.*"

"Y'betcha! Not a peep outa me. I'll get my time from old Blevins tomorrow morning and hop to it right away."

CHAPTER VIII

THE new rider at the Granite Gap ranch watched Janet King as she walked across the dusty square from the house to the stables. He was shoeing a horse, efficiently, but with a manner of easy indolence that was deceptive. From a distance he had observed Miss King before. She was worth a second look, and that called for several more, to make sure her young good looks were as dazzlingly vivid as earlier impressions had recorded. In her movements was the grace that comes from perfect muscular coördination. The sun and the wind that had browned her hands and face had given her strength and vigor expressing themselves in rhythmic beauty.

Janet pulled up in her stride. The young man in chaps hammering a horseshoe on the anvil was singing softly to himself. The words of his song had drifted to her:

I want to be ready,
I want to be ready,
I want to be ready,
To walk in Jerusalem just like John.

She remembered, with startled certainty, the only time she had ever heard the words before now. A man whom she could not get out of her mind had sung them. Was this just a coincidence? Or was it possible Blake Forrest had chosen this means to get into touch with her?

Her footsteps turned in the direction of the man at the forge. He was a blond, tall, lean and muscular. When he raised his head, she saw he had an attractive face, with a flashing smile that showed fine white teeth.

"You haven't been with us long, have you?" she said.

"Not long, Miss King. Come this week. My name is Stone Heath."

"I hope you'll like it at Granite Gap. . . . Funny, about that song you were singing. I never heard it but once before, and that was the other day. A man sang it who found me lost in the desert and took me to Fair Play."

The blacksmith plunged the horseshoe into a tub of water. "I picked it up from a side-kick of mine who is loaded up with camp-meeting songs," he explained.

"Of course he wouldn't be the man who helped me."

"Not likely." The cowboy rested a muscular brown forearm on the rump of the bronco he was about to shoe. He was willing to prolong this conversation indefinitely. "No, I don't reckon you would be meeting my friend. He's not a lady's man."

"Neither was this one who saved me. He thought I was a nuisance, but he was too polite to say so."

"Might have been Blake, at that," he admitted.

The blue eyes of Janet sparkled to quicker life. "If you mean Blake Forrest, that's exactly who it was," she cried. "When he brought me to town, he was arrested."

"They didn't hold him long," Heath said, smiling at her.

"No. I wish I could do something for him, after what he did for me. You don't know where he is, do you?"

"No ma'am, I don't. On the dodge somewhere. I'd like to meet up with him too. I've been aiming to ride in and see Buzz Waggoner. You see, I'm one of Blake's witnesses. He was with me when the Texas & Pacific was robbed. We were most a hundred miles from Crawford's Crossing at the time, so he couldn't have been in that job."

"I'm so glad to hear it," Janet told him, and her heart was lifted with joy. "I don't mean, to hear he wasn't in the train hold-up; I knew that. He told my friend Mr. Vallery that he wasn't. But to know he has reputable witnesses to prove what he says."

"I aint so blamed reputable, Miss King," Heath admitted. "I've been in plenty of scrapes with Blake. We raised trouble in couples, he and I. So I won't make such an all-fired good witness. Fact is, I reckon Buzz will want to arrest me as one of the bandits, soon as I come through for Blake."

"But you'll come through," she said quickly. "You won't let that interfere."

HEATH'S gray eyes grew hard. "Do I look like some kind of a yellow dog that runs away when it is kicked?" he asked.

"No, you don't. I'm sorry I said that. Forgive me, won't you?"

From his tanned face the chill vanished. "When you say pretty please that way, I reckon I will. After all, you can't tell how good a watermelon is by looking at it. Maybe I might be a coyote. No way for you to know."

"There is, too," she contradicted. "I can tell by looking at you, and I know that Blake Forrest wouldn't have a friend who wasn't true."

"You like that old scalawag!" he said.

"You like that old scalawag!" he said.

A slow flush crept beneath the tan of her cheeks. "Yes. Wouldn't you like somebody who had saved your life and then risked going to prison by bringing you back to safety?"

"I'd like Blake Forrest if he'd never brought me anything but trouble. And come to think of it, that's about all we ever did bring each other except some of the best times two fellows ever had."

"So would I," she said, and her steady eyes defied him to think evil of her confession. "It isn't what he does for you. It's what he is."

"You're shouting, Miss King. Both Blake and I have stepped outside the law a few times, I wouldn't wonder. Laws aren't made to fit conditions. A bunch of soft politicians sit at Austin and put a lot of statutes on the books that won't stand up when you're on the range fighting drought, blizzards, rustlers and general hell. At times Solomon himself couldn't guess which cow was the mother of some little dogie gone astray. It belongs to the first cow-man who finds it, either in person or through one of his riders. You know that. It's common sense. But the law doesn't say so."

"If that was the only crime your friend has committed, they ought not to be hunting him down like a wolf."

"Maybe there are others," he conceded cautiously. "When a young fellow is helling around, he rips a lot of ordinances to pieces. But what I claim is that Blake is a white man and will do to take along. He has the rep of being a killer. To hear some folks talk, you'd think he had massa-creed about forty, instead of having wiped out three sneaking ruffians in self-defense."

Janet recalled that her father had once shot down a rustler who fought back when he was caught red-handed. Curtis King had never mentioned this to her, but she had heard it from others. She knew he had not been to blame, but had been driven to firing to protect himself. Perhaps it had been that way with Blake Forrest too.

"He seems to have a knack of getting into trouble," Janet answered, harking back to the absent friend of the horse-shoer. "Take this fight he has just had at Deer Trail: the paper says he attacked several peaceable citizens and left them all wounded behind him when he lit out in the dark."

"Don't you believe it! Don't believe a word of it." The friendly gray eyes of the cowboy had grown hard as agates. "You have brains, Miss King. Use 'em. Would a hunted man, who is trying to hole up till he can get out of the country, go to shooting up a lot of citizens who weren't bothering him? A cool customer like Blake, who never was known to be goosey? It's not reasonable. Now, is it? I ask you."

"But he did shoot them."

"All I know about this is what I've read in the paper, and what I know about Blake and the riffraff he had the fracas with in the wagon-yard. But that's enough for me to be sure this story has been twisted into a lie. They jumped him—figured they would get the reward—figured after he was dead nobody would raise a rumpus about it, account of his bad rep. The mistake they made was in thinking four-five of the Terrell bunch was enough to tackle a man like Blake."

"You're certainly a good friend of his," the young woman said, and there was warm approval in her starry eyes.

"I'D ought to be," Stone Heath replied. "He yanked me out of the Canadian when it was bank-full and a drifting log had knocked my horse from under me. That was two years ago. We were taking a herd up the trail for Shanghai Pierce. . . . Maybe I'd better give you an idea howcome this Terrell outfit to be such enemies of Blake—and of me too for that matter."

"If you will, please," she assented eagerly.

"First off, I got to admit Blake and I were wild young coots. We weren't noways trained to travel in harness and stay hitched. When we'd go to town, we'd get roostered and raise Cain. Mostly, what we did was harmless, and we would pay later for anything we busted. But we got a bad name, and a lot of cowmen figured it would be a good thing to pass us up when they were hiring riders. So gradually we drifted into a crowd of rapscallions who were tough. We weren't in the inner circle, but kinda outsiders fooling around with them. They flattered us, and we were young enough to like it. Of course we were a pair of suckers, and they were drawing us in so that we'd go so far we couldn't back out."

JANET drank in the story, not lifting her gaze from his. "Go on," she said.

"There was another young fellow ran with us, a lunger with plenty money, out here for the ozone. He came from Connecticut, seems to me. Name of Brooks Phelps. A nice young cuss but weak, all filled up with romantic notions about the West. Pretty soon Blake and I saw the Terrell crowd were aiming to take Phelps for his wad. From remarks they made, we gathered they thought him a tenderfoot and fair picking. They sure made him think he was the fair-haired lad. We kept our eyes open and learned they were going to take him out on the range and sell him the Sawbuck brand, a sizable herd they didn't own any more than I did."

"And you protected him?"

"We picked up our information late, after they had all been out to look the herd over and had come back to the hotel to sign up. Blake and I walked into the room, just as Phelps was starting to sign the check. There had been a lot of drinking and back-slapping. We could see that. Well, ma'am, we could see we had arrived at a mighty awkward moment for the gang. Buck Terrell was the leader. He looked at us plenty black and asked what we meant by butting into a private room without knocking. Blake played innocent and was awful sorry he had interrupted if he wasn't welcome. I forgot to tell you that we had been breaking away from the bunch for four or five months and had been trying to get Phelps wised up about them. So they were already hos-tile, you might say.

"Phelps spilled the beans, not knowing he was doing it. 'I'm buying the Sawbuck brand,' he says. 'Writing a check for it now.' Blake looks around, cool and easy. 'I don't see old man Flandrau,' he comes back. 'I should think he'd be here when he was selling you his herd.' That started the trouble. Buck told Blake he was a liar, and for him to get out o' the room. Blake didn't turn a hair. In that gentle even voice of his he suggested to Phelps to go to the courthouse, look up the Sawbuck brand, and find out who was a liar. You could see the tenderfoot was taken plumb in the wind. He says to Buck, apologetic-like, that it would be a business way to do that.

"Buck knew his crooked deal had gone sour, and he saw red. He dragged out a gun and turned loose on my friend. Blake dropped him in his tracks. By that time my .45 was out, and I had the others covered. We beat it, young Phelps along with us. Two days later one of their crowd, fellow named Pres Walsh, met me in the post office. One thing led to another, and I had to lick him. His friends heard about it and came running, all set to wipe me off the map. Blake drifted in, simultaneous. In front of the post office, with twenty people looking on, he bluffed them out and made them back down. Ever since then they have wanted to get even."

"You think they tried to murder him at Deer Trail the other night?"

"That's the word for it, Miss King. If it had been anybody but Blake, they'd have got him, too, but that lad is a sure-enough hell-a-miler. He is in a class by himself."

"It's an outrage," Janet cried indignantly, "that he should be blamed for these things when it isn't his fault at all."

"Nice if you could get the law to thinking that way too," Heath drawled. "Trouble with Blake is he never stops to explain. But he can look in the glass and see the face of a square-shooter. Don't ever let anyone tell you anything different."

"I never shall," Janet answered.

THERE was such a warm and glowing color in her ardent face that Heath looked at her in surprise. She read his thoughts and reproved them.

"He took me to Fair Play knowing he might be captured." She spoke quietly, but her hot eyes betrayed the emotion in her. "You told me that you are not a yellow dog. Wouldn't I be one if I deserted him now?"

He said, smiling at her with approval: "You'll do to ride the river with, lady."

He had given her Cattle-land's last word of praise. In the long trail drives to a market, the herds had to be taken across rivers sometimes filled to the banks with roaring muddy water. To guide the longhorns from shore to shore was a dangerous business, one that tested a man's courage and loyalty to the limit. Janet knew more than one gay gallant lad who had gone down in the rushing current and later had been buried in a shallow grave beside the stream.

She shook her head, brushing that aside. "Father has hired a lawyer to defend him, you know, if he is ever tried. Mr. Vallery thinks perhaps he can beat the train-robbery charge. It's the other one that is hopeless. At least it looks so. There's no alibi there, is there?"

A film of wariness passed over the face of the cowboy. He trusted Janet King, but he did not intend to make any admissions not hedged with explanations.

"If you mean the Valley Bank robbery, I wouldn't know about that. Jake Gildea is a skunk. No argument there. He would steal from his own mother if she was alive. How do we know there was any hold-up? He claims it took place in his private office; but when the clerk answered his ring, Blake was sitting across the desk from Gildea, smoking a cigarette. He didn't have any gun out. Gildea didn't mention any hold-up. He just gave orders for Homer Packard—that was the clerk's name—to bring Mother Holloway's note."

"Who is Mother Holloway?"

"Finest woman God ever made. A friend to everyone who is sick or in trouble. Any cowboy who is out of a job can go and stay there till he is riding again and settle with her when he gets his pay check. She is a widow. Jake robbed her of about a thousand dollars after her husband died, because a receipt for what Holloway'd paid on a mortgage note had somehow got lost in the shuffle. He was aiming to foreclose on her home. Instead Blake talked him into turning over the note to her indorsed as paid in full."

JANET'S eyebrows met in a frown of perplexity. "How could he talk him into it, unless—"

"Search me," Heath answered dryly. "Blake is right persuasive when he is going good. Maybe he appealed to Jake's better nature."

"You know better than that."

"I know Blake took the note to Mother Holloway, and she had the mortgage released without a word from Jake."

"Maybe he was afraid she had some evidence the note had been paid and didn't want to go to trial to test it. And what about the rest of the money? According to the papers, Mr. Packard says he saw it on the table when he went into the room. It wasn't there afterward, and Blake Forrest went out of the bank carrying a sack."

"Maybe Jake's better nature had got stirred up again. When Blake was a boy, Jake took advantage of Mrs. Forrest and robbed her of everything she had. He did it nice and legal, so there wasn't any come-back. Let's say remorse had been eating at his heart until he just couldn't stand it any longer. So—"

Janet interrupted impatiently. "No jury will believe that sort of nonsense. Jake Gildea loves money and nothing else. And your friend can't walk into a bank and rob it just because he claims Gildea cheated his mother. You know that. We have laws here in Texas, and people have to respect them."

"Well, I'm no lawyer, but I have heard of what they call extenuating circumstances. I was sort o' mentioning some."

A MAN in a buckboard drove into the yard, caught sight of them, and drew up a few feet distant. The driver was Buzz Waggoner. He lowered his fat body gingerly from the rig.

"Mornin', Miss Janet," he said. "Nice to see the sun again after all these rains. After that Funnel Creek business a fellow feels he could stand a lot of sunshine without kickin'."

"Yes," she agreed. "No news yet, is there, of who the man is that saved Bess Decker and little Myra Hunt?"

"Not a murmur. He must 'a' gone into a hole, looks like, and pulled it in after him."

"It's the queerest thing I ever knew. Of course he must have been a stranger."

"Yep." The Sheriff turned his attention to the man at the outdoor blacksmith shop. "Heard you were here, Stone, so I moseyed out to pick you up."

"Might have saved yoreself the trouble," the cowboy said indifferently, fitting an iron shoe to the hoof of the horse. "I was aimin' to ride down and see you in a day or two."

The shrewd little eyes of the officer watched him. "So? What for?"

"For the same reason you came to get me," Heath said nonchalantly, driving a nail into the horn of the hoof.

"You know why I'm here?"

Stone Heath glanced at him, a little amused. "I'm not a plumb fool, Buzz. You've heard talk about me being a witness that Blake couldn't have been in the Texas & Pacific robbery, so you came out to check up."

EVENLY, his eyes on the blacksmith, Waggoner said: "I've heard you were with him at the time the robbery occurred."

"You've heard correctly."

"And if you're innocent, he is."

"You're loaded to the hocks with tact, Buzz," the cowboy grinned. "You might have put it that if he's guilty, I am."

"Probably you have witnesses as to where you were at the time. Maybe you can clear him—and yourself."

"Three of them witnesses. But I haven't got them handy in my vest pocket."

"Good idea to dig up those witnesses, Stone. You can't do it even with the help of horseshoes, sitting here at the ranch. I reckon you better come along with me."

"To your calaboose?"

"I aim to get this business cleared up if I can."

Janet could not keep out of it any longer. "He really was going down to see you, Sheriff Waggoner. We were talking about it just before you drove up."

"That's fine. If he was fixing to come anyhow I won't be discommoding him by giving him a lift to town."

"I'd like you to speak with Father before you go. He's in the house now. Let's walk back to the porch and you can sit down."

"Suits me," Waggoner said. "You come too, Stone."

"Looks like somebody else will have to finish shoeing this horse," Heath said with a grin. "Well, I never was crazy about blacksmith work anyhow. Soon as I've got this one shoe on, I'll be with you."

"I'll wait," the Sheriff said pointedly. To mitigate the bluntness, he added: "I got lots of time. No need to hurry."

A gangling youth in high-heeled boots and shiny leather chaps crossed the yard.

"Bud, will you run in and tell Father that Sheriff Waggoner is here and wants to see him?" Janet called to him.

The boy loped to the house and disappeared through the door. Presently his father came out to the porch. Curtis King was a broad-shouldered man in his late forties. He had the strong, rugged face of a man who has fought his way through adversity to success. His shirt was gray flannel, and his corduroy trousers climbed halfway up the legs of dusty boots.

"Hello, Buzz," he called. "Glad to see you. Aren't you off your range a bit up in this neck of the woods?"

"He came to arrest our new rider Stone Heath," Janet said quickly.

"What's the boy been up to, Buzz?"

"He's a friend of Blake Forrest, so Mr. Waggoner thinks he ought to be in jail."

Curtis King looked at his daughter. "Suppose you let Buzz do the talking, Janet. He's not dumb."

"Stone here is an important witness in the T. & P. train-robbery," the Sheriff explained. "Claims he was with Blake Forrest at the time of the hold-up. If so, I reckon he better come down and tell the district attorney and the rangers what he knows. Wouldn't you say so, Curt?"

King turned to his employee. "Is that a fact, Heath? Were you with this man Forrest when the express was robbed?"

THE eyes of the cowboy narrowed slightly. He had a perfectly straight story to tell, but he did not intend to say anything that later could be twisted by lawyers into something he had not meant.

"That's right, Mr. King. Bill Crabb and I spent the night with Blake at a cow-camp of the Circle Three B. Two line-riders of that outfit were with us. One of 'em was called Shorty. I disremember the name of the other, if I ever heard it."

"At what time was the express robbed?" the cattleman asked Waggoner.

"Quarter after eight, in the evening."

"And you were at the Circle Three B, a long day's ride from Crawford's Crossing, at that time, Heath?"

"Yes sir. Lying in front of the campfire, my head against a saddle, listening to the boys tell windies."

"And you can prove you were there?" King asked sharply. "No use building up a fairy-tale to try to help your friend. The lawyers will tear it down in court quicker than a cat can wink, and send you to the penitentiary for perjury."

"My story is correct, sir," Heath answered curtly.

"When did you see Blake last, Stone?" the Sheriff inquired amiably. "I don't reckon you know where he is now."

"No, I don't." Heath spoke with a touch of drawling sarcasm. "You've seen him since I have. Wasn't he a guest at yore hotel for a couple of days and then decided to check out?"

Waggoner drew the ranchman to one side for private conference.

"Stone tells the same story that Blake Forrest does about being at the Circle Three B," he whispered wheezily. "Of course they might have fixed it up together. Forrest and Heath and this Bill Crabb are thick as three in a bed, I've heard. Maybe all three were in the hold-up."

"And the two line-riders?"

"May have been invented to help out the story. Mind, I don't say it's that way, Curt. I've a notion they are telling the truth. Blake is an old acquaintance of mine. Generally speaking, I'd take his word a hundred per cent, and he tells me this is a frame-up against him. He did me a good turn once, and I like him. But I'm Sheriff of this county, and I reckon I'll tote Heath down to Fair Play. If his story is straight, he'll be able to prove it at the proper time."

