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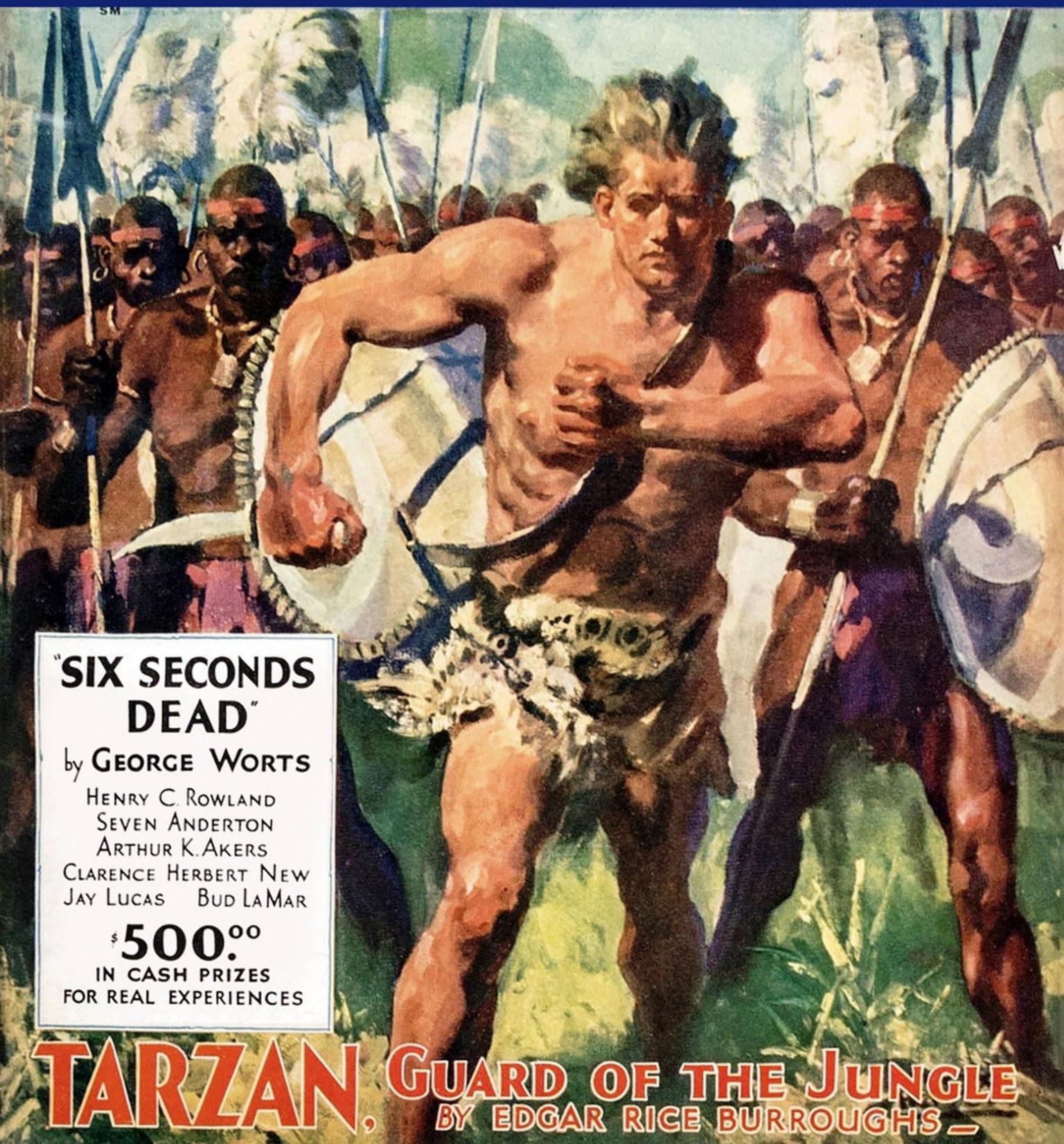

"SIX SECONDS DEAD"
by GEORGE WORTS

HENRY C. ROWLAND
SEVEN ANDERTON
ARTHUR K. AKERS
CLARENCE HERBERT NEW
JAY LUCAS BUD LAMAR

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Why Do *You* Read?

WE read, observes William Lyon Phelps in a recent article, for two reasons: to remember, and to forget. To forget, perhaps, the boredom of a train journey or of a lonely evening; to forget sleeplessness or disappointment or pain—even grief.

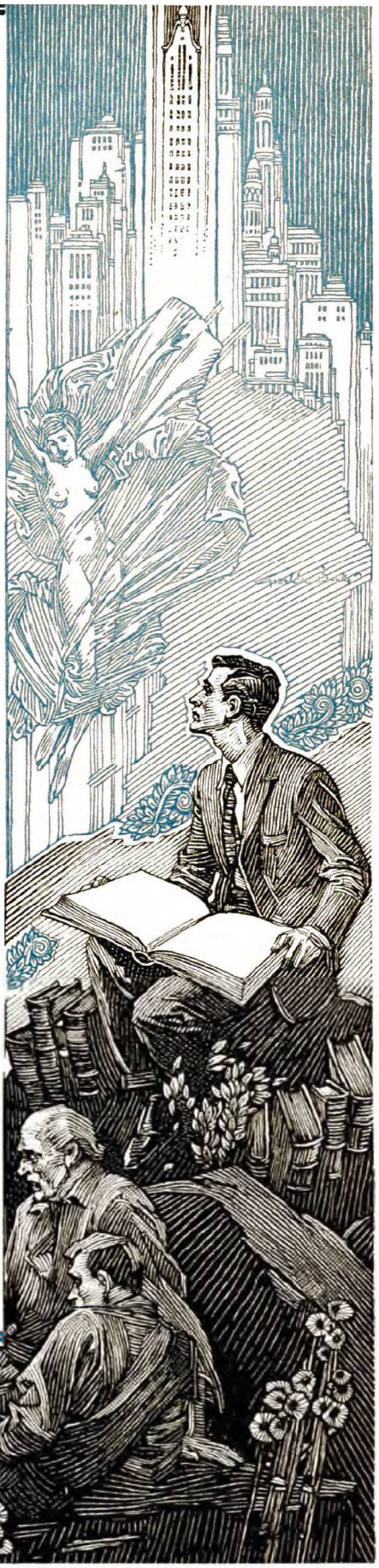
To remember, of course, the vast store of information we are continually acquiring through the printed word; to remember the delightful pictures of far fascinating scenes and exciting events so vividly painted for us by the magic of the author's pen; still more important, to remember the widely differing viewpoints and experiences and philosophies of other men and women which the insight of the truly gifted fiction-writer gives—and which are invaluable in bringing to us understanding of this so-perplexing world wherein we dwell. . . .

It is our earnest endeavor to make this magazine fulfill, so far as is possible, these two demands of its readers. We know of nothing better calculated to bring forgetfulness of tedium or unhappiness than those brilliant romances of primitive adventure which Edgar Rice Burroughs has given us in his famous Tarzan stories. And surely the blithe comedies by Arthur Akers, Bud La Mar and Bertram Atkey should cheer the spirits of the most downcast.

Much also is here offered, we believe, that is worth remembering long after its purpose of transient entertainment is achieved. Each of us lives but once, lives only one career. Yet we may share the most memorable moments of other men's lives in the Real Experience stories. And through the enchantments wrought by the skill of such writers as Henry C. Rowland, George Worts, Clarence Herbert New, Robert Winchester and Seven Anderton, our own life-experience may be infinitely multiplied.