King agreed. "Won't do any harm, though, if you want to leave Heath here, I'll produce him any time he's wanted."

"If he doesn't pull his freight," the Sheriff amended. "I reckon I'd better take Heath with me."

The Sheriff did not think it necessary to explain his own private and personal reason for putting Heath under lock and key. There had been a good deal of criticism of him for having let Forrest escape. It was Waggoner's opinion that if he bustled around and showed activity by arresting another possible suspect, he might draw the sting out of the bad impression he had made.

Waggoner told the cowboy he had better pack his war-bag.

"Am I under arrest?" Heath asked.

"Let's not get technical, Stone," the Sheriff evaded. "We'll put it that you are going down as my guest."

"At yore home or the jail?"

"I'll have to think about that."

Heath grinned, hardily. "Looks like I'm going to be such a welcome guest that you wouldn't hear of me turning down yore invitation," he said.

Before they left, the cowboy found occasion for a private word with Janet. "Don't worry," he comforted. "It will work out all right."

She wished she were sure about that.

CHAPTER IX

MAVERICK jogged through the chaparral in a leisurely way, expertly avoiding the thorns of the mesquite and prickly pear which reached out to clutch at him. His master wore heavy leather leggins above the boots thrust into stirrups protected by *tapaderos*. His jacket was of the same material. Gloves with gauntlets saved hands and wrists from a hundred scratches.

For an old-timer it was comparatively easy to get through the thicket in this meandering fashion, though a tenderfoot would have thought it an impassable tangle. Blake Forrest had been a brush-popper in earlier days. Many a time he had pounded wildly through the jungle, high-tailing a mossy-horn racing for dear life, while cat-claw, rat-tail cactus, Spanish dagger, wild currant and a dozen other savage growths tore at him fiercely.

Blake was not hunting cattle today. He was running down information that would help him prove, he hoped, that the T. & P. express robbery was none of his doing. He was not heading for Crawford's Crossing. Any story he might have read from an inspection of that swampy terrain had long since been obliterated by the heavy rains. The outcast was playing the hunch he had mentioned to Bill Crabb, that since the bandits had chosen for the hold-up a day when the train was

carrying a large shipment of money, they were probably acting on direct information of treasure aboard, in which case the news must have been wired them from San Antonio or some point west of there.

This was a sheer guess, but one based on a logical premise, if as he suspected, the robbers were being tipped off by inside information. Fifteen miles west of Crawford's Crossing was the station Summit Gap. Eastward about the same distance from the scene of the hold-up was the small village of Horse Creek. The telegram might have been sent to either place. The hopes of Blake strongly ran to Horse Creek, for the reason that this small village was a much more likely contact point than Summit Gap for the Terrell gang. In riding from Deer Creek to Crawford's Crossing, one would have to detour only a few miles to take in Horse Creek, but must ride an extra thirty miles to reach Summit Gap. . . .

About noon Blake rode along the single dusty business street of Horse Creek. There were half a dozen adobe houses facing the railroad tracks, including a blacksmith shop, a general store, a saloon and a tumble-down shack set in a corral. The station stood by itself on the other side of the rails. He trailed the reins and sauntered into the red-painted frame building.

A girl sat at a telegrapher's desk reading a book. She was about fifteen, fresh-colored and plump. At sight of Forrest, she put her finger on the page to keep her place and waited for him to speak.

He smiled at her. "Are you the president of the T. & P., miss?" he asked.

The girl flashed a white-toothed grin. "No sir, I'm just keeping the depot open while Father eats his dinner," she answered. "There might come a message while he is away."

"So you're a telegrapher too."

"He taught me. I'm not awf'ly good."

"I don't reckon you get a great many private messages either coming or going," he suggested. "You don't have to be a top hand, do you?"

"Not one a month. What would anybody want to send a wire for from here? Once in a while we swap messages with operators up and down the line, just to pass the time."

"The world sure moves," Blake contributed. "To think you can send a message twenty miles in a split second! Then there's this newfangled dofunny the telephone. They say you can hear a fellow's voice a half a mile."

"Blake dropped him in his tracks. By that time my .45 was out, and I had the others covered."

"We get messages a lot farther than twenty miles," the girl said. "Sometimes Father hears from San Antonio."

"Think of that!" Forrest was full of rustic wondering admiration. "On company business, I reckon."

"Mostly. Like I said, once in a great while somebody sends a telegram."

HIS eyes were the puzzled inquiring ones of a country boy come to town. "What in the Sam Hill about? Why won't a letter do just as well?"

"Mostly about folks sick or dead. We got one three-four weeks ago from a mother about her baby. Said there was scarlet fever in the family, and she was sending the baby to a ranch on the express that day. Kind o' funny about it, too: Her brother is a nester and lives back in the brush somewheres. He came in for supplies that day, and was hanging around here before the message came."

"Expecting it, eh?"

"Yes. Seems she had written him she might have to send the baby, but it was lucky he happened into town that day."

"Wasn't it?" Blake agreed, all enthusiasm. "Say, miss, I never did see one of these here telegrams. You wouldn't have, I reckon, a copy of that baby one sticking around yet."

"Sure we have. Father is very particular about that. He hangs all the private ones on that hook over there." She smiled cheerfully. "Course I'm not

supposed to show them, but there's nothing private about that baby one. I'll get it for you—or some other one that's not important."

From the hook she took the few copies of wires hanging there. Clearly she was proud to show her superior knowledge to this good-looking cowboy just out of the brush. One of the sheets of paper she passed to Blake. "There it is. From San Antone. Dated April 23."

OUTWARDLY not a flicker of excitement showed on Forrest's face as he read, but the blood was pounding in his veins—the express had been robbed on the twenty-third. *"Scarlet fever here. Sending baby on express today. Meet train."* It was addressed to *"Sam Jones"* and was signed *"Mamie."*

"An' I reckon the baby arrived right side up, and Uncle Sam was here on the job with a nursing milk-bottle all ready," the outlaw said with a grin.

"No, that's another funny thing. The baby didn't come, and the uncle didn't show up to meet it."

"Well, I'll be doggoned! An April Fool joke maybe, about three weeks too late." Blake handed back to the girl the sheet of paper, and she replaced it on the hook. "Much obliged for letting me have a look-see. You know, I'm one of these here brush-poppers who don't get a chance to know about these up-to-date doodads the way you do. Maybe I don't look it, but I'm most scared to death to meet a young lady, account of not seeing one in a month of Sundays. You sure have been nice to me. Expect I'd better drift along."

Blake stood in the doorway, awkwardly clinging to his wide-rimmed hat with both hands as if it were a safety-belt.

The girl's childish face dimpled to a smile. This bashful young man made her feel sophisticated. It was quite safe to tease him.

"Give my love to the longhorns, and if you ever come back this way again—"

"I'll sure drop in, miss," he promised. "I won't be like that forgetful guy Uncle Sam Jones. Say, like as not the bird was locoed."

"He didn't look crazy, though I didn't like him."

"Why didn't you?"

"I dunno. He was kinda mean and sulky, with no color in his face and dead slaty eyes. A little fellow." The girl slanted a glance at her new acquaintance. "And old."

The outlaw tried to achieve a blush. "How old is 'old'?" he asked. "Would you call me old, miss?"

"Not yet," she gave information. "Forty is old."

"Mr. Forty-year-old Sam Jones didn't get fresh, did he?"

She shook her head violently. "No sir. He thought I was just a piece of the furniture. And when I told him there wasn't a telegram for him,—that was before it had come, you understand,—he snapped at me like I was an Indian squaw. Spoke to me through his teeth without opening his lips. He was certainly no gentleman."

Forrest guessed that the name Mr. Jones usually went by was Webb Lake, but he did not say so. "Some one ought to work that scalawag over and teach him manners. If I meet him, perhaps I will. He hadn't any right to treat a little lady like you that-a-way. Did you say his hair was sort of brindle?"

"No, black." There was a spark of excitement in the brown eyes of the girl. It began to look as if she had made a conquest. "But don't you go getting into trouble over me, Mr.—"

"—Wood—Jim Wood," supplied Forrest on the spur of the moment.

"Glad to meetcha, Mr. Wood. My name is Willie Fulwiler."

"Was this cuss alone, did you notice? Or did he come to town with friends?"

"He was alone. I saw him when he came riding down the road."

"Notice the horse?"

"It was gray—just like any other gray horse. Now, look here, Mr. Wood. If you should happen to meet this Jones, I won't have you picking a difficulty with him just because he was grumpy to me and doesn't know how to behave the way a gentleman should."

Her visitor appeared to drop the idea with reluctance. He bowed himself out of the station, and led Maverick across the street to the corral.

A COUPLE of old-timers sat on a bench, whittling. A youth in overalls seemed to have charge of the place. Forrest turned over his horse to be fed, and leaned against the corner of the shack indolently.

"Come far, stranger?" one of the antiques inquired.

"Quite some distance," drawled Forrest.

The other old man squinted up at him from faded eyes set in a face wrinkled

as a last year's winter pippin. "Ridin' for some cow outfit, I take it," he offered by way of an opening conversational lead.

"Have been," the young man admitted. "Not right now. Kind o' drifting, you might say."

They discussed the rains, grass, price of cows, and came at last to the recent hold-up of the T. & P. express.

"I don't reckon they passed through this town on their way to Crawford's Crossing," Blake said, referring to the bandits.

INSTANTLY the two old men moved shrilly into an argument that apparently had been threshed out more than once before.

"You reckon wrong, stranger," one of them said hurriedly, plunging in to get the first word. "They sure done just that. Not right spang through the town, though one came in to buy grub for them whilst the others waited in the scrub for him to come back."

The old fellow shut his toothless mouth and glared at his crony, challengingly.

His companion, even more ancient and wrinkled, promptly took up the cudgels. "Nothin' to that, Giles. Nothin' a-tall. This Blake Forrest wouldn't be such a fool as that. Just because some danged brush-popper drapped in and bought a couple of plugs of chewing tobacco and some grub, don't prove any such a thing. I been tellin' you that for weeks, but you always was an opinionated old vinegarroon."

"Me, opinionated!" shrieked Giles bitterly. "Why, anybody in this county will tell you that the most sot jackass in our midst is Hans Reincke. Nothing less than a stick of dynamite will get a notion out yore head once it gets lodged there! Now listen to me, stranger: Billy Boss saw these birds in the brush right outside of town, and they waved him round. Now, why would they do that if they didn't want not to be seen?"

Hans shook a fist in the face of the other. "You couldn't believe Billy Boss on a stack of Bibles. Why, that lunkhead came in to the store here once and told how—"

They were off. The quarrel raged violently for five minutes, then died down swiftly to friendly accord. There was no real heat in the epithets they had flung at each other. In a quarter of an hour both would have forgotten them. The recriminations were a routine expression of *camaraderie* devised to pep up life and make it more interesting.

Forrest learned that Billy Boss lived in the village, and looked him up. He found him leaning against a sun-baked adobe wall strumming a guitar, his long lean legs stretched in front of him along the ground. He had a lank cadaverous face and lopsided brows that twitched above humorous eyes when he was amused. It was a fair guess that he took life easily. Three or four flaxen-haired children were playing about the place.

He waited until this stranger had explained what he wanted.

"You a sheriff or a ranger, Mr. Wood?" inquired Boss, picking a note or two on his guitar as he talked. "Because if you are, anybody in this town will tell you not to believe a word I say. I'm the doggonedest liar in Texas, I reckon."

Once more Forrest trailed the bridle-reins. He sat down beside Boss and rolled a cigarette. "I like a good liar," he said, smiling.

Billy Boss looked at him reproachfully. "Jumping jackrabbits, fellow, don't you know a liar aint got any character?"

"Depends on how, why and when he lies," the man in chaps told him.

A barefoot little girl came out of the house. "Paw, Maw says for you to cut her some firewood if you want any supper tonight," she said severely.

"Sure, Melissy. Tell yore maw I'll do that right soon." The father of the family turned a tilted and erratic eyebrow toward his guest. "Sounds mighty immoral to me, Mister. Tell me more. A lie is born of the devil. Or else it aint. Now which?"

BLAKE shook a warning finger at the man. "You're not foolin' me one little bit, Billy Boss. I know all about your lying."

"I'm plumb surprised," Billy said. "An' you never even met me till two minutes ago."

"Sir Walter Scott was a good liar, if you want to call him that. I've read a heap of his romances. This fellow Mark Twain is another—and so's this Artemus Ward. You've got what book scholars call imagination. When you sit around the store swapping yarns, you tell sure enough tall stories. You top the best the other fellow pulls. But when I ask you, straight out, whether you saw three-four men in the brush who waved you around the day of the train-robbery, I know I'll get the truth."

The voice of Boss was lugubrious, but his eyes twinkled. "That's no way to go around knocking a rep a fellow has spent a lifetime in building," he complained. "Well, dad gum it, I did see some men in the chaparral, and they waved me round. I was looking for one of my sows that had just had a litter of pigs."

"Sure they waved you round?"

"Plumb sure. I didn't stop to ask them why. I vamoosed."

"Would you know them again?"

"Might know one of them, the big fellow who was nearest to me. He rode a sorrel horse. And I'd know the one on the gray gelding that rode into town and bought grub for them."

"He was with them when you jumped up the bunch?"

"Just leaving—heading for town."

"Notice the other horses?"

"Not particularly. Hadn't time. Solid colors, I'd guess. Roan or sorrel, I'd say. Now, brother, turn about is fair play: where the heck do you come in on this?"

"I'm working on the case," Blake said. "You'll see me in court when they are trying that fellow Forrest."

"Railroad detective, eh?"

A slim young woman, sun-bronzed, in a faded print dress, came to the door and looked down at them. A satiric smile twitched at her mouth.

"If you're rested enough, you might get that wood, Billy, if it's not interfering with more important business," she said amiably.

Blake came to his feet with one rhythmic motion and bowed. "Afraid I've been detaining him, madam. He's been very impatient to get to work. I'll let him go now."

The smile of Mrs. Boss became a broad grin. "I don't see how you kept him from it so long, energetic as he is!"

The visitor swung to the saddle and took the road.

CHAPTER X

CRABB limited his conversation to, "Pass the potatoes, please," and "Another cup of coffee, ma'am." He liked to talk, but he had been educated in the come-and-get-it school of eating, where a fellow had to stow away the grub *muy pronto* or run the risk of losing out to a bunch of hungry wolves ready to take advantage of any tenderfoot who opened his mouth save to put food in it.

He was very much aware of the good-looking red-haired schoolmarm opposite him. She was certainly as good for the eyes as Mother Holloway's food was for the stomach. Miss Decker was flanked on the right by her younger sister Bess and on the left by her brother Phil. Both of them were in from the ranch for the day, Bill gathered. Just now the slim half-grown sister of Helen Decker was much in the public eye, since she had been snatched from death at the Funnel Creek train disaster a few days earlier. In another way Phil too, was attracting some attention. He was wearing a bandage around his head. Compliments of Blake Forrest, thought Bill with an internal chuckle. He wanted to ask Phil innocently if a bronc had piled him, but it did not seem a good time to devil that short-tempered youth. Bill was in Deer Trail solely to dig up information.

Most of the boarders were single men who lived at Deer Trail. One owned the wagon-yard; two worked in the store; another freighted. Most of the conversation was manufactured for Helen Decker's ears, though not always addressed directly to her. Bill guessed that they were showing off, as small boys do, mostly by "joshing" one another; but their repartee was a little feeble. They were not quite in a class with the school-teacher, who was as full of fire as a thoroughbred colt.

FROM the talk Bill gathered that her school would be out next week, and that after the final exercises she and her sister Bess were going to visit their friends the Kings at the Granite Gap ranch. From this another piece of news developed.

Some one lower down the table mentioned a name that stopped Bill's jaws abruptly.

"Buzz Waggoner found Stone Heath working for Curtis King and took him down to Fair Play with him," a man mentioned. "Stone admits he was with Blake Forrest when the T. & P. was robbed."

"That ties it," Phil Decker spoke up jubilantly, breaking a sulky silence that had endured most of the meal. "It's the penitentiary sure for Forrest, now one of his gang has confessed."

"What has he confessed, Phil?" asked Crabb, his good resolutions giving way to a more urgent impulse.

Young Decker stared at him hardily. He knew Crabb was a friend of Forrest.

"That he helped his no-'count friend rob the express. Didn't you hear Jake?"

"I heard him," Bill Crabb replied. "But you got Stone wrong. He claims that when the train was robbed, he was with Blake, sixty-odd miles from Crawford's Crossing, along with three other witnesses."

"How d'you know he claims that?" Decker demanded tartly.

"I expect that's what he says, because I am one of the other three," Bill mentioned mildly.

Decker said angrily: "Looks like you're talking yourself into the pen too."

"Be still, Phil," his sister ordered.

"I don't have to be still," her brother replied, his voice and manner truculent. "Everybody knows Crabb is thick as thieves with Forrest. Somebody had to help him do the stick-up. If Heath and Crabb say they were with him, that—"

Mrs. Holloway interfered. "I'm not going to have any trouble started at my table. If you want to quarrel, please go outside and don't come back."

"I'm a clam from right now," Bill promised, "except to say I'd like a piece of that apple pie circulating around, ma'am."

"Coming up," the owner of the wagon-yard said, helping himself to a wedge of the pie.

"And to say," added Crabb, "that I'm not lookin' for any fuss and won't have a thing to do with one unless it's brought right to me and laid on my lap."

"You didn't come to town, then, to finish the job your friend started," young Decker said sullenly.

The faded blue eyes of the freckled cowboy held for an instant a flash of derision, but the voice was almost apologetic in its amiability.

"Why, I haven't heard of Blake starting any job he couldn't finish, Phil. If you was to ask me, I'd say his middle name is *Thorough.*"

Somebody farther down the table snorted. Decker glared at the man, then pushed back his chair and got up. His sister Helen rose swiftly and followed him out of the room. There was a moment of awkward silence before Crabb suggested that if it didn't rain, he reckoned they would have fair weather for a while. . . .

After dinner Helen Decker was waiting for Crabb at the door of the parlor. She asked him if he would come in for a minute. When he did so, she shut the door behind him.

"There it is. . . . Dated April 23."

Her tawny eyes fastened on his. "Why did you come to Deer Trail?" she demanded, and he saw that anger was smoldering in her.

"Why, miss, to buy this and that. I been out in the brush quite a spell."

"Well, get out of here—at once. There will be trouble if you don't. No friend of that crazy killer Forrest is welcome here. You ought to know that."

"Blake isn't a crazy killer," he denied. "They attacked him, and he defended himself. About me being at Deer Trail, Miss Decker: I'm peaceable as a preacher—and it's a free country."

"You won't find it so free. They'll put you in jail."

Watching her, he knew that was the least of her worries. Back of her anger was fear—she was afraid that her brother would stir up his friends to destroy him.

He lifted his shoulders in a shrug of acceptance. "All right, miss. I'll go. I've done finished my business, anyhow. Much obliged."

"You needn't thank me." The resentment in her low husky voice was clear. "I don't want Phil to get into trouble. That's all."

He knew she was a fine high-spirited girl, and that she was unhappy because her young brother had fallen among evil companions. She could not help being aware the Terrells were a bad lot, even though they were her relatives.

"I'll saddle and get right out," he promised.

He walked down to the corral where he had left his horse. As he rode out of the gate, he saw several men coming down the street. One of them called to him. He did not answer, but turned in the other direction and put his horse to a canter. Though he was not sure, the impression was strong in him that they were the Terrell crowd. He was getting away just in time.

BILL CRABB could tell that Forrest had reached the rendezvous ahead of him. A thin drift of smoke from the brush informed him that preparations for supper were under way. Bill had not eaten for twelve hours, so this was good news.

But he did not give the yelp of a coyote, wait for an answer, and then ride forward to the camp. That would have been altogether too tame. He swung from the saddle, trailed the reins, took cover behind a clump of cholla. From this he slipped back of a mesquite and crept across the open on his stomach to some prickly pear. He was making a half-circle of the camp, all the time drawing closer to it. His last shift was to a spot back of some twisted bushes.

Blake was seated by the fire, his back to Crabb, who was just about to rise and order the camper to throw up his hands when Forrest took the play away from him.

"There's a lunkhead cow-poke skulking back of a mesquite with a crazy idea that he can play at being a Comanche on the warpath," the man beside the fire drawled without turning his head. "If he doesn't come out reaching for the sky, I'll sure begin pumping lead."

Bill came out, hands up, wearing a shamefaced grin. "How did you know I was there?" he wanted to know.

"I've been listening to you and watching you for ten minutes. Coarse work, Bill."

"You couldn't be sure who it was."

"I know how that thing you call your mind works, Bill." Forrest did not think it necessary to explain that he had seen the approaching rider from a little hill before he started his Indian tactics.

Bill picketed his horse while his friend finished making supper. While they ate, Crabb told his story.

"So nobody in Deer Trail saw anything of Webb Lake, Wes Terrell, or Pres Walsh on the twenty-second, twenty-third or twenty-fourth!" Blake said.

"No sir. Because they weren't there. The kid at the corral told me they left early Tuesday morning and didn't show up again till Friday."

"But young Decker was at Deer Trail during all that time?"

"No doubt about it. If there were four of them, they probably picked up some one else. Afraid to trust the kid, I reckon."

"I'm glad he wasn't one of them. The little I know of him he ought not to be in their crowd, any more than we ought to have been in it three-four years ago. But if he sticks around with them long enough he'll sure go bad.... What about the horses they rode?"

"Webb Lake was on a gray gelding."

"That checks. He was still on it when he rode into Horse Creek."

"Wes Terrell had a big bay with four white stockings and Pres Walsh rode a fleabitten sorrel."

"Did they leave word where they were going?"

"Yep. They were going after spike buck. Funny thing is they didn't get any. They had the doggonedest luck, so they claimed to the kid at the corral. All they got was one wild boar, and they didn't bother to bring that back."

"Fishy. With the chaparral full of game! I'd guess their minds were on higher things."

"Even the kid thought it queer," Bill said. "Though of course he hadn't a ghost of an idea where they had been."

"They did the T. & P. job, all right. We haven't enough proof to convict yet, but we have plenty to give the rangers a start on the trail that ought to finish with these birds collected at the end of it."

"Fine," agreed Bill ironically. "Then when you're all rounded up in the pen, after you've been convicted of the Valley Bank hold-up, you can talk over old times together while you're breaking rocks."

Blake smiled, with no enthusiasm. "I certainly must have been crazy with the heat that day. My luck will sure have to stand up if I get out of that."

SWALLOWING a mouthful of flapjacks, Bill glared at Forrest in annoyed protest. "Jumpin' Jehosophat! What's the sense in talkin' about luck? You've got yourself sewed up in a sack so you can't move. A guy can bluff in a poker-game, but not after he has shown his hand and flung it into the discard like you have done. Luck? Hmph! Think you can persuade the jury that old Jake Gildea has

become a Christian and just naturally shoved back at you the mazuma he stole from your mother a dozen years ago? That old buzzard! Why, the jury would split its sides laughing. No sir. You go to trial, and you go to jail."

Mournfully, to plague his companion, Blake intoned a snatch of one of his camp-meeting songs:

See that brother dressed so gay,
The devil's going to come for to carry him away.

"He sure is," agreed Crabb vindictively. "For twelve or fifteen years, Mr. Blake Forrest, with maybe one off for good behavior."

"And your suggestion, my cheerful and comforting friend?"

"Lemme go in and make talk with Buzz while you stick around in the brush. If things don't look good,—and we know blamed well they won't,—I'll report, and you can light out for Wyoming or somewheres north and west of there."

"Thought I'd mentioned to you that I had promised Buzz to come back?"

"Sure, but no use being persnickety. Buzz is a good guy. Once you were Johnny-on-the-spot when he needed help. Now it's his turn. He'll understand. I'll fix it up with him."

"I've already fixed it with him—promised to be back inside of two weeks."

"Yeah, but—nobody knows he gave you the file. It won't hurt him any if you don't show up."

Forrest shook his head. "Nothing doing, Bill. Call it stubbornness if you like, but I'm going back."

"Hell's bells! You don't *want* to go to jail, do you? Who ever heard of a fellow walking back and asking them to put the cuffs on him? Of all the cussed jackasses I ever met up with—"

"I take the cake," Blake finished for him. "Let her ride at that, Bill. Just a darned fool."

Crabb desisted from his objections. He not only knew when he was beaten but was at heart not sorry for it. One of the things he liked about Blake Forrest was that you could tie to him. . . . He would go through.

None the less, the cowboy was unhappy. His gloom was still with him in the morning when they set out for Fair Play. Blake was in good spirits. He laughed and chatted, told stories, even sang, as they rode through the pleasant sunshine. Bill had noticed before that when things were not turning out well for Blake a queer reckless gayety cropped out. He had a natural zest for danger.

"Buck up, Bill," Forrest told him as they looked down on the smoke rising from Fair Play's huddled houses. "One of these poet guys once said that stone walls don't make a prison, nor iron bars a cage."

"Hmph! How long did *he* ever break rocks in a pen?"

"I'm not breaking any yet. We'll cross our bridges one at a time. First, this train-robbery. It will be a pleasure for me to hand that over to the Terrells to explain. As for the Valley Bank business, I've been in worse jams, and came out all right."

THEY rode along the main street to the courthouse and tied at the hitch-rack in front of it. Half a minute later they opened a door and walked into the office of the Sheriff.

Buzz Waggoner took a black cigar from his mouth and stared at his returned prisoner.

"You're a couple of days ahead of time," he said at last.

"Don't tell me I'm not welcome," Forrest begged. "Don't tell me to leave and never darken your door again."

The little eyes of the Sheriff almost disappeared in his smile. "No sir. I aim to make you feel right at home. I wouldn't refuse you the shelter of my roof."

"Me too?" inquired Crabb. "I'm one of these here prodigals too."

"Maybe you too. I'll have to look into that." Waggoner got up from his chair and shuffled forward to shake hands with Forrest. "I hope things worked out for you, Blake. They been kind o' ridin' my tail because I was so careless as to let you escape. I couldn't explain you were coming back."

"Were you right sure I would?" asked Forrest.

The Sheriff ran a fat hand through his hair to help him explain more clearly. "Well, I'll tell you about that," he confessed. "Most of the time I knew you'd be back, but once in a while I'd kick myself for being a darned fool and figure you wouldn't."

"Anyhow, I'm here," Blake drawled. "Get out your handcuffs."

An old-time Western trial-by-jury is one of several dramatic climaxes you will enjoy in the next installment—in our forthcoming March issue.

Man's Boldest

"NOTHING can be more remarkable," writes Stefan Zweig, "nothing can be more beautiful, than a truth which arouses the impression of improbability. To the sublimest deeds of man, because they so enormously transcend the average capacities of our race, there always clings an atmosphere of the inconceivable; but it is only because these are so wildly improbable, that man can recapture self-confidence."

Here follows his story of Magellan, "perhaps the most splendid Odyssey in the history of mankind, the voyage of two hundred and sixty-five resolute men, of whom no more than eighteen returned upon a worn and battered galleon, but with the flag of victory flying at the masthead."

From an old engraving of Magellan's five

IN those days the grip of Spain extended far and wide across Europe. When a week later the five ships touched at Teneriffe, to take on further supplies and fresh water, they were still in the dominions of Emperor Charles V. Once more the would-be circumnavigators could set their feet on Spanish ground, and talk their familiar tongue before steering away into the unknown.

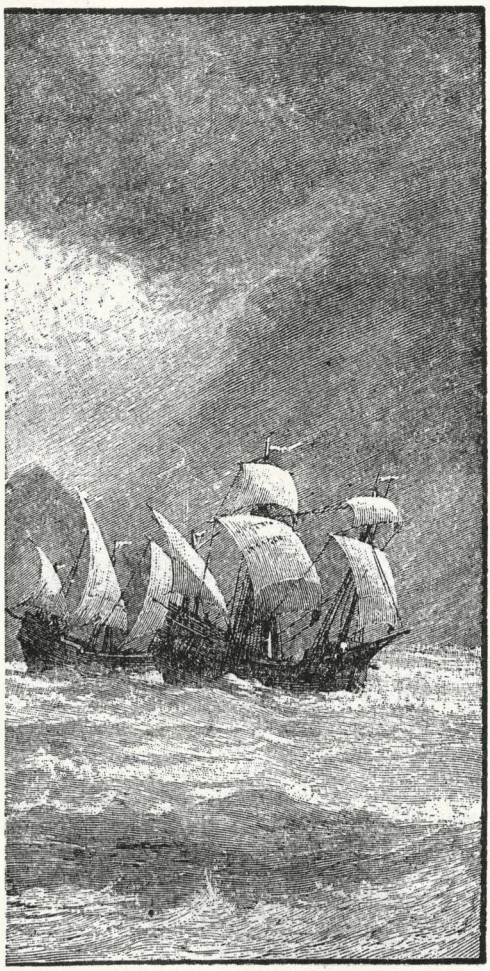
This rest was brief. Magellan was about to hoist sail once more when there appeared in the offing a caravel from Spain, bringing the Admiral secret tidings from his father-in-law Diogo Barbosa. Secret tidings meant, as so often, evil tidings. Barbosa warned his son-in-law that he had learned of the existence of a privy pact among the Spanish captains, who intended to mutiny during the voyage; heading the conspiracy was Juan de Cartagena, cousin of the Bishop of Burgos.

Magellan had no reason to doubt the honesty and accuracy of the warning. It merely came as confirmation of an obscure threat uttered by the spy Alvarez: "Others have been sent with contrary orders, of which you will learn only when it is too late to save your honor." However, the die was cast, and the manifest danger served only to intensify Magellan's natural stoutness of heart. Proudly he wrote in answer to Seville that, whatever happened, he would persist in his service to the Emperor, and that his life would be the pledge. With-

Adventure

By STEFAN ZWEIG

Who wrote that best-seller "Marie Antoinette" and other noted books.



little ships—Culver Service.

out letting anyone on board suspect what a gloomy and truthful warning had been brought by the caravel,—the last letter he was ever to receive,—he gave orders to weigh anchor; and within a few hours the peak of Teneriffe was growing hazy in the distance. Most of the two hundred and sixty-five men were looking upon their homeland for the last time.

THE hardest task for the commander of this motley squadron was to keep as a unified group five sailing-ships of such varying tonnage and speed. If one should stray from the flock, it would be lost in the pathless ocean. Before starting, in understanding with the Casa de Contratacion, Magellan had elaborated a special system to enable the members of his flock to keep in contact. True, the "*derota,*" the general course, had been communicated to the *contromaestres,* the ships' captains, and the pilots. But on the open sea, standing orders were: "Follow in the wake of the *Trinidad.*"

By day this was easy enough; for even during a big storm the members of the fleet could keep one another in sight. More difficult was it when darkness fell; so light-signals had been arranged. When the sun set, on the stern of the *Trinidad* a wooden torch was kindled in a lantern, which the other ships were to keep in sight. If, in addition to this wooden torch, two other lights were shown on the flagship, this indicated to the consorts that they were to sail more slowly, or were to tack if the wind became unfavorable. Three lights signified that a storm was imminent and that the other ships were to shorten sail; four lights meant that all sails were to be lowered. A flickering light upon the flagship, or gunshots, were warnings to navigate cautiously, since shoals or sandbanks were near at hand. This ingenious system of night signaling was worked out to meet every possible eventuality.

Each sign made by the light-telegraph on the flagship had to be answered in like manner by the other ships, so that the captain-general could be sure that his orders had been understood and would be obeyed. Furthermore every evening, just before it grew dark, the four ships had to steer close to the flagship, and hail the Admiral with the words: "*Dios vos salve, señor capitan-general y maestre, é buena compañia,*" and thereafter receive orders for the three night watches. By the organization of these daily contacts of the four captains with the Admiral, discipline during the early days seems to have been secured. The flagship led, and the others followed; Magellan set the course; and the captains had to adopt it without question.

But precisely because the leadership was kept thus rigidly and unyieldingly in the hands of one man, and because this inaccessible, taciturn, self-contained Portuguese commander made them come to him day after day to receive their orders as if they had been mere foremast hands, the captains of the other boats grew more and more restive. They had felt that whereas in Spain, Magellan was justified in keeping the mystery of the "*paso*" close,—lest it fall into the hands of gossips and spies,—once on the open sea, they thought, this precaution would no longer be needed, since the silence and loneliness of the ocean made leakage impossible. Surely they would be invited on board the flagship, would be shown the maps, and would be told the details of his jealously guarded plan. Instead, they found Magellan increasingly reserved, cold and inaccessible.

He did not summon them to a council; he did not ask their opinions, not even that of the most experienced among them. They had to follow the flag by day, the *farol* by night, with the dumb obedience of a well-trained dog. For some days the Spanish officers made no remonstrance at the way in which Magellan, without a word to them, kept his own course. But when the Admiral, instead of sailing, as they had expected, southwest for Brazil, steered southward along the coast of Africa as far as Sierra Leone, Juan de Cartagena, at the time of one of the evening reports, bluntly asked why the course had been changed contrary to the original instructions.

An open inquiry was not in any way presumptuous on the part of Juan de Cartagena. (It is needful to insist upon this, for in most of the accounts of the matter, in order to exonerate Magellan, Juan de Cartagena is described as having been a traitor from the outset.) We cannot but regard it as reasonable and right that the captain of the largest ship in the squadron who was also the *veedor* of the Spanish Crown should civilly ask the Admiral why a prearranged course had been departed from. Besides, from a navigator's standpoint, there were good grounds for Juan de Cartagena's question, since the alteration in the course seemed preposterous, and likely to cost the fleet a round fortnight.

We do not know why Magellan changed the route. Perhaps he sailed along the coast of Africa as far south as Guinea, in order there (following a technical rule of Portuguese navigators, a rule unknown to the Spaniards) to catch a favorable wind. Or it may be that he departed from the usual course in order to avoid the ships which King Emanuel of Portugal sent to Brazil by a more northerly route. In any case it would have been easy for Magellan to tell his colleagues plainly, trusting in their loyalty, the why and the wherefore of what was certainly unusual.

Magellan, however, was not concerned with this particular instance, with the sailing of a few miles more or less to the southwest, but with the principle which led him from the start to maintain strict discipline in the fleet. If there were, as his father-in-law had warned him, conspirators among his followers, he would rather force them into the open. Should secret instructions have been issued to some of them, he wanted to know what these instructions were, and to enforce his supreme authority. It suited his purposes, therefore, that Juan de Cartagena was the captain who questioned him, for now he would find out whether this Spanish hidalgo had come as his equal or as his subordinate.

IN actual fact this question of precedence had become somewhat dubious. Originally Juan de Cartagena had been sent by the emperor as *veedor*-general, and both in this capacity and as captain of the *San Antonio,* he was subordinate to the Admiral without any right to question or advise. But the situation changed when Magellan's cartographer associate Faleiro decided to remain in Spain, since Juan took Faleiro's place as *"conjuncta persona,"* the term *conjuncta* signifying *associate and equal.* Each of them, therefore, could produce a document in support: Magellan the one which gave him supreme command of the fleet; and Juan de Cartagena the *cedula* by which he was appointed *conjuncta persona.* Magellan was determined that this question should no longer remain debatable. He therefore answered the query of Juan de Cartagena, which was apparently justified by the latter's co-equal position, by bluntly stating that "no one was entitled to demand explanations from him, and all they had to do was to follow him as directed."

This was certainly rude, but Magellan thought it better to wave the bludgeon than merely to bluster or to negotiate. In fact, he hit the Spanish captain (and perhaps conspirator) a sound crack upon the head, this implying that Cartagena was to be under no illusions, for Magellan held the commandership in an iron grip.

But though he had an iron grip, he lacked many excellent qualities, and especially the tact which would have enabled him to smooth over a rough answer. Never did he acquire the art of saying harsh things in a friendly way, of dealing with either his superiors or his subordinates in a cordial and courteous manner. Thus there necessarily became diffused around the commander who was bubbling over with energy, a tense, hostile and irritant atmosphere which was likely to increase latent dissensions all the more, since Juan de Cartagena honestly regarded Magellan's change of course as a blunder.

There were reasons for this view. The favorable wind did not come, and the fleet was becalmed for twenty days. Then there ensued such violent storms that, according to Pigafetta's romantic imaginings, the expedition was only saved by the appearance of a luminous vision of the Corpo Santo, the Holy Bodies of the Patron Saints, Anselm, Nicholas and Clara—St. Elmo's fire.

Much time had been lost by Magellan's arbitrary change in the cours , so that in the end Juan de Cartagena could no longer disguise his spleen. Since the Admiral regarded himself as above criticism, the whole fleet should see how little respect he, Juan de Cartagena, had for so bad a navigator. True, every evening his ship, the *San Antonio,* steered close to the *Trinidad* to report and to receive Magellan's orders. One evening, however, Juan did not appear personally on deck, sending instead the quartermaster, who gave only the abbreviated greeting: *"Dios vos salve, Señor Capitan y Maestre."*

Not for a moment did Magellan believe that this defective salute had come about by chance. If Juan de Cartagena addressed him only as "Capitan," and not as "Capitan-general," this was to inform the fleet that Juan de Cartagena, as *conjuncta persona,* did not recognize Magellan as a superior officer. At once the Admiral let Juan know that he expected, henceforward, to be greeted in the proper terms. Juan sent back a curt reply that he must beg to be excused. This time he had made his greeting through the instrumentality of the best man on board the *San Antonio,* but next time he might make the greeting through the mouth of the cabin-boy. For three days the *San Antonio,* within sight of the whole fleet, gave no further greeting, in order to make it plain to everyone that Juan de Cartagena did not recognize the unrestricted supremacy of the Portuguese commander. Frankly (and this is to the credit of Juan, who was not a secret conspirator—as he is often represented), the Spanish hidalgo flung the gauntlet before his Portuguese rival, Magellan. . . .