Let us read, then—to forget if need be, and surely to remember.

—THE EDITOR.



Six Seconds Dead

The amazing story of a man who went to the electric chair, yet lived to solve an extraordinary murder mystery.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

IT was midnight in the death chamber, and Anthony Storm was about to be electrocuted. The young criminal lawyer walked into the room without benefit of guards or clergy, and stopped beside the monstrous piece of furniture from which his legal brilliance had saved so many of his fellows. His eyes were bits of frosted steel. He looked curiously at the ugly straps and electrodes, then lifted his eyes to the men who were gathered here to watch a bolt of electricity ravish his healthy body of its soul.

In a voice like ringing steel, he said: "Gentlemen, I seem to have walked my last step on this earth. Before my lips are sealed forever, I want to make a speech. It will be the shortest and most sincere speech I have ever made. There are six words in it. *I did not kill Burke Nally.*"

A cynic from a tabloid newspaper murmured: "Yeah? That's what they all say."

The comment did not reach the ears of the condemned man, but it was heard distinctly by Jimmy Mullen, of the Steel City *Times*. Jimmy Mullen shot a look at the tabloid man, and said in a low but passionate whisper: "You're a louse. He's innocent."

Jimmy Mullen was in the death-chamber to "cover" the execution for the *Times*. He was here very much against his wishes. It was his first execution, and he would probably do a very good job of it. His report would be fresh and vivid. More to the point: he had covered the case of the People *versus* Anthony Storm from the beginning. He was the first reporter to interview Anthony Storm after the criminal lawyer's arrest. Jimmy Mullen had attended every session of the trial. He had even written fiery editorials about it; but the editorials were like seed sown on barren ground. He had been on hand when attempts were made to carry the case to a higher tribunal, and he had been on hand when a petition was presented to Governor North.

In all these months of contact with Anthony Storm, Jimmy Mullen felt that he had come to know the young criminal lawyer well. He felt that he had accompanied him through hell on earth. To Jimmy, it was very much as if a gallant friend at whose side he had been fighting was about to be brutally murdered. Every decent instinct in Jimmy assured him that Storm was telling the truth when he protested his innocence. Jimmy wanted to cry out to these grim-visaged men in the death chamber: "Can't you see you're killing an innocent man?"

Yet if Anthony Storm did not kill Burke Nally, who did? It was an unusual murder, even as murders go in these piping times. The setting was the golf course of the Ordway Country Club—certainly a distinctive place for a murder to occur. Anthony Storm and Burke Nally had been members of a foursome. The foursome consisted of Anthony Storm, Burke Nally, Seth Brangwyn and Elery Gans.

Burke Nally was the only son of old Joshua Nally, retired steel-master and multimillionaire. Seth Brangwyn was Joshua Nally's nephew, and secretary to Elery Gans. Elery Gans was, in turn, secretary to old Joshua Nally. It was a closely knit little group.

The foursome had paused in the locker-room for a highball. Anthony Storm had furnished the Scotch. A locker-room steward named Clyde Tweed and known by all the members as "Smiles" had brought the mineral water, glasses and ice with which the highball was completed.

Finishing their drinks, the four men went out to the first tee. Burke Nally, in the act of driving off, dropped dead. His death occurred, it was estimated, about five minutes after he had finished his drink. As he had been in excellent health, his death aroused immediate suspicion. What remained of his highball was analyzed and found to contain a trace of cyanide of potassium.

Smiles was the star witness for the prosecution. Smiles testified having seen Anthony Storm drop "something" into Burke Nally's highball as he was pouring the whisky into the glasses. Neither Seth Brangwyn nor Elery Gans had witnessed this furtive act, but Smiles was unshakable. It had looked to Smiles like a little pinch of powder.

Then came a procession of witnesses who testified that there had been real enmity between the two men for years. Recently, it developed, they had both fallen in love with Corrine Brangwyn—old man Nally's niece, and Seth Brangwyn's sister. The girl, Corrine, had been educated abroad and had lived there until her mother's death; then she came to live with her Uncle Joshua. Anthony Storm and Burke Nally had, it appeared, fallen in love with her simultaneously; and their repressed hatred had been fanned to a hot flame. Burke Nally, with his father's millions behind him, and the face and figure of a mythological god, had frequently expressed contempt for Storm, who was, after all, nothing but a young criminal lawyer. Burke Nally had ridiculed Storm's calling; and Storm had been heard to declare that the time would come when he would "even matters up."

The jury construed this as a threat. Smiles sent the rest of the rivets into the case. And Anthony Storm had been sentenced to die.

Jimmy Mullen was sure that Smiles was being paid handsomely for lying. But who was paying him?

The reporter, leaning against the wall of the death-chamber, tried not to keel over. He did not believe in

Finishing their drinks, the four went to the first tee. In the act of driving off, Burke Nally dropped dead.

electric chairs, and he did not want to see Anthony Storm killed.

The condemned man was being strapped into the chair. A sponge soaked in sal ammoniac was placed against the shaved area on the back of his head, so that the electric current could more conveniently shatter the seat of his reason. Hand electrodes were attached. Leg electrodes were put in place. Straps were buckled down.

"I don't want my face covered," Storm said. They were the last words he uttered before the current was turned on.

Jimmy Mullen looked away. In another instant, that man, warm and alive in the chair, would be nothing but a mass of muscles and bones. And at the end of a brief convulsion, he would be clay.

The reporter heard a vague humming, then a hideous gasp and the sudden sharp creaking of strained leather. Through the blur which swam before Jimmy Mullen's eyes, he saw men suddenly moving.

It was all over. Anthony Storm was dead.

Men all about Jimmy were shouting, trying to be heard. A white-faced man in a gray uniform was shouting at the warden and brandishing both arms.

Jimmy had only the strength and intelligence to shout at the reporter next to him: "What the hell?"

The reporter shouted back: "Some mistake! A pardon or something! It came too late."

The warden was trying to make himself heard. He fought past clawing hands to the electric chair. Jimmy reached it first. Cold sweat ran from his face. His fingers were as useless as so many worms. He fumbled at buckles. A big guard knocked him aside, but not before Jimmy had discovered that Anthony Storm's hands were unnaturally hot.

He saw the tabloid man run out of the door, followed him. The tabloid man seemed to have the situation fairly well in hand. He was on his way to a telephone with a red-hot flash.

What he told Jimmy was, in substance, that Governor North had unexpectedly ordered a rehearing for Anthony Storm. The current had been on for six seconds when a guard brought word.

"But he's dead," the tabloid man concluded.

Jimmy went flying back to the death chamber. The prison was going mad. Convicts who had been groaning and howling when the current went on were now shrieking. Hell was loose.

More reporters came stumbling out as Jimmy went in. Guards had carried Anthony Storm into the small room which adjoined the death-chamber. Here, electrocuted murderers had their hearts cut out and their brains poked into for the benefit of science. The post-mortem chamber was now the setting for the strangest, most bizarre act of its history. Doctors were attempting to bring the dead to life.

Jimmy, crowding into the room, recalled that there had been some wild talk of such an attempt when Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray were electrocuted. Their bodies were to be possessed by friends immediately after the execution, and an attempt would be made to resuscitate them.

The frantic reporter saw a doctor strip Anthony Storm's shirt away, exposing his chest; saw him stab into the white flesh over the heart a hypodermic needle. Jimmy knew what that was. Adrenalin, the magical bio-chemical which, if given in time, would cause a localized muscular convulsion. It was the same as if the doctor had reached into the interior of Anthony Storm's chest cavity, grasped his lifeless heart in his hand and given it a succession of mighty squeezes.

A doctor said: "There isn't much hope. My God, what can you expect?"

The question was addressed at no one, but Jimmy answered, huskily:

"How about a pulmotor?"

"One's coming," the doctor said.

"Has he a pulse?"

"No."

Jimmy's lips and mouth were as dry as corncobs. His heart was hammering sickeningly. The shrieks of the convicts were like a devil-dance along his nerves.

Some one asked: "Does the heart react?"

A doctor with a stethoscope answered: "Not yet. Give it time."

It was all, to Jimmy, a nightmare that would never seem part of reality.

Devotion to his calling sent him away just as the pulmotor came. He left the room, feeling satisfied that everything that could be done was being done. Men who seemed to know what they were about were pumping the electrocuted man's arms up and down, chafing his legs, doing their muscular utmost to start up again this delicate physical machine which a high-voltage current had smashed.

Jimmy raced to a telephone and dictated his amazing story in breathless periods. He gasped, became infuriated with the cynical, calm-voiced rewrite man at the other end, and roared hysterical profanity into the transmitter until a telephone operator, listening with shocked ears, terminated the flow.

Jimmy hastened back to the death-chamber. Seconds after he pushed his way in, he heard a doctor say: "I got a beat! There's another! His heart's trying!"

The reporter heard no more. He was beating a sanitary white wall with his fists, while tears burned down his cheeks. . . . .

Anthony Storm was started on his journey back from that dark valley from which so few men have returned.

CHAPTER II

THE newspapers next morning were black and strident with the amazing story. Anthony Storm, condemned to pay with his own life for the murder of Burke Nally, had suffered six seconds of high voltage and was alive!

Injections of adrenalin and of camphor, and the prompt use of the pulmotor were responsible. Anthony Storm now lay in the State prison hospital. He had not yet opened his eyes, but his heart-action was improving, his breathing was excellent.

The tabloids went wild. Was it not likely that the sustained high voltage which had sent the young lawyer into the land of death for six seconds might radically change his character? Would that surging voltage leave his brain unimpaired? Could a man who suffered such a dread experience ever be the same?

There were so many vivid angles to the story that the front pages gave themselves exclusively to Anthony Storm—and to Smiles. For Smiles, himself faced by death, had freed his guilty conscience of a tremendous load.

Smiles, on the night of the execution, was, it seemed, in the near-by manufacturing town of Springdale. He had spent the major part of the evening in a speak-easy, drinking raw gin, and reading the newspaper accounts of Anthony Storm's doings and sayings on the eve of execution.

Branches waved and parted. A face gleamed through the leaves.

At a little before eleven, Smiles staggered out of the speak-easy. He was seen by a policeman crossing Fourth Street, so drunk that he could hardly walk, just as a fast express truck on the Steel City-Pittsburgh run careened around the corner. The truck, striking Smiles, sent him flying into the gutter as a stone is sent flying by a slingshot.

An ambulance took Smiles to the nearest hospital, where it was ascertained that his spleen was ruptured. Numerous ribs were broken. There were other internal injuries.

It chanced that Smiles had been taken, because of its nearness, to the Springdale Maternity Hospital. It was certain that he would never see another sun. Three lives came into the world that night while Smiles' was ebbing out. And as one of the tabloids pointed out, ironically, Smiles was where he belonged. Had he not given another man's soul a chance to be reborn?

When confronted with the painful news that he could not possibly live, Smiles ceased his moans of suffering long enough to glance into the black and uncertain future. The glance was evidently not to his liking. He said he had a confession to make. And in the presence of at least ten witnesses, he made it.

"I was lying, at Anthony Storm's trial," he said. "I never saw Mr. Storm put anything into Mr. Nally's highball glass. I said I saw it, because I was paid plenty for saying it."

An officer from Springdale headquarters prodded his memory as Smiles' confession slid off into more gasps of pain.

"Who paid you?"

"I'll tell you," Smiles gasped out. "I've got to tell you—"

Smiles paused and looked up at him with a sudden smile of amazement. It was the smile of a great and eternal relief from all human suffering.

A nurse drew a sheet over the ghastly smile and the police officer went galloping down the hall to a telephone. He was successful, at length, in getting Governor North on the wire. It took valuable minutes for him to convince the Governor that he was not a crank or a practical joker. The Governor heard his explanation half through for the third or fourth time, then jiggled the hook and called the State prison. . . .

Another interesting angle on the Anthony Storm case was provided by the small tier of cells of which he had been an inmate for so many months. An elderly man named Martin Tulifer, another occupant of the death-house, was to have gone to his death a few minutes after Anthony Storm's execution, but because of the terrific excitement, Martin Tulifer was not to be executed until the following day.

These two men — Anthony Storm and Martin Tulifer—had become warm friends during their confinement in the death-house; yet one had never seen the other. Their cells had been face to face across the corridor, and as long as they created no disturbance, they could talk. It was the strangest of soils in which to sprout a friendship—nothing to go by but the timbre of a voice.

Martin Tulifer was a very rich man. He had made millions in Oklahoma oil, had purchased a large estate in Malvern, which is a suburb of Steel City, and had developed a passion for horticulture. His estate became a show place, and on Sundays the public was permitted to wander at will through his magnificent flower gardens.

Martin Tulifer's head gardener, an Italian named Luigi Ponzoli, had a seventeen-year-old daughter Rosa who was,

according to some accounts, an innocent bud. According to other accounts, she was a cheap and common little flirt. All accounts, however, agreed that Rosa Ponzoli was alluringly pretty in a large-eyed, plump Italian way.

Rosa Ponzoli was found, one morning, floating face down in the lily pond on Martin Tulifer's estate with a length of binder twine tied tight about her soft white neck.

Medical experts pronounced that her death had occurred at eleven or twelve o'clock the night previous. They made the further sensational and shocking announcement that Rosa Ponzoli would have, if she had lived, become a mother.

The tabloids promptly labeled the murder a *crime passionale.*

Martin Tulifer, who was fifty-eight years old, was arrested and charged with the murder. A delegation of infuriated Italians almost succeeded in delivering him from the flimsy Malvern jail and forthwith lynching him.

Joshua Nally died of cyanide poisoning while having tea with his niece.

A brilliant array of legal talent which Martin Tulifer retained declared that their client had never had any interest in the Ponzoli girl but a fatherly one. He had never married; and he had longed for a son or a daughter.

He had seen Rosa Ponzoli lacking in opportunities, and he had gone out of his way to be generous. With her father's permission, he had sent her off to a fashionable girls' school for an education; had been most generous in matters of a clothing- and spending-money allowance. Summing it all up, Martin Tulifer's attitude toward the Ponzoli girl had been fatherly and platonic.

The prosecution construed it otherwise. Zealous attorneys for the State declared that Martin Tulifer was a money-glutted ogre, a horrible old spider who had cleverly spun a web with which to catch the innocent Rosa.

It was called to the jury's attention that Martin Tulifer was a frequent visitor in the Ponzoli home, and most damning of all, that he had gone walking with Rosa in the moonlight on the night she was last seen alive.

Witnesses established that his actions had been peculiar that evening, that he had seemed worried or frightened. Rosa's father recalled that Martin Tulifer had sat in the Ponzoli dining-room that evening, sipping Chianti and frequently looking at Rosa with what Luigi Ponzoli described to the jury as a "hating look."

The prosecution won its case on the legal claim that Martin Tulifer had exclusive opportunity. It begged the jury not to be lenient with Martin Tulifer because of his age or his millions.