A man's character is best disclosed by his behavior at decisive moments. It is danger which brings to light hidden powers and capacities. Those overshadowed qualities which, when the temperature is moderate, lurk outside the range of measurement, are of a sudden unmistakably disclosed. Magellan's reaction to danger was always the same. Whenever great matters were at stake, his silence and coldness grew sinister. He froze, as it were. Even in face of the grossest insults, the eyes beneath the bushy eyebrows did not flash; nor did the corners of his inscrutable mouth twitch. He always kept his temper; but in his icy brain, at such times, his senses were as clear as crystal, while he remained frostily silent, thinking out his plans. Not once in his life did Magellan deliver a blow hotly or hastily, but always struck after a long and obscure silence, even as a cloud draws itself together before the lightning flashes.

NOW, as on other occasions, Magellan kept his own counsel. One who did not know him (and his Spanish subordinates did not yet know him) might have supposed that he had not noticed Juan de Cartagena's challenge. Really he was preparing a counterstroke. He knew that he could not forcibly dismiss the captain of his largest and best-armed ship on the high seas. Patience then, patience. It would be better to seem indifferent. Magellan, therefore, made no answer to the insult, having the supreme gift of taciturnity—conjoined with the ardor of a fanatic, the tenacity of a peasant, and the passion of a gamester. Apparently unmoved, he walked to and fro on the deck of the *Trinidad,* completely absorbed, it might have been supposed, in the petty details of shipboard life.

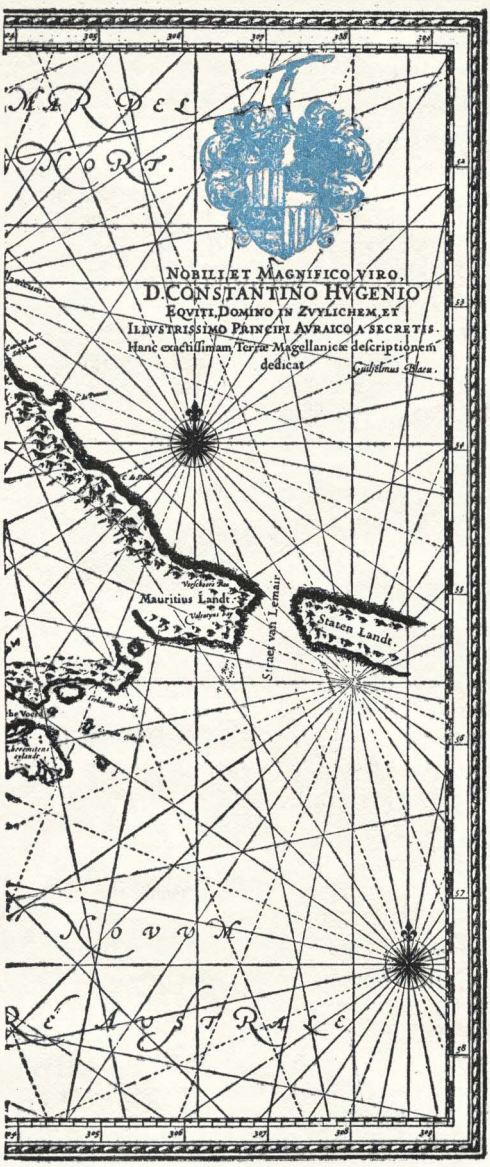
He did not seem disturbed because the evening salute from the *San Antonio* remained unuttered; and the Spanish captains were somewhat surprised when this enigmatic man revealed what they looked upon as an inclination to compromise. For the first time, on the pretext of a breach of discipline by one of the soldiers, the Admiral summoned the four captains to a council upon the flagship. He found it inconvenient, they thought, to be on bad terms with his comrades.

An ancient map of the Straits of Magellan—with sketches of the giant Patagonians

Having realized that the southward course had been a mistake, he felt it would be wiser to take the advice of old, experienced captains, instead of treating them as nonentities.

Juan de Cartagena came to the council with the others, and being now able to address the Admiral in person, he repeated his inquiry why the course had been changed. In accordance with his preconceived plan, Magellan remained cool, well aware that his noncommittal attitude would irritate Cartagena more and more. As the King of Spain's chief official in the fleet, he had the right of free speech; but his anger led to a violent outbreak, to a public refusal of obedience. Magellan, as a skilled psychologist, expected, and even hoped for open insubordination. Now he could strike. At once, seizing Juan de Cartagena by the breast, he said: "*Sed preso!*"—"you are my prisoner"—and commanded the *alguacil* to arrest the mutineer.

THE other Spanish captains were dumfounded. A few minutes before, they had been wholly on the side of Juan de Cartagena; even now, at bottom, they espoused the cause of their countryman and were opposed to the tyrannical foreigner. But the speed of the blow, the formidable energy with which Magellan had had his adversary laid by the heels,



and some old-time ships.

paralyzed them. Vainly did Juan de Cartagena appeal to them for help. Not one of them dared do anything, or to make front against the stocky little man who had for the first time shown his claws and emerged from the tough envelope of silence. Only as Juan was about to be led away, did one of them turn humbly to Magellan and beg that the prisoner, being a Spanish nobleman, should not be put in irons. It would be enough that he should give his word of honor not to break arrest. Magellan agreed, on condition that Luis de Mendoza, to whose care Cartagena was entrusted, should swear to hold the prisoner at the Admiral's disposal. This was arranged. An hour later another Spanish officer, Antonio de Coca, was in charge of the *San Antonio*, and at nightfall, from the deck of his ship, greeted the Admiral in due form as "Capitan-general."

Nothing seemed to be changed, and the fleet sailed onward without incident. On November 29th, the look-out man at the masthead hailed those below to announce that he had sighted the Brazilian coast, which they reached, without landing, in the neighborhood of Pernambuco; and at length, on December 13th, the five ships, after an eleven weeks' voyage, entered the bay of Rio de Janeiro.

RELUCTANTLY the sailors left the paradise of Rio de Janeiro; reluctantly they steered without landing along the alluring coast of Brazil. But Magellan had no more time to spare. Imperturbable though he seemed, burning impatience drove him perpetually onward toward that "*paso*" which was inscribed on Schöner's globe, and which report had led him to expect in a particular region. The way through the Americas must, if the tale of the Portuguese pilots and the latitude given by Schöner were correct, be situated immediately behind the Cabo Santa Maria, and so it was toward this cape that Magellan directed his course. Finally he reached it, on January 10, 1520. Beyond it they saw a small hill rising out of an immense plain, and they called this hill Montevidi—today Montevideo. The weather being stormy, they took refuge in the huge inlet which appeared to stretch westward, indefinitely.

The enormous bay is, in reality, nothing more than the estuary of the Rio de la Plata; but of this Magellan had no inkling. He found himself at the precise spot described in the secret report, the inlet stretching westward, in the direction of the Moluccas. He fancied he had reached his goal. Everything tallied with the description. Assuredly this was the place from which, twenty years before, the Portuguese had hoped to continue their voyage to the west. Pigafetta expressly declares that the ships' companies, without exception, were convinced the desired strait had been discovered.

How could the uninformed Spaniards suppose this gigantic estuary, whose western shores were out of sight, to be a mere indentation of the sea, when we ourselves, steering from Montevideo to Buenos Aires, find it hard to believe that we are merely entering the mouth of a river and not sailing into an open sea?

If we, astonished, doubt despite our better knowledge, how should mariners, most of whom had seen only the mouth of the Tagus, the Po or the Rhine, fail to let their hopes cheat them into the belief that they were entering a strait like that of Gibraltar, the Hellespont, the English Channel? Assuredly, though it might narrow for a few hours, it would then widen again to lead into the South Seas.

THE persistency with which Magellan explored the estuary of the Rio de la Plata proves that, from the time of his first glimpse of this vast sheet of water, he was convinced that he had discovered the *paso* of which he was in search. He spent a fortnight upon the fruitless quest. Directly the storm which broke out at the time of his arrival had abated, the Admiral divided his fleet. The smaller ships were sent westward to discover the presumed channel, in reality upstream. The two larger ships simultaneously sailed southward across the mouth of the La Plata, and here again we get a glimpse of Magellan's secret impatience. Instead of remaining at the place of assignation where the five ships were to reassemble, he quitted the flagship to explore the coast in person on board the *San Antonio,* not wishing to leave the triumph of the discovery to anyone else.

A few miles to the south, however, he reached land, and had to console himself with the hope that the other ships, which had sailed westward, were on the right track, as he supposed the unknown Portuguese to have been twenty years before. Bitter was to be his disillusionment. After he had waited a fortnight in "Montevidi," the returning members of the squadron hove in sight. No pennant was waving joyfully at the masthead, and the captains brought the crushing intelligence that this huge indentation in the coast of Brazil, which they themselves had likewise supposed to be the channel of which they were in search, was nothing but the mouth of an unusually large river, for they had come to a place where the waters ran fresh. In honor of Juan de Solis, who had hoped to reach Malacca by the same route early in the year 1516, and had instead met his death, the river was provisionally christened Rio de Solis—for the name of Rio de la Plata was not applied to it until a later date.

Magellan's only resource was to keep a stiff upper lip. None of the captains and none of the crew must discover how fearful was his disappointment. For one thing, at least, had become plain to him, that Schöner's globe (or whatever map he was depending on) was untrustworthy, and that the news of the Portuguese concerning their discovery of a passage through the Americas in the fortieth parallel was erroneous. False had been his information; false were Faleiro's calculations; false his own contention; false were the promises he had made to King Charles and the Privy Council. If a strait really existed,—and for the first time the man who had been so confident had to admit that there was an *"if,"*—it must lie much farther to the south. But to steer southward meant to steer away from the warm seas. Since they were many degrees south of the Equator, it meant an approach to the Antarctic. February, here in the far south, was not the end of winter but its beginning. Unless they could soon find a passage into the South Seas, unless the strait could be quickly discovered, the favorable season would be over, and there would remain only two possibilities: either to get back to a warmer clime, or to winter in these bleak southern latitudes.

From the moment when the scouting ships returned with the evil tidings, gloomy thoughts must have predominated in Magellan's mind; and just as there was gloom within, so was there gloom without. The coast became increasingly hostile, barren and desolate; and the skies darkened. The white light of the south was extinguished; the blue zenith was overcast with gray; the steaming forests with their sweet aroma had vanished, balsamic odors were no longer wafted to the ships from the distant shore. Disappeared forever was the friendly landscape of Brazil, with its luxuriant fruit trees, its waving palms, its multicolored animals, its hospitable brown-skinned natives. On the strand there was nothing to be seen but penguins, which waddled away when approached; while sea-lions moved oafishly and lazily upon the reefs. As far as eye could reach, there were no other living creatures, for both man and beast seemed extinct in this disheartening waste.

Once, indeed, on land huge savages fled wildly at sight of the strangers, men clad like Eskimos in skins. They would not heed the lure of the little bells, or of the brightly tinted caps that were held out to them. With threatening and renunciatory gestures they fled, and the explorers

vainly attempted to discover a trace of their dwellings.

Slower and more laborious became the voyage, but Magellan held stubbornly southward, hugging the coast. Every bay was examined, with leadsmen at work in the chains. It was true that Magellan had long ceased to believe in that accursed globe which had enticed him into so fruitless a journey. But a miracle was still possible; there was still a chance that at some unexpected spot the *paso* would be found, and that before the beginning of winter the fleet would find the "Mar del Sur"—that the strait of which he was in search lay somewhat farther to the south.

When, on February 24th, the fleet reached the entrance of another bay whose western shores were out of sight, the Gulf of San Matias, hope flickered up once more. Again Magellan sent the smaller ships to explore. No, there was nothing. Another closed bay. The pilots came back crestfallen; and no less vainly were two other bays explored, the Bahia de los Patos, so called because of the numerous penguins seen there, and the Bahia de los Trabajos, or Bay of Toil—thus named because of the terrible hardships suffered by members of the crew who landed there.

FARTHER and farther south sailed the fleet along the gloomy coast beneath gloomy skies. More and more horrible grew the prospect, shorter the days, longer the nights. The gentle breezes of latitudes nearer the Equator had long been left behind, to be replaced by cold and vicious storms.

Snow and hail whitened the sails, while the gray waves towered dangerously high. Two months were spent by the fleet, constantly fighting bad weather, in traversing the thousand miles of coast between the estuary of the La Plata and Port San Julian. There were hurricanes almost daily, shattering the masts and carrying away the sails, but the *paso* continued to elude them. They had to pay heavily, now, for the wasted weeks, for while the ship had been exploring bay after bay, winter had overtaken them. The time had come when they would have to face this southern winter, wild and dangerous, blocking the southward course with its storms.

The crew began to show uneasiness, instinctively aware that something was wrong. When they signed on in Seville, had they not been told that the voyage was to the Spice Islands, to the sunny south, to a paradisaical world? Had not the Admiral's slave Enrique assured them that his country was the land of the lotus-eaters, a place where the most precious spices grew ready for the picking without labor? Had they not been promised wealth and a speedy return? Instead, this silent and sinister man was leading them into a cold and poverty-stricken world. On some days they could see the sun, pale yellow, as it described a low arch in the sky; but as a rule the heavens were overcast, and the smell of snow was in the air. The biting wind whistled through their worn clothing; the ice-encrusted ropes took the skin off their chilled hands, and their breath steamed. As for the land, how God-forsaken it looked! Even the cannibals had fled from the cold. When the men went ashore, there was no fresh fruit to be found, nothing but fish and sea-wolves; the cold waters were almost as barren of life as the storm-lashed strand. Whither had this crazy Portuguese brought them?

The Spanish captains watched the growth of this mutinous spirit with tacit gratification. They took no part in fomenting the disturbance; they avoided speaking to the Admiral; they were conspicuously silent; but their silence was perhaps more dangerous than the frank discontent of the sailors. Being themselves masters of their craft, it did not escape them that Magellan was inwardly suffering from disappointment, and that he no longer felt sure of his secret. If he really knew the precise latitude and longitude of the alleged *paso*, why did he waste a fortnight exploring the estuary of the Rio de la Plata? Why did he continue to squander precious time by investigating every insignificant inlet that they passed?

The Admiral must have deceived either the King or himself when he declared that he knew the route, for it had become plain that he did not know it but was looking for it. With malicious delight they watched him, at each new indentation of the coast, scrutinizing the shore through his telescope. Well, let him go farther and farther south, entangling himself in the rime; they need not protest. Soon would come the moment when he would be compelled to admit that he did not know his course, and that it was impossible to go any farther. . . .

It is hardly possible to conceive a more terrible position than that of Magellan during these weeks. Having been twice

From an old German allegorical print . . . . Magellan in his little ship, surrounded by

Culver Service

cruelly disappointed, first in the estuary of the Rio de la Plata, and a second time in the Gulf of San Matias, he could no longer conceal from himself that his faith in Schöner's globe and in the reports of the Portuguese navigators had been misplaced. He was faced by a terrible alternative: either this strait, this *paso,* this "*estrecho,*" did not exist, in which case he had himself been deceived and had deceived the Emperor; or else, although the strait did really exist, it was farther south, nearer the Antarctic, so that, in the best event, he could not hope to get through until the cold season was over. Winter had him in its grip. Even should he discover the passage, he could not, till spring came, avail himself of it, with his worn ships and his discontented crew. He had spent nine months on the

various mythological figures—including the fabled roc, which could fly off with an elephant.

voyage without reaching the Moluccas as he had prematurely pledged himself to do. Threatened by storm and winter, the fleet was wandering, none knew whither, fighting for life against the hurricanes.

The most reasonable course would be to disclose the truth. Let him call the captains together, inform them that the globe and the reports of the Portuguese pilots had led him astray, and that a search for the *estrecho* would have to be renewed next spring. Better, now, 'bout ship, evade the storms, sail northward along the coast of Brazil, where they would find a warm and friendly climate in which to spend the winter months, patch their battered craft, and rehabilitate the crew, returning south in spring.

That would have been the most obvious thing to do, as it would have been

the most humane. But Magellan had ventured so far that he was unwilling to turn back. Self-deceived, too long he had deceived others by declaring he knew an unexplored and shorter route to the Moluccas. Too roundly had he dealt with those who had expressed even the faintest doubt as to his omniscience: he had insulted the Spanish captains; he had deposed the King's highest officer in the fleet, and treated the man like a criminal. Nothing but a great, a decisive triumph could excuse his actions. Not for an hour, not for a minute, would the captains and the crews fail to rise against his command if he uttered the slightest hint (to say nothing of a frank admission) that he was no longer so sure as he had told King Charles. The youngest of the cabin boys would refuse to salute him. For Magellan there was no turning back. The instant he decided to 'bout ship and sail for Brazil, he would no longer be his officers' commander, but their prisoner.

He therefore made a desperate resolve. Even as Cortez, in that same year, burned his ships in order to deprive his men of the possibility of return, so did Magellan determine to keep ships and crews in a place so out-of-the-way that they would not be able to return even should they wish to do so. If, when spring came, he found the passage, he would have won the game. If he failed to find it, all was lost. Now that his original plan had miscarried, there was no middle course for him. Nothing but stubbornness could give him strength; nothing but boldness could save him. Once more, while keeping his own counsel, the incalculable calculator prepared for a decisive blow.

From day to day the weather grew wilder and more wintry. The ships could advance only with great difficulty. Two whole months had been spent in traveling no more than twelve parallels of latitude southward. Then on March 31, 1520, another indentation appeared. With a transient gleam of hope, the Admiral looked into it. Was it open? Could it be the long-desired *paso?* No, it was a closed bay. Still, Magellan entered. It was a sheltered place, and the water seemed well stocked with fish, so he gave orders to anchor. Then, to their astonishment and perhaps to their dismay, the captains and the crews learned that their commander (without consulting any of them) had decided to winter in this Port San Julian, this unknown and uninhabited bay on the nine-and-fortieth parallel, the gloomiest and remotest place they had yet struck, where no European had ever been before them, and where Europe seemed at an inaccessible distance. These were to be their winter quarters.