Martin Tulifer moved into the death-house a few weeks after Anthony Storm had taken up quarters there. He was overheard saying to Storm that he was not afraid of death, yet he wished that something could be done to prevent such a miscarriage of justice as had occurred in his case. He was an innocent man. He had not killed Rosa Ponzoli. Yet he had refused to use his great wealth unfairly to procure his release.

The friendship between these two condemned men, who not once in the weeks of their ripening friendship, saw each other's face, was based upon this mutual hatred of injustice.

The newspapers, devoting their entire front pages and much of their interior space to Anthony Storm's miraculous escape from death, took this opportunity to re-hash the Tulifer case. New interest was aroused by the statement that Tulifer had, immediately upon hearing of Anthony Storm's deliverance, sent for his lawyers.

Jimmy Mullen, of the Steel City *Times,* devoured all these accounts as he waited in the warden's office for bulletins on Anthony Storm's condition. A famous heart specialist had come all the way from Rochester, Minnesota, by airplane. He had said that Anthony Storm had a fighting chance.

At eleven in the morning a bulletin stated that Anthony Storm was on the verge of consciousness, that his lips had moved.

Jimmy Mullen was weak from his ordeal of the previous night, but he was happy. His hero would probably live!

Lounging in the warden's office, with a dead cigarette hanging from his lip, Jimmy suddenly sat up and listened. The convicts were howling as they had howled last night when Anthony Storm was strapped into the chair. Suddenly, the reporter's nerves began to jump.

He glanced at his watch. His hand was shaking so that the numerals danced. It was noon. Martin Tulifer was to be sped into oblivion at noon.

CHAPTER III

ANTHONY STORM continued to occupy the front pages of the newspapers. What, the public clamored to know, was to be done about him? His return to health was now assured. True, he would not be the man he had been before; but he would not die.

Reporters were denied admittance to him. Strange and conflicting rumors got about. It was said that he had lost his reason. This was denied. It was said that the electric shock had turned him into a white-haired, bent old man. This too was denied.

He was taken secretly from the prison hospital when his recovery was assured, and escorted under heavy guard to the State capitol, where his case was reviewed behind closed doors by the Governor and the State attorney-general.

When he emerged, he was a free man. Governor North issued a statement in which he said that the case against Anthony Storm had "technically collapsed," because of Smiles' death-bed confession. The Governor refused to elaborate that baffling phrase. And the newspapers fell upon it and squabbled over it as dogs squabble over a bone. It meant, to some, that Anthony Storm was as guilty as before, but was freed because of a legal technicality. To others, it meant that Storm was as innocent as a lamb. If this were so, who, then, was the murderer? The finger of suspicion was subtly directed at Seth Brangwyn and at Elery Gans, both of whom might have gained by Burke Nally's death. With Burke Nally out of the way, Seth Brangwyn and his sister Corrine might inherit the bulk of their uncle's estate. What had Elery Gans, the old man's secretary and companion, to gain?

The prosecuting attorney who had sent Storm to the chair declared that he would not reopen the case. He refused to comment on the death-bed confession of his star witness except to say that it was "somewhat incomplete." He refused to say whether or not he still believed Storm to be guilty. As far as he was concerned, the case was closed. And it would stay closed.

Newspaper photographers and news-reel men were disappointed when Storm left the Governor's house after his private hearing. He left by a back way, entered a limousine with curtains drawn, and was driven rapidly away.

His whereabouts became a burning mystery. It was presently learned that he had gone to Martin Tulifer's country place at Malvern and had turned the place into a fortress. Guards were posted day and night at all entrances. Storm refused to see anyone. He would not talk on the telephone.

Martin Tulifer's lawyers issued a curt statement, in response to the clamor of the press, that Anthony Storm had been made Martin Tulifer's sole heir by a will which was executed an hour before the oil-millionaire went to the chair.

The fortune to which Anthony Storm fell heir in such an amazing fashion was estimated at ten million dollars. The terms of the will were not made public. There was said to be an amazing string attached to the inheritance. But Martin Tulifer's lawyers would not talk, and Anthony Storm issued orders that reporters were to be thrown bodily off his estate.

Just when the case might have lost interest because of Storm's refusal to tell reporters what he intended to do with that ten million, it received a new stimulus. Seth Brangwyn was arrested, charged with the theft of eighty thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds which had been entrusted to him by his uncle. Rumors again flew. A bold statement by one of the tabloids that Seth Brangwyn might well have been the murderer of Burke Nally went unchallenged. Frantic attempts to get some kind of opinion from Anthony Storm were unsuccessful.

The lovely, patrician face of Corrine Brangwyn was once again seen on front pages. This girl who had been loved by two men, one of whom had been murdered, the other of whom had paid for the murder with six seconds of his life, was once more the object of morbid curiosity. Truly, she seemed to have been born under an unhappy star.

Her brother went to trial. Her uncle took the stand against him, testified that he had given Seth Brangwyn the bonds to be stored away in a safe-deposit box. Seth Brangwyn declared that Elery Gans had instructed him to sell the bonds, secure the cash and keep it until it was needed. Elery Gans firmly denied having given the young man such instructions. Seth Brangwyn was accordingly found guilty and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary.

Corrine was not called upon to testify, but she was present throughout the trial as a spectator. Calm and poised and slimly beautiful, she was as aloof from the crowd as though she had been encased in glass. Reporters shrewdly observed that she spent most of the time staring at her uncle and at Elery Gans with large brown eyes which brooded with a dark and sinister disapproval.

Once again public interest in Joshua Nally, Corrine Brangwyn and Anthony Storm died down. It was sharply revived by the rumor that Anthony Storm was about to announce what he planned to do with his ten-million-dollar inheritance. Reporters again stormed the fortress. Those who got up the front steps were forcibly ejected.

And ten days after sentence was pronounced on Corrine Brangwyn's brother, her uncle was murdered. Joshua Nally got up from his afternoon tea, cried out in agony and dropped dead. His secretary declared that the old steel-master had been killed with the same poison that had killed his son—cyanide of potassium!

On that same afternoon, Jimmy Mullen succeeded in breaking through the barriers and talking to his hero.

CHAPTER IV

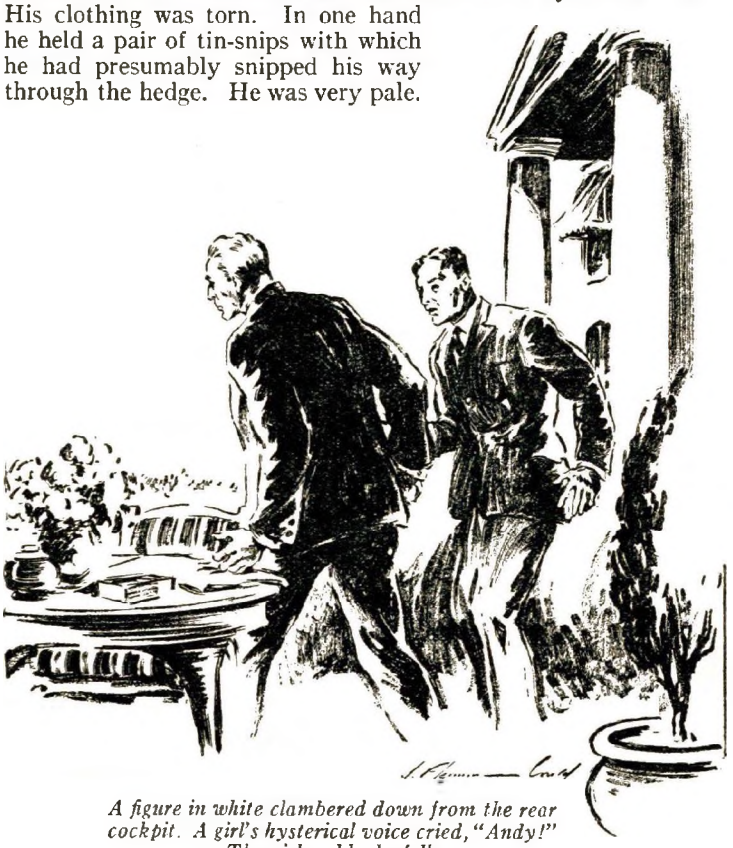
ANTHONY STORM was seated in a wicker chair on the flagstone terrace upon which his drawing-room faced, reading an evening paper and smoking an excellent after-dinner cigar. From the tail of his eye he saw that the hedge—a high, black, thorny one—which ran along the southern boundary of his estate, was mysteriously twitching at one point.

Leaves trembled as branches shook. It was dusk. There was not the faintest breath of wind. Some one was trying to break through; yet that hedge was supposed to be impenetrable.

"The mystery man of Malvern" laid aside his newspaper, removed the cigar from his mouth and watched the hedge.

It shook again. Branches waved and parted. The pale oval of a face gleamed through the leaves.

A young man in gray seemed to pop out of the hedge. He was hatless. His face was scratched as if by a cat. His clothing was torn. In one hand he held a pair of tin-snips with which he had presumably snipped his way through the hedge. He was very pale.



A figure in white clambered down from the rear cockpit. A girl's hysterical voice cried, "Andy!" The girl suddenly fell.

Anthony Storm stared at him curiously, but he did not call to his guards. The intruder brushed leaves and twigs from his shoulders as he came across the lawn and mounted the slope to the terrace. He laid the tin-snips on a flagstone and said in a voice husky with nervousness:

"Mr. Storm, you may remember me. I'm Jimmy Mullen, of the Steel City *Post*. Before and during your trial, I was on the *Times*. You may recall the editorials I wrote at that time, declaring you were innocent. I wouldn't have clipped a hole through that hedge if it wasn't mighty urgent. I had to see you. I hope you won't have me thrown out."

He paused. Anthony Storm was puffing at his cigar and looking at him. Jimmy, holding his breath, took a good look in return. He had heard the rumor that Storm's hair was completely white; yet he was startled to find that it was. He had heard that Storm had aged tremendously; yet he was shocked to see that Storm's face was that of a man of at least fifty. He had heard that his hero's eyes were strange, yet he was dismayed to find that they were—well, not quite human. A strange light played in them. It reminded Jimmy of moonlight on the black water of a still lake surrounded by dead trees, a cold and eerie light.

Against the brown brick of the house wall, the strange eyes, the snow-white hair, and the older face were startling. Jimmy experienced a surge of horror mixed with the greatest pity.

"I have nothing," Storm said, "to say for any newspaper."

His voice was startling. Before that dreadful night in the death-chamber, it had been young, rich, humorous. Now it was curiously remote, toneless, and as crackling as the powerful current that had made it so. It was as if a man far inside Anthony Storm were doing his talking for him.

Hair on the nape of Jimmy Mullen's neck stirred. A voice sliding off a glacier could not have been colder. Jimmy would not have been surprised if the door had opened and another Anthony Storm had stepped out. He wondered if it was true that all of the juice was fried out of Anthony Storm's soul.

He blurted out: "Don't you remember me at all, Mr. Storm?"

"Yes. You were standing in front of me the night I went to the electric chair. You can go out that gate."

Jimmy was conscious of a sinking sensation in the region of his digestive organs. Anthony Storm didn't realize how hard he had worked for him.

"Mr. Storm," he said quickly, "I know just how you feel, but I've been for you all along. And all I want now is to ask you one question. My city editor said that if I didn't come back with the answer, I needn't bother coming back."

"City editors," Storm answered, "have always said that."

"My city editor," Jimmy said, "means it. It's a peculiar situation. The Steel City *Times* had a shake-up. In spite of the good work I'd done, I was let out. The *Post* has given me a chance to make good. This is the chance."

Jimmy was relieved when Storm did not terminate the interview by telling him flatly to get out.

"Why," the lawyer asked, "should I oblige your city editor? Did any city editor ever consider other people's feelings? Did they consider them in this instance?"

Jimmy's heart sank again. He had thought that Storm had picked up the newspaper from the table as a gesture of dismissal. But Storm was holding up the paper for Jimmy to see a headline flung across the top of the page:

JOSHUA NALLY MURDERED!

The reporter was so startled that he exclaimed, "Good God!" He bent down and stared at the "drops" under the headline and glanced at the fourteen-point "lead."

His eyes, running swiftly down the type, widened with the shocking intelligence that Joshua Nally had died of cyanide of potassium poisoning while having tea with his niece, Corrine Brangwyn.

Storm's strange, hard, crackling voice inquired: "Isn't the finger of suspicion pointed at every member of Joshua Nally's household? By whom? The city editor of this newspaper!"

Jimmy stared at him incredulously and read on. But the body of the story told him little more than he had gleaned from the headlines. What Jimmy saw, hovering in the type, was a horrible black vulture whose awful wings were spread over the Nally household. First, Burke Nally. Then Seth Brangwyn. Now—the old steel master.

A photograph of the grim-jawed old man stared out at him from the page. Beside it was a likeness of Corrine—clear-eyed, aristocratic, lovely. And he recalled the look of hatred in her eyes during her brother's trial, when she had sat and stared at her uncle during his testimony.

A preposterous question flickered in his mind: Was she somehow responsible for the death of her cousin Burke Nally too? Was she a modern Lucrezia Borgia?

HE wondered suddenly how Anthony Storm was taking this. Storm had once loved Corrine Brangwyn. Perhaps he still loved her. But could this man whose soul had been shriveled by an invisible electric flame love any woman?

"What right," Storm asked, "have city editors to take this attitude?"

"You can trust me," Jimmy said earnestly, "to give you a square break. I always have before."

"Why can't I be permitted to handle my private affairs privately?"

"Because you're news. I wouldn't be so persistent, but my wife isn't well, and with times as tough as they are, I can't afford to lose this job."

"Very well. Tell me what you know, then tell me what you want."

"I don't get you, Mr. Storm."

"I haven't seen the newspapers until tonight. I don't know what the public thinks of me or expects of me. I want you to tell me."

Jimmy's uneasiness grew. "They think you're a mystery."

"Why?"

"Because you throw everybody out who tries to see you."

"Do you blame me?"

"I'm not here out of curiosity, Mr. Storm."

"Don't you represent the morbid curiosity of the public? Don't you realize that a man who's been through what I've been through wants nothing but to crawl off by himself? How would you feel if you'd had my experience?"

"Just the way you feel, Mr. Storm—and the public would be just as curious to know how I felt."

"Now we're getting somewhere. You've been unjustly accused of murder. The only woman you ever cared a hang about has become a stranger to you. The machinery of the law takes you and puts you in a diabolical contrivance called an electric chair. Prepared to meet your God, you are shattered, burned to a husk. Then this same machinery executes an about-face, and after due process of law, you are tossed back among your fellows. You come back to life to find that your hair's snow-white, that your face has aged fifteen or twenty years, and that your eyes look like two holes kicked through the wall of hell. Are you still putting yourself in my place?"

"Yes sir," Jimmy said huskily, "and I've been over every inch of it with you before."

The bright spark of Storm's cigar slowly dulled.