CHAPTER VI

COOPED up as they were here in Port San Julian, which, though well sheltered, was a gloomy place in which to spend the winter, it was inevitable that dissensions between commander and crew should become intensified. Matters grew worse than they had been on the open sea. Nothing can show more clearly Magellan's strength of character than that, in spite of the tension he knew to exist, he did not shrink from a measure which could not fail to foster dissatisfaction. He alone knew that the fleet, in the best event, could not reach the fruitful islands of which he was in search until many months had elapsed, and he therefore put his men on short commons. It was amazingly courageous—at the end of the earth, with hostile subordinates—to anger everyone on the first day by declaring that henceforward the allowance of bread and of wine must be considerably reduced. In actual fact this energetic step was what subsequently saved the fleet. But the crew, which had grown indifferent to an adventure they failed to understand, were by no means inclined to accept such restrictions. A sound instinct told the sorely tried sailors that even if their Admiral should acquire eternal fame through this voyage, at least three-fourths of themselves were destined to perish miserably from cold and hunger, from toil and hardship, and from the evil fortune of the sea. They had signed on, not to navigate the polar seas, but to reach the Moluccas.

Magellan entertained no doubts that a settlement must ensue, and speedily. The tension of reciprocal silence and mutual supervision between himself and the captains had been growing for weeks, during which, within the narrow limits of their ships, they had daily encountered one another with cold aloofness. Sooner or later this silence must lead to tumult and to violent deeds.

Right, however, was clearly on the side of the officers; for it was not idle curiosity but a plain discharge of their duty when they showed distrust of Magellan and anxiety about the fate of the fleet. Urgency was justified by the Admiral's

previous shifts. To their honor it must be said that the Spanish captains did not make a dastardly attack upon the Admiral. They gave plain warning before having recourse to violence. They had waited week after week for a council; and not until they found that Magellan, without consulting them, took a decisive step and issued orders to winter in Port San Julian, did they make up their minds to use strong measures in order to force an answer from one who maintained so stubborn a silence. They gave him a last hint that their patience was exhausted, a hint which Magellan could have understood had he wished to do so.

Hoping by a courteous gesture to assuage the captains' anger at his arbitrary orders, Magellan formally invited them to attend Mass with him on Easter Sunday, and then to join him at dinner on the flagship. The Spaniards, however, would not allow themselves to be fobbed off in this way. The hidalgo, Fernão de Magellanes, had, they considered, obtained his proud title of Knight of the Order of Santiago by fraud; they themselves were experienced navigators and high officials of the King of Spain, who had sailed with him for nine months without having once been invited to give their opinions as to the course of the fleet; so they declined his invitation to dinner. Indeed, they did not even decline, omitting this courtesy. Without troubling to explain that they were not coming to dinner, Juan de Cartagena, Gaspar Queseda, Luis de Mendoza and Antonio de Coca, the four captains appointed by King Charles, contemptuously ignored the invitation. Their places at his table remained vacant, their plates untouched. Magellan sat at board with, as only companion, his cousin Alvaro de Mesquita, whom Magellan had, on his own authority, made captain of the *San Antonio.* The dinner-party was a frost. By their deliberate and collective insult, his captains had warned him once more that they stood together, and that he was alone against them all.

MAGELLAN could not fail to understand the challenge, but nothing shook his iron nerve. Without showing anger or disappointment, he ate his dinner quietly with his kinsman, issued the customary orders on the flagship, and when night fell, lay down to sleep. Soon the lights were extinguished; in the shadows of the bay the five ships lay motionless like slumbering leviathans; so profound was the darkness of this long wintry night, when the heavy clouds hung low, that from the deck of one the outline of the others could scarcely be traced. A sullen darkness veiled all. There was nothing to be heard above the plashing of the waves; no one on watch was aware that at midnight a boat had set out from one of the ships to approach the *San Antonio* with muffled oars; no one could suspect that the three royal captains, Juan de Cartagena, Gaspar Queseda and Antonio de Coca, were in this boat, advancing to the attack.

The plan of the mutineers had been well thought out. They knew that nothing but overwhelming force would enable them to press so bold and resolute an adversary as Magellan to the wall. Very sagaciously had Charles V appointed the Spanish captains in large majority. When the fleet sailed, only one of the ships, the flagship, was under Portuguese command, the four others being under the control of Spaniards. The Emperor's arrangement had, however, been arbitrarily changed by Magellan, who had first degraded Juan de Cartagena, replacing him by Antonio de Coca on the *San Antonio,* and had then dismissed the latter for "untrustworthiness" and appointed Cousin Mesquita as captain in the latter's place. With these two large ships at his disposal, he was master of the fleet, all the more since Serrão, captain of the fifth ship, the *Santiago,* was one of his supporters. To the mutineers it seemed that there was only one way of depriving the Admiral of his advantage, only one way of reëstablishing the Emperor's will. They must regain control of the *San Antonio* by deposing the improperly appointed Alvaro de Mesquita.

This scheme was carried into effect with as much care as it had been planned. With a crew of thirty armed men, the boat drew alongside the sleeping *San Antonio.* All climbed on board by rope ladders, led by Juan de Cartagena and Antonio de Coca. Both of them having captained this ship, they knew where to find the commander's cabin. Before Mesquita could get out of bed, he was surrounded by men with drawn swords, who put him in irons and thrust him into the purser's cabin. By now some of the crew of the *San Antonio* were awake. One of them, Maestre Juan de Lorriaga, realizing that treachery was afoot, bluntly asked Queseda what business he was about. Queseda answered with six dagger-thrusts, and Lorriaga fell bleeding to

the deck. All the Portuguese on board were clapped in irons. Thus Magellan's supporters were put out of action.

Now, in order to win over the rest of the crew, Queseda had the storeroom opened, and allowed the men to supply themselves with ample rations of wine and bread. Except for the stabbing of Lorriaga, which made what had been intended to be a kidnaping into a bloody rebellion, everything went off according to plan. Juan de Cartagena, Gaspar Queseda and Antonio de Coca returned tranquilly to their ships and got them ready for any eventuality, leaving the *San Antonio* in command of a man whose name now turns up for the first time, Juan Sebastian del Cano. At this hour he was summoned to hinder the realization of Magellan's idea; but later, destiny chose him to complete Magellan's work.

THE gloomy dawn of these inhospitable regions at wintertide broke. The five ships were anchored in the icy prison of the bay. By no outward sign could Magellan be led to suspect that his faithful cousin and friend, with all the other Portuguese of the *San Antonio,* were in irons, and that a mutineer was in command. The usual flag waved at the masthead; there was nothing outwardly changed; and on the Admiral's ship the routine of the day began as usual. As on every other morning, Magellan sent a boat ashore from the *Trinidad* to fetch the daily supplies of wood and water for the various members of the fleet. As on every other morning, this boat called first on the *San Antonio* which always sent a couple of its crew ashore for the same purpose. It was strange, however, that when the boat drew near the *San Antonio,* no rope-ladder was lowered, nor did any of the seamen appear; and when the oarsmen angrily hailed the decks, telling the lazy lubbers to look alive, there came the amazing reply that on the *San Antonio* they no longer took orders from Magellan, but only from Captain Gaspar Queseda. So astounding was this answer, that the boat promptly returned to the flagship to report to the Admiral.

Magellan immediately reviewed the situation. The *San Antonio* was in the hands of mutineers. He had been overreached. But even so murderous a surprise could not quicken the pulse, make tremulous the hand, or cloud the thoughts of this unbending man. His first business was to survey the gravity of the peril. How many of the ships were on his side, and how many had gone over to the mutineers? He sent back the rowing boat to inspect. The *San Antonio,* the *Concepcion* and the *Victoria* all declared themselves for the rebels; only the inconsiderable *Santiago* was true to him. There were but two possibilities open in this disastrous position: One, the most reasonable course, which seemed the obvious one in view of the superior strength of his opponents, was to come to terms with the Spanish captains. The other alternative, heroic though absurd, was to attempt a decisive counter-thrust, try to defeat the mutineers.

It is necessary here to insist once more that in Magellan audacity, boldness, invariably assumed a peculiar complexion. To act boldly did not, in his case, mean to act on the heat of impulse, but to lay his plans craftily, to do the dangerous thing after the most careful calculation. It was by this mixture of imagination and caution that, again and again, he triumphed in moments of danger.

Magellan realized that he must do what his captains had done: he must seize one of their ships to get the upper hand once more. But their task had been comparatively easy. At dead of night, they had attacked an unsuspecting craft, a ship whose captain and crew were sleeping soundly. No one was armed for defense; not one of the seamen had a weapon to hand. Now it was daytime. Suspiciously, from the three ships of the mutineers, the captains kept watch on the flagship; cannon and arquebus were ready for use; the mutineers knew how likely he was to attempt a bold stroke.

They knew his courage, but they did not know his cunning. They never suspected that this swift calculator would venture a most improbable hazard, would in broad daylight with a mere handful of men try to recapture one of three heavily armed ships. It was by a brilliant ruse that he did not make this attempt upon the *San Antonio,* where his cousin Mesquita lay in irons. He knew well this was what his enemies would expect. For that very reason, he chose the *Victoria.*

Every detail of the *coup* was brilliantly thought out. His first step was to seize the *San Antonio's* boat which had brought a message from the mutineers. Thus he gained two things: should it come to blows, he had deprived the mutineers of a number of their fighters; secondly, he now had two rowboats in hand, and this apparently trifling advantage would soon prove decisive. Keeping his own boat in

reserve, he sent the captured boat in command of the thoroughly trustworthy master-at-arms, the *alguacil* of the fleet, Gonzalo Gomez de Espinosa, with five men, to the *Victoria,* carrying a letter to its commander, Luis de Mendoza.

The mutineers on board this well-armed ship had no suspicion when they saw the tiny boat approaching. What cause was there for uneasiness? How could six men attack a ship manned by sixty and commanded by so able a captain as Mendoza? They did not know that the men in the boat carried concealed weapons, nor the momentous instructions given to Gomez de Espinosa. In a leisurely way (feigned leisure, for he knew that every second was of the utmost importance), Espinosa climbed on board, and handed Captain Luis de Mendoza the Admiral's letter summoning him to the flagship. Mendoza read the message. He could not fail to recall how, on board the *Trinidad,* Juan de Cartagena had unexpectedly been arrested. No bait should lure Luis de Mendoza into a mouse-trap. *"No me pillarásallá,"* ("You won't catch me going there!") he said with a laugh. But this laugh ended with a hideous gurgle, for the *alguacil* stabbed him in the throat.

AT this critical instant, Magellan having calculated time and distance to perfection, fifteen heavily armed men climbed on board. They had arrived in the *Trinidad's* own boat, under command of Duarte Barbosa. The crew of the mutineers' ship stared at the corpse of their captain, who had been cut down by another of Magellan's men even as the *alguacil* stabbed him. The attack was too sudden for them to concert resistance. Duarte Barbosa was already issuing orders, which the intimidated mutineers hastened to obey. In a trice the anchor was weighed, the sails were hoisted; and before the mutineers' two other ships had grasped what had befallen with this thunder from a clear sky, the *Victoria,* as the Admiral's lawful prize, was steering to take up her position beside the flagship. Now the *Trinidad,* the *Victoria* and the *Santiago* faced the *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion,* guarding the mouth of the harbor to prevent attempts at desertion.

By this brilliant counterstroke the balance had been readjusted, the seemingly lost game had been won. The captains had been outmaneuvered, and for them there remained only three possibilities: to flee, to fight or to surrender.

As already explained, the Admiral had taken precautions against flight. Nor had the remaining mutineers any stomach for battle. Magellan's *coup* had undermined the courage of his opponents. In vain did Gaspar Queseda, armed with lance and shield, call upon his men. They were thoroughly cowed, and refused to obey. Magellan had merely to send a boat, for resistance to collapse, on both the *Concepcion* and upon the *San Antonio.* Within a few hours Alvaro de Mesquita was freed from his irons, and the surviving mutinous captains were given a turn of the same medicine.

The tension had been dispelled with the first flash, like that of a thunderstorm in summer. Perhaps this phase of open struggle had been the easier part; for now, in accordance with martial and maritime law, atonement must follow. There must have been a terrible conflict in Magellan's mind. The King had expressly endowed him with right of life and death; but the chief among the guilty enjoyed the special confidence of the Crown. To maintain his own authority, he must inflict severe punishment; and yet he could not punish all the mutineers. How would it be possible for him to continue the voyage if, as he was entitled to do, he made an example of one-fifth of his men?

Magellan resolved to have only one victim, and he chose the man who had used arms, Gaspar Queseda, who had stabbed Juan de Lorriaga the *maestre* on board the *San Antonio.* The proceedings against him were formally opened. The writers, the *escribeiros,* took their places; the witnesses were summoned; and with the same prolixity as if the trial had been held in Seville or in Saragossa, the clerks made notes. Mesquita, as chairman of the court, opened the case against Gaspar Queseda, former captain in the armada, for mutiny and attempted murder. Magellan passed sentence. Gaspar Queseda was condemned to death; and the only grace the Admiral would accord the

Spanish nobleman was that of being executed by the sword instead of being strangled.

But who was to act as executioner? It would be hard to induce any member of the crew to act voluntarily in this capacity. At length a man was found to consent, at a horrible price. Queseda's servant, Luis de Molino, had participated in the homicidal attack on Lorriaga (who did not die of his wounds until more than two months later). Now a pardon was offered to Molino if he would cut off Queseda's head. The alternative of being himself executed or of slaying his master may have been a cruel one; but in the end he declared himself willing. With one blow he struck off Queseda's head, and thus saved his own life. In accordance with the barbarous practice of the day, Queseda's body was quartered, as Mendoza's had already been, the quarters being spitted on poles. Thus for the first time were these dreadful customs of the places of public execution in Europe introduced into the antarctic regions.

There remained another sentence for Magellan to pass; and it is hard to say whether this was more clement or more cruel than death by the sword. Juan de Cartagena, the real leader of the mutiny, and a priest who tried to foment a second mutiny, were no less guilty than Queseda had been; but even Magellan's courage was not equal to having these two offenders put to death. He was unwilling to hand over to the executioner the man whom King Charles had appointed as *conjuncta persona,* or (being a pious Catholic) to shed the blood of an anointed priest. Nor did it seem to him feasible to carry the pair of them half round the world in chains. He decided, therefore, to maroon them. When the fleet set sail once more, they were left behind on the shore at Port San Julian, furnished with a supply of food and wine, it being left to God Almighty to decide whether they should die there.

WAS Magellan right or wrong to pass these sentences at Port San Julian? Was it fair, the trial of which Mesquita kept the minutes, and which allowed no scope for defense? What view are we to take of the subsequent utterances of the Spanish officers who got back to Seville, and who declared that Magellan paid the *alguacil* and certain members of his crew twelve ducats for their murderous onslaught on Mendoza, also promising to divide among them the possessions of the slaughtered noble? When these assertions were made, Magellan, being dead, could not contradict them. Immediately a contentious deed has been done, conflicting accounts of it are apt to be circulated; and when we find that historians incline to justify Magellan, we must not forget that the victor is almost invariably held to have been right.

Had Magellan failed to find the strait of which he was in search, had he failed to complete his exploits, he would have been bluntly accused of murder for putting out of the way a Spanish captain who raised objections to his dangerous adventure. Magellan, however, was endorsed by a success which conferred on him immortal fame, whereas those who died ingloriously have been forgotten; and the chroniclers, judging by accepted standards, approve his harshness and unyieldingness. Magellan's bloody sentence was to become a precedent for Francis Drake, the most brilliant of his successors. When, fifty-seven years later, this English hero, making the same dangerous voyage, was menaced in like manner by mutiny, he landed in this unlucky Port San Julian, and paid a sinister tribute to Magellan's martial activities by imitating them.

Drake was perfectly well informed as to what had happened during his predecessor's voyage, was familiar with the minutes of the former trial and with Magellan's pitiless dealings with the leading mutineers. It is probable that he found in Port San Julian the very block on which, two generations before, Queseda had been decapitated. Drake's rebellious captain was named Thomas Doughty, and like Cartagena, he had been put in irons during the voyage. Sentence was passed on him in this very same *porto negro* of San Julian, the same sentence—death. Drake gave his former friend the choice between dying honorably under the sword as Gaspar Queseda had done, or being marooned like Juan de Cartagena. Doughty, having also read the story of Magellan's voyage, knew that no trace of Cartagena or of the priest who was marooned with him had ever been discovered, and that presumably they had died a slow, painful death. He chose, therefore, like a brave man, to die by the sword; and once more a head rolled in the sand. Is it not the eternal doom of man that his most memorable deeds should so often be bloodstained; and those who are harshest are those who usually accomplish the greatest deeds?

CHAPTER VII

FOR four or five months Magellan's fleet was secluded by winter in the harbor of San Julian. Time moved on leaden feet in this solitude; and the Admiral, doubtless aware that nothing tends to make men dissatisfied and unruly so much as boredom, kept his crew hard at work. The ships, which had now been almost a year on the way, were thoroughly overhauled; fresh timber was cut; beams were made; perhaps he invented superfluous tasks if only to make his subordinates feel sure that the voyage would soon be resumed, and that, from these wintry wastes, they would make their way to the Fortunate Isles.

At length there came the first sign of spring. Throughout these frosty and fog-ridden weeks the men had come to the conclusion that they had reached a No-Man's-Land, a place utterly deserted by man and beast; and their dread at a sojourn in a primeval den remote from humankind may have increased their gloom. One morning, however, there appeared on a neighboring hill a strange figure, that of a man whom at first they hardly recognized as one of their own kind, for in their alarm and surprise he appeared to them at least twice the ordinary human stature. The statement is confirmed by Pigafetta, in the following words: "So tall was he, that we reached only to his waist-belt. He was well enough made, and had a broad face, which was painted red, with yellow circles round his eyes, and two heart-shaped spots on the cheeks. His hair was short and colored white, and he was dressed in the skins of an animal cleverly stitched together."

ESPECIALLY astonished were the Spaniards by the gigantic feet of the huge man; because of this "big-foot" *(patagão)* the natives were called Patagonians, and the country Patagonia. But the first alarm at the son of Anak was soon dispelled. The enormous man clad in skins stretched out his arms with a grin, danced and sang, and busily sprinkled sand upon his white hair. Magellan, being well acquainted with the ways of savages, took these as signs of a desire to be friendly, and told one of the sailors to dance in like manner, and to scatter sand upon his head. To the delight of the worn and weary mariners, the wild man accepted this pantomime as a sign of welcome, and drew near. After the "Tempest," the *Trinculos* had at length found their *Caliban*—some one who could provide them with diversion in the wilderness. For when they unexpectedly held a metallic mirror in front of the good-natured giant's nose, he jumped with the surprise of seeing his own countenance for the first time—jumped violently backward, and tumbled down, dragging four of the sailors with him.

His huge appetite made them forget the smallness of their own rations. They stared as he swallowed a bucket of water at a draft, and stuffed half a hamper of ship's biscuit into his mouth as he might have stuffed one or two gingerbread nuts. What a shout did they give when, to the horror of the bystanders, on being presented with a couple of rats, he devoured them alive, skin and hair included! But the savage and the crew were inspired with mutual sympathy; and when Magellan bestowed a few little bells on the visitor, he hastened off to fetch some other "giants," as well as one or two giantesses.