"You have?" His voice was surprised.

"Yes sir. I know just how you must feel."

"And if you were I, what would you do?"

"First of all," Jimmy said, "I'd move heaven and earth to find the man who had framed me. I wouldn't sleep until I had him where he belonged."

"Then what would you do?"

"It would all depend." Jimmy hesitated.

"On what?" Storm prompted him.

"On the fact that I had inherited ten million dollars."

"You're clever," Storm said. "But you're honest. I'm glad you came through that hedge, Jimmy Mullen. You're the first man from the outside world I've talked to in two months." He paused. Then: "Let's have that question."

"It's this," Jimmy nervously replied. "How are you going to spend that ten million?"

Dusk had settled on the terrace. The bright ruby spot of Storm's cigar waxed and waned as he seemed to ponder the question for an answer to which Jimmy Mullen had scratched his face and torn his only decent suit of clothes. It reminded Jimmy of the tip of a smoldering volcano which might decide at any moment to erupt. . . . An airplane with red and green running-lights at its wing-tips droned past overhead.

The ruby spark of Storm's cigar described a parabola through the night. It exploded on the lawn in a burst of little rubies.

"Go back and tell your city editor," the lawyer said, "that I am going to spend it trying to make my hair turn brown again. Tell him I'm twenty-eight and hungry for fun, even if I have snow-white hair and the face of a man of forty. Tell him I'm going to spend it on beautiful women of the more decadent type, rare wines and whiskies, good food, yachts, imported automobiles, and any luxury that the whim of a moment may dictate. Tell your city that, and tell him to go to hell!"

"Why not let me tell him," Jimmy growled, "that you're going to establish a ten-million-dollar fund for the aid of wayward cats?"

Anthony Storm came so close to him that Jimmy could feel his breath on his face.

"Don't you believe me, Jimmy Mullen?"

"No," Jimmy answered. "No man who is planning to run hog-wild has a pair of eyes like yours. You're planning to spend that ten million raising hell, but not on cuties, booze and yachts. You can't fool me."

"I'll answer your question," Storm said. He paused. Jimmy waited expectantly. The airplane was approaching again. Jimmy wondered if the pilot was lost. Storm said quickly:

"Martin Tulifer's will requested me to spend his millions trying to help men and women who are unjustly accused of crime, as he and I were. In long talks with him, he repeatedly said he wished something could be done for unfortunates hailed into court without enough money to hire able lawyers. A rich racketeer can go into court and buy what he wants. If Mr. Tulifer had spent a million on bribes, he would not have been electrocuted; but he was a straight-shooter. He thought some hidden force of justice would come to his rescue. According to his will, I am to help any poor devil who is deserving, who is unjustly accused and who cannot afford to retain competent legal counsel."

JIMMY could not answer, for the drumming of the airplane had suddenly become the deafening roar of a nine-cylinder exhaust. The green and red running-lights swooped down toward the terrace. Jimmy shouted, "That guy is heading for a crack-up!" But Storm did not hear.

The roaring suddenly diminished. The pilot had cut his throttle again, was gliding in. The green light blinked, vanished.

Two glaring searchlights flashed on and flooded the wide southern lawn. A more dazzling white light appeared and began to float down, down, in a slow, deliberate path.

The reporter knew that it was a magnesium landing flare on a toy parachute. And with wires humming, engine sputtering and coughing, the plane came gliding down.

Black wings suddenly recalled to Jimmy the vulture of his imagination as light glinted on their varnished surfaces. The black biplane settled on the lawn, bounced, settled again, rolled on and came to a stop near the hedge. The engine roared again, and the landing-lights came swinging about. They bore blindingly on the two men on the terrace.

A gruff voice said, "I've got her, Pete. Hold the light steady."

The mystery ship came roaring at them. It stopped twenty feet away. The motor muttered, gurgled, clicked. The landing-lights went black. A powerful amber bulb, controlled from somewhere within the house, blinked on and drenched the terrace with golden radiance.

A figure in white clambered down from the plane's rear cockpit. A girl's hysterical voice cried: *"Andy!"*

The aviatrix came running unsteadily up the slope to the flagstone terrace, pushing her goggles from eyes to forehead as she ran. She wore mechanic's white overalls. Jimmy saw that her eyes were dark and large, and that there were red marks under them where the goggle cushions had rested. She was holding her lower lip in her teeth. In the light from the amber bulb, her teeth sparkled.

Jimmy was too excited at first by the manner of her arrival to recognize her. When he did, his heart gave a queer lurch. The girl was Corrine Brangwyn.

Storm exclaimed, as Jimmy recognized her: "Oh, my God!"

The girl suddenly fell. She crumpled in a small white mound with arms outflung on the edge of the terrace. At first Jimmy thought she had stumbled. Then he realized that she had fainted.

He saw all this in terms of headlines. It was, for Jimmy, a big moment. He was the sole witness to a scene which might well be the biggest news story in years! But would Storm let him stay?

Jimmy took no chances. Some feet over his head was a cornice. Below was a black shadow, thrown by the amber bulb. Jimmy flattened himself against the wall and was swallowed by the shadow.

CHAPTER V

THE butler who had thrown Jimmy Mullen down the front steps earlier in the afternoon came running out onto the terrace. His permanently distorted ears and well-scarred face made Jimmy certain that he had once been a welterweight chopping - block. Jimmy had heard that every man in Storm's employ was an ex-convict.

Storm was bending over Corrine Brangwyn, looking into her white face with open-mouthed, glittering-eyed anguish. In such a way, Jimmy reflected, a man might look upon the dead face of a beloved wife. Storm sharply turned his head. The expression was gone.

"Where's that reporter?" he snapped.

"I didn't know there was one, Mr. Storm. How did he get in?"

"Through the hedge. He's probably gone. Never mind him. Bring some brandy."

Storm was looking at the very spot where Jimmy stood. Jimmy held his breath, but Storm did not see him.

The lawyer gathered the girl in his arms and walked slowly to a chair not ten feet from Jimmy. He arranged her in it, pulled up a chair, sat down and began chafing her wrists.

Jimmy knew that Storm had forgotten him, and he knew that Storm had never stopped loving Corrine Brangwyn. The butler came out with a decanter and a liqueur glass. The lawyer took decanter and glass and told him to go into the house and stay there.

Corrine Brangwyn revived after a measure of brandy had gone down her throat. She opened her eyes and looked into Storm's face. Her eyes ran slowly up to his white hair. She gave a little scream and began beating with her fists on the arms of the chair.

"Oh, Andy!" she said in a wail so packed with agony that Jimmy winced. She reached up and touched Storm's hair, and let her fingers trail down his face to his mouth. She withdrew her hand.

"Why didn't you let me see you? Why didn't you answer my letters? Why wouldn't you come to the telephone? Was there ever the slightest question in your mind?"

Storm was drinking in her loveliness as a man who has been in a punishment cell might drink in a vista of green fields and brooks and misty hills. But his voice was controlled.

"Obviously," he said, "I've had to start a new life."

"Was there ever any question about my loving you?"

"I didn't know who you loved. Since my trip to the electric chair, I haven't thought much of those old things. Why not call it a closed book?"

Corrine Brangwyn gave him a look of utter desolation. "We stood together against the world before. I can't see why things have got to be changed. I've been trying to go it alone. Things aren't dead in you any more than they are in me. You were victimized by the same man who is now trying to victimize me. I feel beaten. I just can't stand any more. Are you going to let him send me to the electric chair too?"

"Who?" Storm snapped.

"Has there ever been a moment's doubt that Elery Gans killed Burke Nally and shifted the blame to you?"

"Can you prove that?" Storm cried.

"Andy, I can't prove anything. I was sure he had murdered Burke, and I was sure he deliberately framed my brother, to have him out of his way and to disgrace him in my uncle's eyes. He is a great horrible spider spinning a web so cleverly that no one realizes it is a web. You see? I had absolutely no one to turn to but you. I knew that you would not rest until you had found the man who killed Burke. You must have suspected Gans."

"I am not ready."

"But you did suspect Gans?"

THE lawyer's answer was a deliberate evasion. "I thought you were under arrest."

"I was. They locked me in my room."

"Who?"

"Pat Wren, the chief of the Steel City homicide squad. I climbed out my bathroom window and slid down an eavespipe."

Corrine Brangwyn lowered her head and placed her fingers against her temples. Her voice came, muffled: "I feel so tired and sick; I'm beaten, Andy. Gans has built up a case against me stronger than the case against you. I've always given Uncle Josh his afternoon tea. It had become a kind of ceremony. Every afternoon at five, I'd bring it to him in his study, and we would have tea there."

"Did Elery Gans have tea with you?"

She nodded wearily.

"Always. This afternoon, I made some little iced cup-cakes. It was the cook's afternoon out; and I swear, Andy, that Gans had planned it down to the smallest detail. That's why he is so dangerous and so successful with his crimes. He neglects nothing. He was in and out of the kitchen a dozen times while I was making those cakes. I made a dozen of them. I paid no attention to him when he came in and hovered around, because I detest him so I never glance at him if I can help it.

"When I took the tea-things up to Uncle Joshua's study, Gans was there. Both of them looked pale. There was something in the air. I was sure they had been quarreling. Uncle Joshua's eyes looked queer, and he kept glancing at Elery Gans all through tea. They were suspicious looks."

"Are you sure," Storm broke in, "you weren't imagining that?"

"I'm sure," Corrine Brangwyn said firmly. "There had been this thing in the air between them for days. My theory is that my uncle had discovered, or was on the verge of discovering, something that Gans had done. I think that was Gans' motive for killing him."

"Let's have facts," Storm said, "not theories, Corrine."

"Well—then I'd better go back a little," Corrine said. "Ever since Burke was killed, Uncle Joshua has been very moody and abstracted. He was so proud of Burke. Burke was not merely his son; he was a god that my uncle worshiped. He aged terribly after Burke's death. He became absent-minded—just a doddering old man. When he testified against Seth and identified the bonds as some he had owned, he hardly knew what he was saying. But in spite of his senility, he was beginning to suspect that Gans was back of it."

"Did he ever tell you so?" Storm asked.

"He told me a number of times that he was sorry he had testified against Seth. Last night at dinner he looked up at me and said: 'I don't think your brother stole those bonds.' I asked him why he had let Seth go to prison. And he said: 'My head doesn't feel right, Corrine. We'll discuss this again.'"

"Was Gans present then?"

"Yes. And I'm sure he realized that if he did not kill my uncle, his whole scheme would be spoiled."

"Just what was this scheme?" Storm asked.

"To get control of my uncle's fortune. The first step was to kill Burke. The next was to ruin Seth's reputation. The third was somehow to get me out of the way. The fourth would have been to kill Uncle Joshua. Hasn't he done all four?"

"What happened this afternoon at tea?"

"I'm trying to remember. Gans, as you know, was always fussing around Uncle Joshua—waiting on him, fetching him things, making him comfortable, doing a thousand and one things to ingratiate himself. All I remember about this afternoon is that I poured my uncle's tea. He drank it. Suddenly he got up from the table with his eyes queer and his mouth all twisted—and dropped dead!"

"How about those cakes?"

"Uncle Joshua didn't touch them."

"Did anyone else?"

"No. I never eat anything at tea. The instant Uncle Joshua toppled over, Gans accused me of having poisoned the cup-cakes out of revenge for Uncle Joshua's having sent Seth to prison. That's what he told the police. He said he wouldn't put it beneath me to've put poison into the cakes. When my uncle fell, Gans snatched up the plate and ran into his office with them. He said he was going to have them analyzed. I ran into his office after him and knocked the plate out of his hand. I wanted one of those cup-cakes too. He hit me in the shoulder with his fist, and I kicked him in the shin. I grabbed one of the cakes and ran out and hid it in my room. Then I went to the kitchen and got the four that I'd left there and hid them with the other one."

"Didn't anyone," Storm asked, "call a doctor?"

"I did—then. At least, I tried. When I picked up the receiver, I heard Gans' voice. He was in his office, calling the police headquarters in Steel City, asking them to send detectives right out. As soon as he'd finished, I called a doctor. Then I ran back to Uncle Joshua's study. I suspected that Gans had dropped something into his tea. I wanted to make sure. But the cup, saucer and spoon were gone. I've got the cakes here."

CORRINE BRANGWYN removed from a pocket of her white coveralls a baking-powder tin. Removing the lid, she dumped out onto her knees several small round objects wrapped in waxed paper. There was a green ribbon around one of them.

"That one," she said, "is the one I got from Gans. The others were in the kitchen."

"Let's sift this down," Storm suggested. "Your theory would be that while you were making the cup-cakes Gans put poison into them while you weren't looking. He expected your uncle to eat at least one cake. When your uncle did not eat a cake—"

"I forgot to say," Corrine interrupted him, "that Gans repeatedly urged my uncle to eat a cup-cake."

"But your uncle wasn't hungry. When your uncle did not eat any of the cakes, Gans found a way to put poison into his tea—presumably, the same kind of poison he put into the cakes, so suspicion would be attached to you."

"Yes," Corrine said angrily. "And when the police came, the first thing he told them was that my uncle had eaten two of the cakes—and suddenly dropped dead."

"Yet you say you saw Gans do nothing suspicious while your uncle was drinking his tea, or before he drank it."

"I saw something green flash in his hand."

Jimmy, drinking in every word of it, was so startled that he almost made an exclamation. At an early period

of Anthony Storm's trial, something had been mentioned about a flash, or a glint, of something green in Elery Gans' hand when the four famous highballs were being passed around in the locker-room of the Ordway Country Club, but there had been no further mention of the green flash or glint.

"What," Storm asked, "did this thing look like?"

"I don't know. All I caught was the flash of something green."

"When did you see it?"

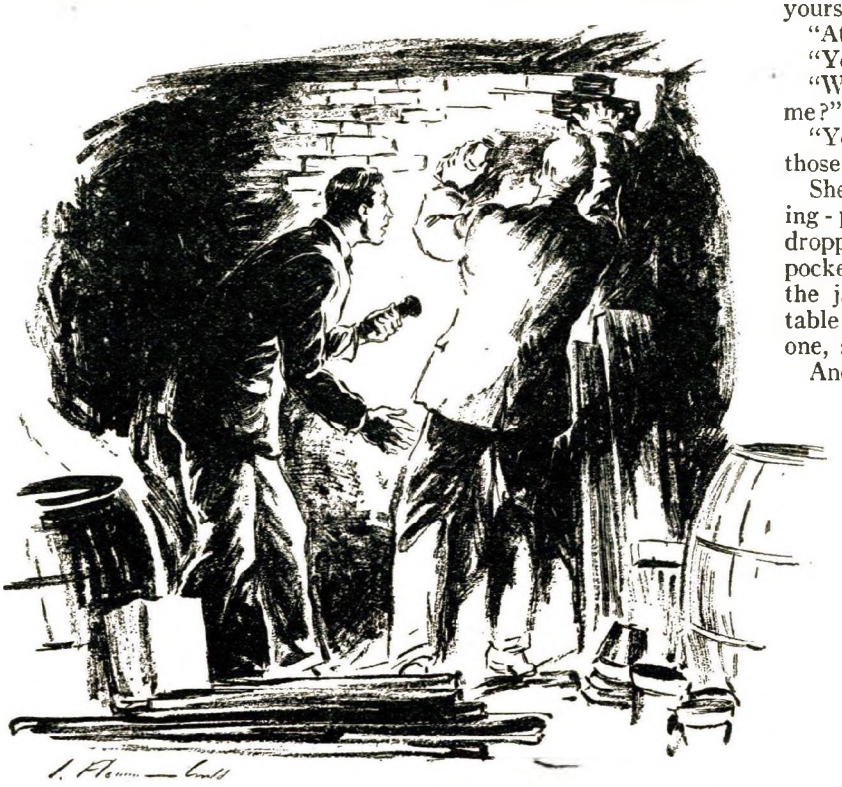
"Just before my uncle drank the tea."