THIS nonchalance was to prove disastrous to the children of nature. Like Columbus and the other *conquistadores*, Magellan had received strict orders from the Casa de Contratacion to collect specimens, not only of plants and ores, but also of all new varieties of man whom he might encounter on the journey, and bring back some of them to Spain. To the sailors, it seemed that the attempt to catch one of these giants alive would be as dangerous as tackling a whale with their bare hands. Anxiously they crept close to the Patagãos, but again and again, at the last moment, their courage failed them. At length a mean trick occurred to them. Magellan loaded the natives with presents, so that their hands were full; then he offered them a pair of irons; and as they were unable to take them, showed how they could be fitted upon the legs. A couple of strokes of the hammer riveted the bolts, and the two unlucky savages were prisoners before they realized their position. They were pleased, at first, with these beautiful rings round their ankles, which made merry music. But now it was easy to sandbag them, since fettered they were no longer dangerous. Vainly did they howl and thrash with their arms, calling Setebos, their Great Spirit, to their aid. (Shakespeare borrowed this name from the Patagonians.) The Emperor wanted

them as curios, so like pole-axed oxen they were borne on board the ships, where they perished miserably from lack of proper food.

By this perfidious behavior on the part of the representatives of civilization, good understanding with the savages was destroyed. The Patagonians kept aloof from the deceivers, and when a troop of Spaniards pursued them on one occasion (Pigafetta's report lacks clearness about this matter) to catch or to visit some of the Patagonian women, the white men were forcibly repulsed, and one of the sailors paid for the attempt with his life.

NEITHER to the indigenes nor to the Spaniards did this unhappy Port San Julian bring aught but disaster. Magellan had no luck here. The blood-stained strand was fraught with doom. "Let us get away!" was the cry of the crew. "On with the voyage, on with the voyage!" was Magellan's supreme desire. The impatience of both parties increased as the days grew longer.

As soon as the worst storms of winter were over, Magellan made a move. He sent the handiest of his ships, the little *Santiago,* under the captainship of Serrão, to sail southward along the coast on an exploring voyage, even as Noah sent the dove from the Ark. Serrão was to come back and report after a specified number of days. He overstayed his time, and Magellan impatiently watched the sea. The first tidings, however, came from the land. Two strange, tottering figures were seen on one of the hills. Believing them to be Patagonians, the sailors made ready their crossbows. But the naked men, half frozen, almost starved, exhausted and spectral, shouted words in Spanish. They were two of the crew of the *Santiago* and brought evil tidings. Serrão had got as far as a river which he named the Rio de Santa Cruz. It was conveniently situated, and there were abundant supplies of fish; but when he was about to continue his reconnaissance, a squall from the east drove the ship ashore. Only one life was lost, that of the captain's negro slave. The rest, thirty-seven in all, got safely to land. They were waiting at the mouth of the Rio de Santa Cruz in the extremest need, while the two speakers had made their way along the coast to Port San Julian. Chosen for the task as the strongest of the party, they had just managed to keep themselves alive by devouring roots and grass.

Magellan promptly sent a boat to the rescue. The shipwrecked men were brought back. They were saved; but their ship, the most mobile in the fleet, had been utterly destroyed. She was a total loss, and like every loss in this uttermost part of the world, she was irreplaceable. When, on August 24, 1520, Magellan gave orders to weigh anchor and leave this unlucky Port San Julian, giving a last glance to the two poor wretches he had marooned, in his secret soul he perhaps cursed the day and the hour when he had landed here. One of his ships was lost; two of his captains had been killed; a whole year had passed since the beginning of a voyage in which nothing had been gained, nothing discovered, nothing accomplished.

All the more splendid would be the reaction when it came, for bliss is more glorious when we rise from the depths of despair....

Even now they were baffled for two days by head-winds, and every inch had to be conquered. At length the wind shifted to the north, and they made good progress. But the land off which they coasted did not cheer their hearts with a brave show of green; for sand and rocks such as had depressed them all the winter, stretched inhospitably before their eyes. Sand and rocks, rocks and sand. But on October 21, 1520, they sighted a cape with white cliffs rising above a strangely indented shore. In honor of the day, St. Ursula's, Magellan christened it Cabo de las Virgenes. On the farther side of it they entered a deep bay with black waters. The fleet sailed into this bay.

STRANGE, harsh and tremendous was the prospect. There were steep hills, uneasy-looking and fissured. Far in the distance were snow-clad peaks, such as they had not seen since their last winter in Europe.

How dead was the entire landscape! No sign of human life, no vegetation; naught but the howling and roaring of the wind disturbed the silence of this ghostly spot. The men looked dubiously at the dark waters. To all of them it seemed absurd that this landlocked bay, encircled by mountains, its waters black as Hades, could be supposed to lead to a flat shore or to the "Mar del Sur"—the bright, the sunny southern seas. Unanimously the pilots declared that this deep indentation in the land could be nothing but a fiord, like those found on the coast of Norway. It would be waste of time

and energy to explore it, or to take soundings. Too many days and weeks had already been spent in making reconnaissances along the Patagonian coast, to find that none of the bays led into the expected strait. Let there be no more hesitation! Let the chief give orders to sail on along the coast, and then, if the *estrecho* did not soon disclose itself, return home while the weather was still warm; or if he did not do that, let him make for the Cape of Good Hope and round it into the Indian Ocean.

But Magellan, obsessed by his idea of a hidden strait, insisted upon thoroughly exploring this remarkable bay. Reluctantly his companions heard the order, "for"—wrote Pigafetta—"we all believed that it was a blind alley." The flagship and the *Victoria* stayed behind, anchoring on the southern side of the inlet. The *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion* were instructed to sail as far westward as they could, but to return and report in five days at the utmost. Time was precious, for supplies were running short. Magellan could no longer allow a fortnight for exploration, as he had in the estuary of the Rio de la Plata. Five days was the utmost he could spare for this last adventure.

The dramatic moment had come. Magellan intended the *Trinidad* and the *Victoria* to cruise round the outer part of the bay until the *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion* returned from their exploratory voyage. Once more, however, nature showed herself adverse to the revealing of her last secret. The wind freshened to a gale, and then to one of the hurricanes which are common in this part of the world, of which the Spanish maps of the times warningly assure us *"no hay buenos estaciones"*—there are no good seasons here. In a trice the waters of the bay were lashed by the storm, the ships dragged their anchors, had to weigh them, and to make sail for the open, lucky not to be dashed on the rocks.

For a day, and then for another, they were in great peril. But it was not the risk to these two ships which disturbed Magellan, who continued to weather the storm as best he could in the mouth of the bay. It was the *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion* about which he felt grave anxiety. The hurricane must have overtaken them in the narrows, where they would have no room to tack, no possibility of anchoring or of seeking shelter. Save for a miracle, they must be driven ashore and dashed to pieces.

Intense must have been the leader's disquietude, his impatience, during these days and hours when he was awaiting the decision of fate. One day passed, and there was no sign. Another day, and the explorers had not returned. Then came a third and a fourth day of waiting. Magellan knew that if these two craft had been lost, all was lost. He could not venture to continue his voyage to the west with no more than two ships. His achievement, his dream, would have been wrecked as well as they.

At length the look-out man at the masthead hailed the deck. Alas, it was not the returning members of the fleet which he had espied, but merely a pillar of smoke in the distance. What a terrible moment! A smoke-signal could only mean shipwrecked men calling for aid. The *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion*, his best ships, must have foundered, and with them his whole enterprise, in this nameless bay. Magellan gave orders to lower the boats, row toward the point from which the signal came, and save what lives could still be saved.

BUT now came the turn in Magellan's fortunes.

It was like the glorious moment in "Tristan and Isolde" when the dying, the plaintive, the despairing death-melody of the shepherd's flute is transformed as it swells into a pæan of happiness. A sail! A *sail!* A ship! A *ship!* God be praised, one ship is saved. No, both ships, both, the *San Antonio* and the *Concepcion* are coming back, safe and sound. Hardly have Magellan and his companions caught sight of them, when on the port bow, they see flashes, one, two, three, followed by the thunderous notes of large bombards, reëchoed from the hills. What has happened? Why are his subordinates, who have been strictly instructed to avoid wasting powder, firing one salvo after another? Why, thinks Magellan, who can hardly believe his eyes, are the returning craft dressed with flags? Why are the captains and the crews waving and shouting? What are they trying to say? Still too far away to hear the words or understand the signs; but those who have so anxiously been awaiting the return of the expedition are confident—Magellan most of all—that the language is that of triumph.

The concluding chapters of this "most splendid Odyssey in the history of mankind" will appear in our next issue.

"Have you need of anything, Sergeant?"

Warriors

"Dust of Dead Souls," ninth in this unique series, vividly pictures the tragic adventure of the Foreign Legion in the Franco-Prussian War.

WHEN news of the *Hindenburg* disaster broke, I was in Algiers. . . . Europe and Africa being tremendously air-minded, that calamitous news made a real impact. People talked about nothing else. My chauffeur talked about it, as he ran his rickety taxicab up the steep hill above the cemeteries, to the glorious church of Notre Dame d'Afrique on top of the headland. Two white-clad monks out on the church steps were evidently discussing it, too, with a little old gnarled, white-haired man who waved a newspaper in one hand and in the other held a stick, as a man holds a sword.

As my driver pulled up beneath the trees at the side, he jerked a thumb at the old bent figure.

"*Regardez!* A veteran of the Franco-Prussian war, m'sieu; the Colonel Wiart. He's getting on to ninety, they say, and spry as an Arab boy!"

Not quite, perhaps; those little brown animals have the very devil in them. Old Wiart went into the church. Some kind of service was going on, and I followed him. The Black Virgin above the altar was lighted up, which seldom happens, and I studied her with some interest. This was a place of pilgrimage for all Algeria, and the walls were covered with votive objects of all sorts, from ship models to plaster casts and crutches. Among them were not a few medals. One, set high up, appeared to be a cross of the Legion of Honor, set behind glass.

I was looking up at this when Wiart came out. As he passed, he followed my glance, and I saw him smile and nod.

"Pardon me," I ventured, "but you seem to recognize that cross. Of the Legion, I think?"

We had a few words; he spoke English perfectly, and seemed pleased by my request. We walked over beneath the trees and sat down at the verge of the great drop. Off to the left, the seminary, the villas and buildings running westward; below, the cemeteries; to the right, all Algiers dropping down its sweeping hillsides to the sickle-curve of the bay—and beyond all, the Mediterranean. A lovely spot, white with sun and green with the soft verdure of Africa, and vivid blue with sea and sky.

"Dust!" old Wiart snorted. "These scientists say that the blue of the sky comes from dust. Then it is the dust of men long dead."

"That's an idea, anyhow," I said. "A charming conception."

in Exile

By
H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

"These poor people who died with the *Hindenburg* airship—they are up yonder." And he pointed with his stick. "They are the blue we see; the dust of souls. Conception? Not at all. It is fact. You asked me about the cross of the Legion, inside there. I'll be glad to tell you the story. It is about a sergeant in the Foreign Legion, and what happened on the 15th of January, 1871."

What all this had to do with the cross and its ribbon up there in the church wall, I did not see. The old fellow had a way with him, however. He mentioned Sergeant Wiart of the Legion, and this puzzled me; an old veteran, thirty years with the Foreign Legion—his father, I reflected. This man, approaching ninety, could not have been much more than a lad of twenty, back in 1871.

"You know," he went on, accepting a cigarette and brushing back his white mustache as he held it to my lighter, "Bourbaki was the great hero, in those dark days. He had begun his career with the Legion in Africa; he was the finest soldier in all France; he had even refused a throne. Well, Bourbaki commanded the Army of the East; he was the hope of all France, when 1871 began. He had already beaten the Prussians once. Now he had one hundred and fifty thousand men and was advancing to relieve the siege of Belfort. Do you know why he lost his entire army and emptied a pistol into his own head?"

I shrugged; who knew, or cared, about those days of 1871? The old man caught my gesture, and sighed. Then he took a pencil and pad of scratch-paper from his pocket, and made a sketch. He dashed down a face, a ragged uniform, a man—an entire personality. The result was one of those astonishing trifles which say more than words can convey. . . .

A grizzled, unshaven man of iron, this sergeant of the Foreign Legion, wearing odd bits of various uniforms—anything to keep out the wintry blasts. The vivid intelligence of his face was held in check by his inbred habit of discipline, of respect for his superiors; if you ordered Sergeant Wiart to march and die, he might know you for a blithering idiot, but he would march to death in silence.

Wiart saluted. "Support—for the Legion."

During the horrible march to capture the heights above Sainte Suzanne, this sergeant knew better than anyone else what it was all about. The Legion had been almost wiped out in previous fighting; now the gaps were filled by two thousand young Bretons. This entire

army was composed of recruits, backed by a steely nucleus of a few old regiments.

The Foreign Legion was given one day in which to capture those heights. It was a mere detail of the marvelous plan Bourbaki had evolved to crumple the whole Prussian invasion; a plan so perfect that, despite all defects and failures, nothing could stop it. Bourbaki had spotted the one vulnerable point. General Cremer was to be hurled forward like a spearhead, all opposition rolled away—and the Prussian disaster would be inevitable.

AS the Legion found, the plan was evolved from maps. The army had no intelligence service. Sergeant Wiart snorted through his mustaches that the Legion had to do what an entire division could not do—and it was literally true. But the Legion did it.

All that day, the Legion struggled ahead. Prussian batteries played upon them. Prussian troops occupied every height of land. Bridges no longer existed. The weather was bitter cold. There was no food; all service of supply had failed. The wintry air, throughout the whole Lisaine country, was hammering with artillery, spiteful with rifle-fire, clouded with the reek of powder.

Sergeant Wiart prompted the green officers, cheered up the men, scoffed at hunger and bloody feet. To him the colonel turned for some knowledge of what lay ahead. With admirable precision, Wiart sent on the advance scouts, sent back the word they bore, watched the Legion struggle grimly forward.

With afternoon, the plateau was dead ahead—the heights dark with Prussian battalions. They had reached the objective; they had only to take it. The harassed colonel and adjutant summoned Sergeant Wiart, who saluted stiffly.

"There is no reserve ammunition, sergeant. How is the supply?"

"Practically exhausted, my colonel."

"Have you heard anything of supporting troops coming up?"

"There are none."

"It is incredible!" muttered the colonel, his worried gaze searching the valley behind. "Already we have lost—how many, adjutant?"

"A few over five hundred, my colonel," said the adjutant, and grimaced.

"Very well. The Legion has been ordered to take those heights and hold them. The quicker we do it, the better."

The bugles shrilled. The orders rattled along the lines. Wiart had caught up a rifle, and fixed bayonet as the click of steel lifted on the wintry sunlight. Smoke rimmed the snowy heights ahead. Sergeant Wiart surveyed his weapon approvingly. Old model bayonet, new model rifle; the "fusil, 1866 model"—the famous chassepot.

Jests broke out. Wiart's voice crackled into the chorus, dominating the others with its rasping, blasphemous profanity until the Legion howled with joy, all except the dark Breton recruits, who were religious fellows. There was nothing pious about the Legion in general, or about Sergeant Wiart in particular. He was noted for his hatred of anything clerical. He was as savagely blasphemous as his wife, in Algeria, was devout.

Oddly enough, the thing he most revered in life, aside from his wife and son, was the Cross of the Legion of Honor. He had won it years ago, and was wont to mourn over his wine-cup that the first Napoleon had not chosen another emblem than the Cross. . . .

A sudden order rattled. A wild yell burst forth; then Wiart was up and going with his company.

Fire rippled along the heights. Balls screamed and sang viciously, or thudded home. Grape shrieked and whistled; the cannon ahead were blasting away. Men stumbled, slipped in the snow; the charge left a bloody wake, yet, with never an answering shot, the figures wavered on and upward.

The heights came closer. The Prussian faces, bearded and staring, appeared through clinging smoke. Breastworks, by God! And then, suddenly, it was hand-to-hand work.

The sergeant was up and over. Wily old veteran that he was, he fought carefully and coolly, plunging the point home, warding threatening steel away. The guns were taken, the positions carried; the Prussians broke. The ferocity of the Legion swept everything before it, until the entire plateau was captured.

Now it had to be held.

THE colonel paused beside Wiart, who was calmly bandaging a ragged gash across his upper left arm.

"So you caught it, eh?"

"A mere scrape of the bark, my colonel."

"You're able to travel. Go back to headquarters; give this note to General Barolle, chief of staff, and augment it by

Within a quarter-mile of the hill, he drew rein. His errand had come too late.

word of mouth. We must have cartridges, food and supports. Meantime, we shall hold the plateau as ordered. Now, sergeant, lift the lid off hell if you like—but reach headquarters!"

Sergeant Wiart saluted, caught up his ragged coat, and started.

A dead Prussian provided a sound pair of boots, and emergency rations. A mile farther back, kindly fortune provided transport. A gallant and portly Bayonne wine-merchant, who had squeezed himself into captain's rank and cavalry uniform, was frantically trying to find his

regiment, when the ragged figure of Wiart came upon him, with revolver leveled. The major dismounted, cursing hotly, and Sergeant Wiart swung up into the saddle with a grin.

"Curses don't hurt a Legionnaire, old sowbelly," he retorted.

"I'll have you shot for this, you scoundrel!"

"You'll find me at headquarters," said Wiart, and rode away.

Now he began to meet stragglers, officers, a torrent of marching men and transport. To anyone else, it would have been an involved and confused mess; to Sergeant Wiart, the news he picked up began to make the whole campaign look simple. Suddenly a shout halted him. He turned, to see a young staff officer, a captain, riding toward him. His scarred, brown features broke into joy. His gray mustaches quivered. Stirrup to stirrup, the two men embraced warmly, with open emotion.

IT was the first time Sergeant Wiart had seen or heard of his son, since leaving home.

"Ah! You're a fine fellow—and a captain!" Tears glittered on his unshaven cheeks. "Magnificent! On the staff, eh? What staff?"

"Headquarters, my father. I'm one of Barolle's aides."

"Good! We ride together," and Wiart explained his mission. Voluble speech flowed from them both; joy at their reunion, wonder at the chance of it. The old sergeant called it luck; the young captain called it providence. He did not share his father's atheism.

As they rode, their speech was torrential. Neither had heard from Algeria in weeks; with France prostrate and struggling vainly, everything seemed in chaos. Everything, except here. Under his son's explanations, old Wiart understood the strategy of Bourbaki, and approved it. Simple enough; roll back the Prussians to right and left, let General Cremer smash through with his army corps to Belfort, and the war was over.

"But it's not so simple," said Captain Wiart, a worried look on his young face. "The chief of staff, Barolle, is a wonder. But General Bourbaki has a favorite aide, one Colonel Perrot, who has practically superseded Barolle; he's a flashy fool."

"Bah! Old Bourbaki knows his business," growled the sergeant confidently. "I knew him thirty years ago when he came to the Legion as a shavetail. He's all right."

It was dark when they rode into the village that housed headquarters. The captain procured food and wine for them both, reported, and took in the sergeant's note. Old Wiart noted with some astonishment that there was no particular tension here; couriers and aides were dashing about, but the general air was one of complacent assurance.

"Bourbaki knows how to run a battle!" he muttered. "Calm efficiency—that's the ticket!"

Barolle appeared, a tall, thin man with the absolute precision which marks the born chief of staff. With a dozen words he appraised and ticketed Sergeant Wiart.

"No food, no ammunition, no supports—this must be remedied. God knows where the various corps are. Make yourself comfortable, until I see the general."

The sergeant followed into a large room, blue with tobacco-smoke, littered with tables, maps, officers hard at work. Barolle vanished. Sergeant Wiart took a chair and relaxed gratefully.

"Poor Barolle!" remarked somebody. "They've raised hell with all his dispositions—"

The voice hushed abruptly. From an adjoining room came a laughing, jovial colonel, his face flushed, his eyes bright with wine.

"Captain Marcel! Send a telegram to General Belancourt at Verlans, instantly! At ten in the morning, he is to advance on the Mont Vaudois heights with every available man; instruct him that his job is to divert the enemy's attention from the main attack against Hericourt."

A dead silence fell. It was broken by the officer addressed, who spoke in dismay.

"But, my colonel, we do not know that Belancourt has yet reached Verlans! In fact, we received a report that the Prussians are there in force and have mined the bridges—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Colonel Perrot. "Belancourt was ordered to capture Verlans before six tonight; it has been done. Officers of France never fail. We've just had word that the Legion has taken the Sainte Suzanne plateau, as ordered. You see?"

With a twirl of his mustache, he turned and disappeared. Sergeant Wiart saw the flash of horror in the faces around.

"Colonel Perrot is always right," some one muttered. "He counts the kilometers on a road—good! It should be

"It will not be a battle but a massacre, my son."

marched in an hour. He does not stop to ask if the Prussians hold it, or if it is still a road."

"Anyhow," said another, "we know that the great thing is accomplished: General Cremer has gone forward, the Prussians are pierced, the way's open to him!"

"And there's hell to pay everywhere else," retorted the first officer.

Sergeant Wiart got out his pipe and lighted it, to choke down the spasm of emotion that gripped him. To his wise, cynical old eyes, the curtain had rolled back, revealing terrible things. A chief of staff superseded by an aide—that was bad enough. Worse, a telegram sent to Verlans on the assumption that a French general was there, because he had been ordered to be there! A telegram, not in code, revealing the whole strategy of the morrow's battle! If that telegram reached a Prussian general*—well, Sergeant Wiart went cold at the very thought. He looked about for some sight of his son, but the young staff captain was nowhere to be seen.

Colonel Perrot reappeared and summoned an aide.

"Make out a formal order, which the General will sign. Order Colonel Chauvez to march at once with the 115th Infantry and the 23rd Zouaves, to support the Legion at Sainte Suzanne. When it's ready, Captain Wiart will take it."

The aide saluted, and hesitated. "It is not known yet," he blurted desperately, "if Colonel Chauvez and the reserve corps has reached the river—"

"Certainly he has reached it; he was to have been there by four this afternoon," said Perrot brusquely. "Here's an order for the quartermaster-general. Have food and ammunition sent the Legion at once, by a forced night march."

Perrot disappeared. Sergeant Wiart again saw the officers look one at another, and from somewhere came a low, bitter comment:

"A fat chance the Legion has! Every corps living on its knapsack, and not a wagon of food to be found within twenty miles! And who knows where the ammunition is?"

Sergeant Wiart shivered with a chill that swept through his very soul—though he had always denied having a soul. A courier came stumbling in, and presently another; he could guess that they bore bad news. Telegrams were arriving. A funereal aspect settled on the big room, an air of consternation and dismay.

Suddenly it changed, all in a moment. The muttering talk ceased. General Barolle appeared, and his presence transformed the whole place; the man's energy, his strength of character, was like a tonic.

"Sergeant! General Bourbaki wishes to speak with you."

OLD Wiart went into the adjoining room and stood at attention. More than anything in the world, just now, he wanted to see his son again; but orders were orders. A table was littered with maps and reports; orderlies at work with Captain Perrot; other officers all about. At the table was Bourbaki himself, with three other general officers.

"Ah! A sergeant of the Legion, and looks it!" exclaimed Bourbaki. He was swarthily handsome, for his father had been a Greek officer. "Here's a glass of wine for you. What's your name? Haven't I seen you somewhere before now?"

"Thirty years ago, *mon général*." Wiart downed the wine, put the glass on the table, and stood at attention again. He gave his name, pronouncing it in the German fashion.

*As it did.—*Editor.*

"I seem to remember you," Bourbaki said, frowning. "Thirty years ago? Where?"

"When the General joined us as a lieutenant at Algiers. He got into trouble about that Arab girl—"

Bourbaki broke into a roar of laughter, in which the others joined.

"So, I remember you now! Well, well, make yourself comfortable at that corner table, help yourself to food and wine; no ceremony, old campaigner! Rest a bit, eat, then return to your leather-bellies and congratulate them. The Legion has reached its objective, if no other corps has!"

"No other corps has!" Those words sent a jolt through Sergeant Wiart, but he settled himself at a corner table and began to eat and drink. An aide came in with a message. Bourbaki read it and uttered a delighted exclamation.

"Messieurs, all goes well! Cremer has driven the enemy from Chenebier. The Lure road is open before him. He has only forty kilometers to march, and France is saved!"

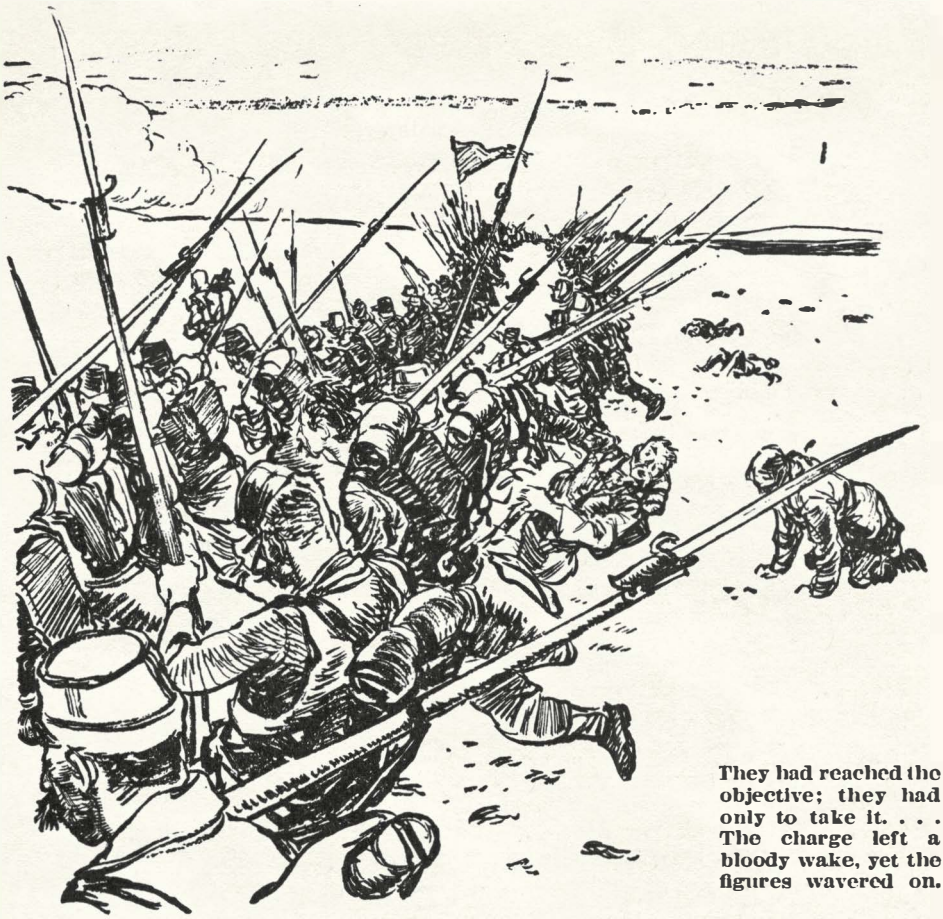
There was an outburst of voluble, joyous voices. Only one among them all uttered a hesitant word of disagreement.

"Forty kilometers? But, Bourbaki, that is a march!"

"Bah! Five years ago in Mexico, the Legion marched thirty leagues in a day. And Cremer can certainly throw his corps forward a mere forty kilometers, when the fate of France hangs in the balance! He must do so. He shall!"

Sergeant Wiart was actually stupefied by the fact that Bourbaki spoke in earnest. True, the Legion had marched something like a hundred and fifty miles in thirty-two hours; but not through ravened country, with every road mined, every bridge blown up. When Bourbaki rushed off half a dozen telegrams and couriers, the sergeant noted the messages, then wiped his gray mustache and fumbled for his pipe; his appetite was gone.

"The devil!" he told himself in dismay. "Army corps scattered everywhere. No information about the enemy. A general attack to roll back the Prussian armies, cut their rear, cripple them—and not a third of the job accomplished! And the old man gives an aide full charge of operations while the chief of staff is a mere messenger-boy. Well, if Cremer goes through, we still win the day, for nothing can save the Prussians then. If



They had reached the objective; they had only to take it. . . . The charge left a bloody wake, yet the figures wavered on.

he doesn't go through, the Army of the East will be wiped out like a burst of smoke."

With his thirty years' experience, he saw this in one flash—not of intuition, but of shrewd intelligence. He knew his business. At least, he had definite news that was good. Cremer had smashed through the Prussians and had a clear road before him. He tucked away his pipe and rose. Bourbaki caught sight of him.

"Leaving, Sergeant? Have you need of anything?"

Wiart saluted. "Food. Ammunition. Supports. For the Legion."

"There's a soldier for you, gentlemen!" And Bourbaki chuckled. "Well, my friend, I've sent food, ammunition and supports. You'll probably join them *en route* back, for Chauvez and the reserves are down at the river, ahead. Perrot! Write out a pass for my friend the sergeant of the Regiment Étranger."

Colonel Perrot scribbled the pass.

AS Sergeant Wiart took it, the door suddenly burst open. Into the room hurtled an aide, pale, eyes staring. He struck against old Wiart, knocking him aside, and thrust the telegram in his hand at the General. He tried to speak, and could not.

Bourbaki seized the message. As he read it, his eyes distended.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" he gasped. "Manteuffel and his army of sixty-five thousand Prussians are advancing on Cremer's flank—an army supposed to be sixty miles away!"

The blood died out of his face; he was suddenly an old man, tragic, broken, hesitant, his fire exterminated. It was a frightful moment. Every man present knew what it meant; but only one man, of them all, knew what was to be done. Sergeant Wiart. The mad words rose in him—"Tell Cremer to hammer through!" They were on the very lips; and he might, in his momentary madness, have uttered them, had not General Barolle at this moment come into the room and saved him from the breach of discipline.

"Barolle!" The General swung around. "You know? You have heard? It is not true?"

"Apparently it is true," said Barolle calmly. "You have not asked my advice. Pardon me for presuming; it is to tell Cremer to advance more quickly."

Sergeant Wiart could have hugged the man, general or not, for those words.

"My God! It's impossible. We haven't any force at hand to meet Manteuffel—except Cremer's army," broke out Bourbaki, purple veins rising in his forehead. "He must halt, retire, and stop the gap. Once Manteuffel breaks through, our whole army is lost!"

"But my general!" said Barolle coldly. "If Cremer goes forward, if the army of Manteuffel does not strike his flank—then every Prussian in France is lost!"

"If! *If!*" cried out Bourbaki in a tragic voice. "Who could take such a chance? This is the one army remaining, the hope of all France— No, no! Send the order to Cremer at once, instantly!"

Barolle saluted and retired.

Sergeant Wiart went stumbling out of the room, out of headquarters, out to where he had left his borrowed horse. His pass took him through the sentries. He mounted, kicked in his heels, and sent his horse scrambling away.

He perceived, quite clearly, the truth of this whole business. The chances were ten to one that Cremer and his army would have gone through without sighting a Prussian—but the General dared not take that chance.

"And now, what happens?" reflected Wiart, as he rode under the cold stars. The crepitation of distant artillery fire crept down from far snowy hills. "What happens? Only one thing can happen. Cremer halts, checks the veterans of Manteuffel with his young recruits, and perishes. Meantime, the other Prussian armies are rolling in from all sides. The Army of the East is destroyed, its retreat is cut off, it ceases to exist. One of the great tragedies of history is happening around us."

The night was bitter cold, and growing colder, but not nearly so cold as the heart of Sergeant Wiart, when he thought of the Legion awaiting him, up yonder on the heights. Not even his explosive roll of oaths could give any comfort. And by midnight the stars were hidden behind clouds, with a threat of snow.

THE heights of Sainte Suzanne were only a couple of miles farther, when Sergeant Wiart overtook two wagons plodding along, with a little column of men. An Arabic oath crackled out; he responded with incredulous delight. Tirailleurs! Next moment a horse reined in beside him, and he was clasping the hand of his eager son.

"Your mother prates about miracles," he said dryly. "Is this one?"

Captain Wiart laughed, and let the little convoy draw ahead lest they overhear him.

"Something of the sort, my father. I was ordered to take food, ammunition and supports to your corps. Well, I have bad news for you. There are no reserves, it seems. There is no food or ammunition. They have not come up with the army, and the Prussians have cut off the rear. I picked up a wagon of rations, another of ammunition, and a hundred tirailleurs under a lieutenant, who was lost; he consented to obey me and here we are."

"Excellent," said the Sergeant coolly.

WITH an access of emotion, his son caught him by the arm.

"My God! Don't you realize what it means?"

"I realized that long ago. They've recalled Cremer to meet a fresh army of Prussians. If he'd gone on, their whole rear would have been cut. As it is, he's turned back. Their armies are around us. We have only one possible retreat—across the Swiss frontier, to be interned. That is to say, if we can reach the frontier. Tomorrow, my son, all the upper air will be filled with the spirits of dead Frenchmen who have rejoined their Creator."

"What!" exclaimed the other. "You have not suddenly become religious?"

"Not likely," and Sergeant Wiart sniffed. "But I believe that when a man dies, what we call his spirit rejoins the Vital Force of nature, which you call God. It is quite simple, and satisfies me. Now, never mind theology. I'll take these wagons on, and you get back to headquarters in a hurry."

"No. I go with you," said Captain Wiart.

The old sergeant flew into a furious cursing rage. He had no idea that the Legion would or could retreat. In any case, a few more hours would see the army a chaotic rabble striving desperately to reach the frontier, Prussian rifles and Uhlans and artillery hailing death into them from three sides; the headquarters staff would certainly be safe, and the Legion would as certainly be in the thickest of the hell. He said nothing of this, naturally.

"I stay with you," calmly repeated his son. "It's the first time we've met; and we can stay together now. Later,

tomorrow, I can find my way back to headquarters—if there is one. Anyway, Colonel Perrot told me to inspect the conditions here and bring back a report later. That will cover my—"

"As your father, I tell you to clear out!" stormed the sergeant angrily. "It's no place for you. There'll be no report. We're retreating at once, you fool!"

"I thought you said the Legion would not retreat? You certainly said so, when we first met and were talking."

"It's none of your damned business what I said," furiously exclaimed old Wiart. "Get out! I order you—"

"I refuse. I'm your superior, an officer, and an aide of the General. March!" The younger man chuckled, then sobered. "Pardon, *mon père;* stop swearing and move on, will you? So far as I'm concerned, the argument's ended. Let's catch up with the wagons."

He urged his horse on, and the sergeant followed. . . .

When they rode into the camp on the heights, Sergeant Wiart went straight to the colonel, who wakened to receive his report. Here was one man to whom he could speak his heart. The colonel was an old-timer. They were friends. In the blackness and chill, rank could be brushed aside.

SERGEANT WIART crouched beside the silent figure under the shelter, and told of everything he had seen and heard and feared. The colonel said nothing at all until he had finished. Then:

"You old fool, I hoped you'd stay gone!"

"Thirty years in the Legion, *mon colonel.*"

"I might have known it. Instead, you bring back a son and want me to send him off. I shall do nothing of the sort. We'll need him. I suppose you think the Legion's going to stick here unsupported—against all the armies of Prussia?"

"It's the sort of thing the Legion does, certainly."

"Not here. My orders are to fall back if unable to hold the heights. Turn in and sleep. We march at six in the morning; the food and ammunition you have brought will save us. Tomorrow the army will be destroyed, and the next day, and the next—"

He hung his head and muttered into his beard, in black despair and heartbreak. Old Wiart crept off, turned in among his comrades, and slept. He was dead beat.

Morning gave a gray sky, and the thunders of artillery from all the horizon; the Army of the East was encircled. A hero, who had suddenly turned into a broken old man, had flung away the whole splendid strategy of success. Sergeant Wiart found his son and sat apart with him, accepting the destiny he could not evade. He saw utter destruction for them all, and was desperate.

"FRANCE is dying," he said to Captain Wiart, despairingly. "Men are dying. Half the army may reach the frontier and safety; the rest will perish. It will not be a battle but a massacre, my son. It is cold up there!"—and he glanced at the gray sky. The younger man smiled slightly.

"You're still thinking of the Nature Force or whatever you call it?"

The sergeant nodded, gravely. "Yes; but I am not certain of anything. There is always a chance that your mother may be right about these things. Suppose I die, suppose what makes the life in me evaporates and goes up there, back to rejoin the divine force whence it came—well, after all one may reconcile that with Christ, or Allah, or what one likes. At all events, I have made a vow to the Virgin of Africa."

Young Wiart stared in sharp surprise.

"Yes." Old Wiart spoke with simplicity. "One never knows; your mother may be right. I have asked the Black Virgin—you know, the one in the church above Algiers, where your mother went on pilgrimage—I have asked her to bring you home safe; and if she does, I've vowed my Cross to her. You remember that. You tell your mother."

"I?" Sudden tears suffused the keen dark eyes. "I, Father? You speak as though you weren't coming back home."

"I don't think any of us are, my son; I hope you are." Sergeant Wiart put out his hand to meet that of his son. "Goodby. There go the bugles. God bless you—well, I'm a damned old fool for saying so, but I mean it anyhow—"

They embraced, captain and sergeant, as the bugles spoke. Rifles were crackling; bullets were in the air.

The Legion began its retreat. If the advance had been difficult, this retreat was a horrible nightmare. The Prussians were everywhere. The hills were masked by smoke, the ground shook with the tremendous blasts of artillery fire. The colonel went to old Wiart and pointed down the valley.

"You remember that sharp, steep hill we passed on the way up—the little one? Take your company and get there; hold it, while we check these damned Uhlans who are coming down on us. If the enemy gains that hill, we'll all be cut off. Otherwise—"

"Understood," said Sergeant Wiart. He passed the word to his men, and they were off at the double.

The main body fought on grimly. As the morning wore on, it became more apparent that the colonel had hit the nail on the head; if the Prussians held the little hill off the road, they had the entire corps at their mercy. Smoke and rifle-fire now ringed that hill, however. Sergeant Wiart was holding it against a blasting attack.

The column slogged on, the Prussians were checked and fell back, only to come again as fresh troops reached them. Captain Wiart had field-glasses, and as he rode, trained them on the little hill. The colonel came to him.

"Your horse is fresh enough. Will you take word to Sergeant Wiart to retire his men at once? We're past the danger-point now—we can't be cut off, thank God!"

The captain saluted and thrust in his spurs, and was gone with a rush, across the snowy fields and away from the road.

He was within a short quarter-mile of the bald, bare little hill, when he drew rein. He was on a little rise of ground. His pulses suddenly leaped, as he sensed something wrong. Then he saw what it was: the firing had ceased. He drew out his glasses, focused them, and saw a flood of Prussian uniforms over the crest of the hill. His errand had come too late.

His heart stopped. Then, through the glasses, he discerned a little knot of struggling movement, off at one side of the crest. Figures were clumped there. For an instant, his glasses brought up a face and figure he was certain that he recognized. And then all was quiet; the group was dissolving.

THE glasses slipped from his stiffened fingers, slid away. His straining, distended eyes lifted; sudden astonishment came into his face. For directly above the little hill, the gray sky showed a spot of blue. The blue widened. It became a circle of clear, open sky—and it was gone again. Only for the fraction of a moment. But enough to convince Captain Wiart, to send him riding back with fear and mystery stirring in his heart.

"And now the scientists have come along to say much the same thing," said the old gentleman sitting beside me and looking down at Algiers and the Mediterranean. "It is very strange. The blue sky is only dust, they say. Well, it is not nearly so nice a thought as the one my father had! And there was something to his belief; perhaps that was why the gray sky opened and a little bit of blue showed to me, when he died there on the hill under the Prussian bayonets!"

I DID not argue with him, of course. If the old chap believed it, if the thought pleased him, why argue it away? Besides, to be quite honest about it, I was by no means sure that I could argue it away even if I wanted to do so!

"Then," I asked, "that story explains why the Legion of Honor decoration is hanging up there on the wall, silk collar and all!"

He nodded. "Bullets found me; but I reached home safe, though a little crippled. Still, that was not the fault of the Black Virgin. So my mother did as my father had desired, and his Cross hangs there as you see it. I had to leave the army, because of the bullets that crippled me. It was the great sorrow of my life. I had hoped to get transferred to the Foreign Legion, you see."

"That's all very well, about soul-dust making the sky blue," I observed. "When you apply it in general, to poor folk such as those who perished with the German dirigible, it's a nice thought. But what about people who go down under the sea with a ship and stay there? You can't expect their vital essence or spirit or whatever it is, to get up through the water, can you?"

I had him there. He gave me a slow, serious glance, and then he pointed to the big block of stone out in front of the church, on the very tip of the high headland; the stone with its inscription for very pious folk, about the souls of those who were drowned in the sea below.

"No," he said, "I can't. But maybe the Black Virgin takes care of them, m'sieur. For, look down there!" And so saying, he swept his stick out at the Mediterranean. "What makes that ocean so blue, if it's not the same thing that makes the sky overhead blue?"

Well, I was never good at theology!

The scene shifts around the world in the succeeding story of this series, and next month we follow the exciting fortunes of the Foreign Legion in China.

Captured

By DIXIE O'REILLY

Each month we close the issue with a group of true adventure stories contributed by our readers. (For details of our Real Experience Contest see page 3.) This month we have loaned part of the space to an adventurer long dead—Ferdinand Magellan (see Page 112). Here follows Mrs. O'Reilly's story of the time she was captured by Mexican enemies of her soldier-of-fortune husband Major Edward (Tex) O'Reilly.

IN 1911 I was living on Texas State school land, while my husband, Tex O'Reilly, was fighting with the rebel army in Mexico. I made several trips to the border to visit him, getting as near to the war-zone as was safe with my two small boys. The *insurrecto* army, a ragged bunch of Mexican cowboys and Indians, was garrisoned at Ojinaga, just across the Rio Grande from Presidio; and as usual I wanted to ride over and see the old town and the rebel camp. I had been in the village on the American side several times, and felt more or less at home, for I was on friendly terms with the river guards, the deputy U. S. marshal, and had made friends with the one other white woman in the town. When I wanted to go exploring with my husband, she willingly cared for my children.

I finally persuaded Tex to let me ride across the river and meet him for a tour of the rebel camp. He had to leave early, but we decided that I would saddle my horse, ride across the ford about noon and have lunch in the soldiers' camp. I have always been curious about what may be on the other side of a hill, or at the other end of an unexplored trail, so I decided to start early and look at some of the country before meeting Tex at the rebel headquarters. I believed it was perfectly safe, for there had been no fighting in some time, and the district was supposed to be clear of Federal soldiers. My husband's name would be a passport to any rebel patrols.

I crossed the river and was riding a wide circle through the mesquite-covered hills when a trail leading to a clump of big trees caught my eye. It was an inviting path, and I could not resist the temptation to investigate.

I had covered a distance of a mile or more and was enjoying the ride very much, when suddenly I was confronted by a company of mounted Mexican soldiers. It did not alarm me in the least. They wore no uniforms, and I was sure that they were insurgents. I spoke very little Spanish, but was sure I could make them understand who I was, and where I was going.

It has been my experience that the Mexicans are usually kind and very polite; so when one of them rode forward to greet me, I smiled and said good day. Off came his big sombrero with a flourish; he bowed politely and asked where I was going. In broken Spanish I explained that I was riding to the camp to meet my *esposo*—and I gave his name.

There was a moment's silence, then a roar of laughter from the soldiers. They withdrew a few feet for a hot discussion in Spanish—and the few words I caught told me the ghastly truth: I had ridden directly into a scouting party of Federal soldiers, or rather Federal civilian volunteers, who had earned a name for cruelty! I also knew they had offered a reward for my husband, dead or alive.

I admit I was frightened, but decided I would not let them know that I had discovered who they were, nor show them that I was afraid. With a wave of my hand, I said good-by and tried to turn my horse and ride away. It didn't work. In an instant I was surrounded by dark grinning faces. The leader explained he was sure I was lost, and he would send word to Tex to come for me.

Again I tried to get away by explaining that I was in a hurry, but would be glad to have one of their men ride in with me as a guide. I felt sure that if

they would let me ride away with one soldier, I could escape. On the horn of my saddle was an old-fashioned forty-five six-shooter, and I was a good shot. If the worst happened, I could shoot his horse and make a run for the river. It did not occur to me I could shoot him.

I had no fear for my personal safety. Somehow I knew that they would not shoot me. Both Tex and I had many friends along the border, and if word got out that I was held a prisoner by Mexican soldiers, the Texans, from cowboys to marshals, would not wait for any exchange of governmental notes, but would cross the river at once to rescue me.

Desperately I tried to figure some way out. I was riding a good horse, but knew there was no chance to outride these soldier cowboys who were raised on horseback. I decided that all I could do was be pleasant and keep up my bluff.

After another argument they dismounted and sent out scouts. A small fire was started; one made coffee, and a grinning pirate festooned with pistols handed me some in a tin cup. I drank it without getting off my horse, saying that my husband would be along soon, and I would wait for him. All the time my mind was racing, figuring just what would and could happen:

Tex would be expecting me. When I was late, he would check up, and when he found that I had crossed the river, he would be alarmed and start searching for me. It was more than possible that he would ride straight into the trap.

With all these anxious thoughts running through my mind, I suddenly heard the faint sound of horses approaching. The Federals did not hear them as quickly as I did, for they were busy smoking and talking. Cautiously I maneuvered my horse to the side of the trail. If the rebels were approaching, there would be shooting from both sides, and I didn't want to be caught between lines of fire.

LATER I learned what had happened. The rebels had learned the party of Federal scouts were in the neighborhood, and the news was quickly relayed to rebel headquarters. As I was two hours late for my appointment, Tex was frantic; it took him but a short time to check up and find out when I had crossed the Rio Grande, and he had figured exactly what had happened.

It took his friends the rebels very few minutes to saddle their horses and load themselves with extra ammunition. In a short time more than one hundred *insurrectos*, with my husband in the lead, were galloping to the rescue of the dame in distress—and what a swell moving-picture rescue that would have made!

The Federals who were holding me were outnumbered five to one. Their scouts came racing in a short distance ahead of the charging rebels. Those Federals forgot all about me, and scrambled for their horses. I backed my horse into the brush and silently cheered for our side.

My late captors leaped into their saddles and lit out on the back trail with unanimous haste, firing back as they rode. On came the rebels strung out in a line, shooting and yelling as if the skirmish had been rehearsed. That lanky husband of mine rode standing high in his stirrups, his eyes anxiously searching the ranks of the fleeing Federals for a sight of me.

He almost rode over my horse. When he saw me, he jerked his mount to a sliding halt and stared. His face was pale as he dismounted and took my hand.

"Say, which side are you on?" he asked sarcastically.

THE bombardment didn't last long, and the rebels gathered around me and showered me with questions. I told them exactly what had happened, and refused to be very serious about it, though I admit I was still shivering. They seemed to have great admiration for the woman who refused to be scared. Then they all fired a *fusilado* in the air, and gave a cheer for the "*Tejano*" and his wife.

As we rode back to the camp, I knew that I was in for a dressing-down from my husband. He started his tirade, and I let him rave on for a few minutes, then used his own tactics to stop an argument, by asking:

"When do we eat? I am starved. It's no fun sitting on a horse for hours and bluffing a bunch of bandits."

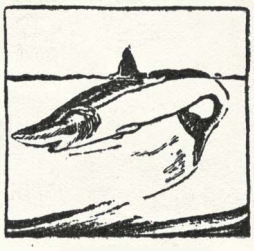
He explained what I had said to his Mexican friends, and they thought it was a good joke. I was escorted to the camp and fed with great ceremony.

That evening my husband guided me back across the Rio Grande. Emphatically he told me to pack my bags, take our children and catch the next stagecoach for the railroad, and not to stop until I arrived at San Antonio.

"The worst thing you can run into there is a street-car," he said. "I don't want you making a joke out of our war."

White Pearl-Diver

Marooned on a South Sea island, he risked his life under water.



By WILMON MENARD

MY chief interest in voyaging to the Tuamotu Isles was to see pearl-diving as it is carried on by the Polynesians of this group. The trading-schooner I sailed on was a decrepit scow, and after setting me down on the atoll of Nengonengo on the southern fringe of the Tuamotu Isles, she started back for Tahiti; but three miles off the southern end of the atoll of Anaa she went to a watery grave, and I was consequently marooned for ten months on one of the most isolated atolls in the South Seas.

I had abundant time on my hands; so as a means to pass the time, I started pearl-diving under the guidance of a veteran diver of the islands, Manu. By the end of the eighth month I was reaching a depth of forty feet in the lagoon.

The day the accident befell me in the lagoon of Nengonengo, a native *taupiti* (festival) was in progress in the village. I slipped away alone, anchored my canoe over a new bed of pearl-oysters, and toeing my lead weight, reached the coral ledge above the lagoon floor.

This sloping ledge, at a depth of about thirty-five feet, afforded me a fine vantage-place for a survey below. The floor of the lagoon here was pebbly, with clumps of flowers and shrubs, all living organisms, growing at intervals along the shelving levels. In one clear space I saw a straight row of large pearl oysters, drawn up as if in military formation. I decided to begin my shell-gathering there. I released the diving weight, catching at a craggy outgrowth of the coral ledge.

Suddenly, close at hand, a poisonous black-spotted coral snake shot out of a fissure in the wall. I drew back into a ravine, and it passed by my retreat, upward, a swift, dark, evil streak. Then, as I waited here for a moment, I saw a long shadow pass slowly over me. I looked up, and with much disquietude of mind saw the menacing outline of a shark some seven feet in length, a sight that made me instantly cautious. I drew back deeper into the crevice. The shark was far above me, and save for a watery wink of a wicked eye in my direction paid no attention to me, but disappeared about a bank of coral. Sharks, in the isles of the South Sea where food for them is plentiful, are not a great menace. Nevertheless I had no desire to test this out.

A small octopus with its eight tentacles flying in a maze behind its round, ugly head, passed close by in pursuit of a small fish. . . . I saw a projection of coral below, within arm's reach, worn by the slow undercurrents into the semblance of a human head. I reached for it, gripped it tightly, dragging myself down until my head and shoulders were down to this point, my body perpendicular. I was now directly above the shells. Holding the outgrowth of coral tenaciously with my left hand, I measured the distance. The tips of my glove just brushed the shell of the nearest one. I pulled my body down closer. Now I could reach them.

Gripping the shell tightly, I gave it a quick wrench, but the byssus of the pearl-oyster was too firmly fastened to the coral. I was now beginning to feel the effects of the abnormal sea-pressure and the lack of fresh air. My ears began to crackle, and I swallowed momentarily to alleviate this; my head throbbed, and my muscles felt strained. I thrashed my legs behind me, propelling my body closer to the patch of pearl-oysters. A sudden current swayed me, and my left leg shot inward. I grabbed desperately for a coral projection below.

IN the next instant my left leg was caught in a tight grip.

Overwhelming fear took possession of me, as I pulled madly on the leg. Stories of attacks by all forms of sea-demons flashed through my mind. I thought of a conger-eel, which often seizes the leg of a diver in its jaws. I imagined a shark, an octopus, or a man-eating rock cod.

And yet, after that first horrible moment, I knew it was none of these. It felt as if my foot had become wedged in a small cleft of coral. In my position I could not turn around to see what it was that gripped it. Hopefully, I released my hold slightly on the hump of coral, thinking that by doing so my foot would rise clear. An excruciating pain shot through my leg as my body rose a few inches. I dragged myself down again, trembling with fear. In that momentary position I had seen what held my foot. A lightning, horrified glance had revealed the serrated coral-encrusted shell of a giant furbelowed clam, its lips closed about my foot to the ankle. It was in a shallow ravine at the base of the coral-limestone wall, resting upon a low dais, to which its byssus was firmly fastened. It must have weighed all of a quarter of a ton, a colossal mountain of coral-fouled shell.

A *PAHUA!* What grim tales I had heard of them! I was mad with fear in those awful moments. Death under the lagoon terrified me. I thrashed the water frenziedly with my free leg, striking it against the invulnerable lips of the giant clam, unmindful of the danger of attracting conger-eels or cod. I might just as well have tried to batter down the whole coral wall. I pulled frantically on the outgrowth of coral I held. It only made the pain in my leg worse. Those first seconds are too horrifying to recall.

My lungs were nearly bursting for want of air. A minute and a half had possibly elapsed, although it seemed like eternity. My body, under the water pressure, felt as if it were being slowly crushed in a great vise. My grip on the projection of coral was weakening, and my leg was almost numb with pain, as my body rose by degrees in the strong currents, twisting my foot. I could feel my fingers slipping on the bulge of coral, my strength ebbing fast. I knew it would be all over soon—a sudden gasp for breath, a rush of water into my lungs and stomach, and my body would be flung downward. There I would sway, like a reed in a slow-running stream, until a shark, a conger-eel, an octopus, or a *tonu* tore me loose. A horrible languor engulfed me. Only some miraculous fate could deliver me now. In this ghastly moment, I knew an all-consuming fear of death.

Suddenly I felt a rush of water at my side. My teeth chattered, and I waited for the teeth of some lagoon monster to sink into my body. Then—wonder of wonders!—I felt the contact of a smooth, warm body, a strong hand tugging at my shoulders. I clutched madly, desperately for this person I could not see. My body was instantly thrown upward. I felt no pain as my ankle was severely wrenched by the sudden rise of my body. There was a red blur before my eyes, a maddening hammering in my head. I flayed out weakly with my arms, for something to grip, as I fell forward.

Then, without warning, my heart giving a great bound, I felt that my foot was free; I was being carried swiftly to the surface of the lagoon in human arms.

With an agonizing shock and in a great gurgitation of water, my mouth open, the water pouring into my stomach, nauseating, overwhelming, my head rose clear of the lagoon of Nengonengo. I was battered, half-drowned, my body convulsed, and my nose streaming blood, turning the water about me a deep crimson. I vomited gouts of blood and sea-water. A short distance away, a canoe floated near mine. I felt myself sinking beneath the surface, and then strong hands caught me under my arm-pits.

When I awoke many hours later in the thatched hut of Manu, stretched out on a pandanus mat, with cushions of kapok under me, my body was still distorted by taut muscles. My left ankle was smeared with the gummy, medicinal ointment of the *ape*-bulb and bound tightly with soft, fibrous bark. My entire body felt as if it had been lashed and torn unmercifully upon some infernal torture rack of the Inquisition.

SEVERAL days later, I learned that Manu, missing me from the village shortly after I had left for pearl diving, had paddled out to my canoe, arriving there at almost the time the *pahua's* lips had closed over my ankle. Seeing my predicament through the water-box, he had dived instantly. He managed to plunge a short pronged spear between the lips of the giant clam and stabbed it until it released its hold on my foot, which is the only way a clam will open its jaws once having caught something between its great shells.

I was still hobbling about by the aid of a crude pair of crutches when the trading schooner called at Nengonengo. My pearl shells paid for my passage back to Tahiti, and bidding my good friends of the atoll a fond good-by, I sailed, willing to leave pearl-diving to better men than myself.

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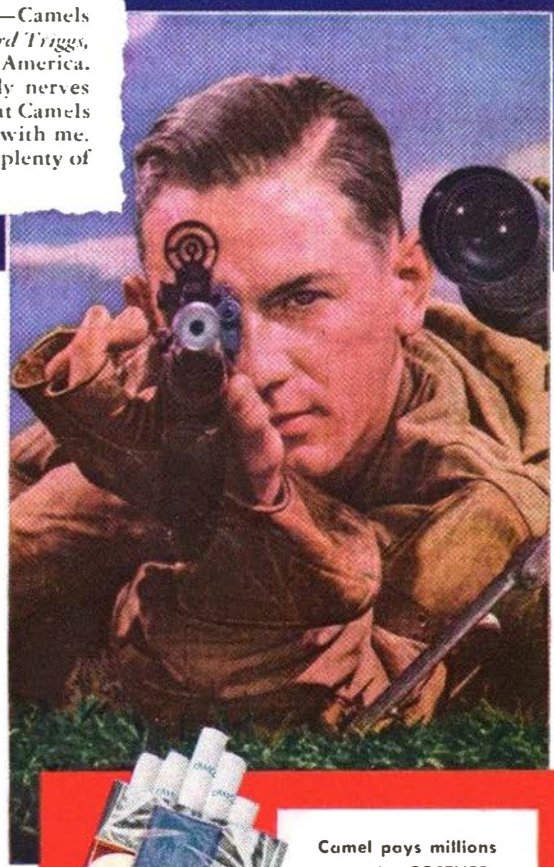

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