"You believe, do you, that Gans dropped poison in your uncle's tea?"

"Why else did he get rid of the cup, saucer and spoon?" Corrine promptly answered; and when Anthony Storm said nothing, she cried: "Andy, what am I to do?"

Still the lawyer did not answer. He paced to the end of the terrace and returned with his hands clasped behind him. The girl looked up at him imploringly, twisting her hands.

"Andy!" she wailed. "You won't let them send me to the chair!"



"Handle them with a handkerchief. There'll be fingerprints."

Storm looked down at her with his brows knit, his eyes narrow, his cigar clamped in a corner of his mouth.

"What can you prove?" he said finally. "Supposing we find poison in the cup-cakes? What does that prove?"

"Doesn't it prove that my theory is right?"

"Would it prove to an impartial jury that you are innocent of killing your uncle?"

Corrine seemed to go limp again.

"Andy," she said quietly, "will you advise me what to do?"

"Yes," he answered. "I would advise you to retain the best criminal lawyer in the United States. A man like Darrow might get you off. He might not even touch the case."

"I don't want Darrow. I don't want anyone but you. You have a greater knowledge of me, my uncle and Gans than any other lawyer in the world. I want you to defend me. If anyone can get me off, you can. And it will give you your chance to find out whether or not Gans did kill Burke Nally."

"I'd rather have you give the case to some established firm. I have no organization. I'm not prepared. I'm rusty."

"How could I pay them?" the girl asked. "I haven't any money. I don't hesitate to ask you, because I wouldn't hesitate to do as much or more for you, if you asked for it. My uncle's new will, I understand, leaves me nothing but a small annuity. A case like this is apt to cost fifty thousand dollars."

"It isn't a question of money," Storm stopped her.

"Then you'll take the case?" the girl asked eagerly.

"Not unless I can find actual, material evidence to prove that Gans did kill your uncle."

Corrine said wearily: "Very well, Andy. What shall I do?"

"Give yourself up at once. It will look better than having your arrest appear to be a capture. Surrender yourself."

"At Graymoor?"

"Yes."

"Will you fly back with me?"

"Yes. Let me have those cup-cakes."

She gave him the baking-powder tin. He dropped it into his coat pocket. He reached into the jade humidor on the table for a cigar, selected one, struck a match.

And in the flare of it, he saw Jimmy. Corrine saw him at the same time. She gave a little scream.

"How long," Storm menacingly asked, "have you been hiding here?"

"All the time," Jimmy Mullen said weakly.

"Then you heard every word that was said?"

"Yes sir, I did."

Jimmy, stepping reluctantly out into the light, looked very confused and sheepish.

"Who is this man?" Corrine Brangwyn demanded.

"A reporter," Storm said, not taking his cold, hard eyes from Jimmy's. "I can do one of two things with you," he said. "I can have you locked up here until you lose some of your ardor for collecting information—or I can take you along. But if I took you along and you escaped, a great many things which I don't want published might find their way onto tomorrow's front pages."

"Let me make a suggestion," Jimmy said eagerly. "You know very well, Mr. Storm, that modern murder cases are as often as not tried in the newspapers long before they go into the courtroom. Why not let me fix up a story that will give the public the most favorable impression of your client's side of it? After all, I've got a big exclusive story here. I'm the only reporter in the world who's been able to get to you. And I'm the only reporter in the world who's been able to interview Miss Brangwyn. Let me handle this. Believe me, Mr. Storm—and Miss Brangwyn—I know my headlines!"

Miss Brangwyn was still staring at him dubiously. She looked for further assurance from Storm. He gave it. He said:

"We'll forgive Jimmy for eavesdropping. What he says about shaping up the story for impressing the public is sound. Jimmy is trustworthy. I'll vouch for him."

"Very well," she said. "The front cockpit holds two."

Jimmy did not care for airplanes. He had been up, but the sensation of flying was never comforting to a

tender, rebellious stomach. The flight in itself would, of course, make a hot front-page story. Flown from the estate of the Mystery Man of Malvern to the estate of Joshua Nally by the girl who would, in tomorrow's papers, be accused of murdering him!

Jimmy wondered, as he climbed into the front cockpit beside the lawyer, if Storm was as convinced of Corrine Brangwyn's guilt as he was. There was absolutely no doubt in Jimmy's mind that the lovely, notorious Corrine Brangwyn had put the cyanide of potassium in those cakes. How did she expect Andy Storm or anyone else to get her out of that tight corner?

CHAPTER VI

THAT flight through the blackness would always remain in Jimmy Mullen's mind a wild and unreal adventure. He recalled the story of the army photographer, in the early days of the war, who had been ordered to go up in a plane and take aerial photographs. Full of misgivings, he had said to the flyer to whom he had been assigned, "This is my first time up." And the flyer had answered, "It's my second."

"Put your hands up, you guys!" A flashlight beamed on them.

How much flying, Jimmy was anxious to know, had Corrine Brangwyn done? How safe was he in a plane at night with a girl of the fainting kind at the controls?

The engine roared. The golden bulb over the terrace slid off to the right. There was a bumping. The engine roared more loudly. The lighted mansion slid past, then sank down and turned completely over. Jimmy clutched his stomach. He presently summoned up enough courage to look overside. After all, he had to give his readers some kind of word-picture of this momentous flight.

Great black masses—trees—flowed rapidly arear. He wondered if a star rushing through space felt like this. Mysterious pinpoints of light far below winked jovially at him. Suddenly the plane jerked. Jimmy was thrown heavily against his companion.

Ahead of him he saw a great panorama of rippling lights. They danced and shimmered. They all but sang. That sparkling plain would be Steel City. The dark band cleaving it down the middle would be the Ramadan River. A moment later, the lights were dwindling. Looking down, Jimmy saw the eternal fire burning like an incandescent orange atop the war memorial. It became an eerie gigantic eye. It vanished.

The plane rushed on through the night. Steel City dwindled; became a pale glow on the horizon astern. Lights became few and far-spaced. Jimmy thought he recognized the village of Blue River, near which the Nally estate was situated, because it was the first town of any size southward of Steel City. His guess was confirmed a moment later when the landing-lights flashed on and the plane nosed down. The searchlights on the leading edge of the lower wing cut swiftly across trees, flicked across a red barn which had been converted into a hangar, then settled for a moment on a large gray house which stood lonely and somehow sinister in a grove of tall, somber pines.

Graymoor!

The scene was all dazzlingly lighted of a sudden, and Jimmy knew that Corrine Brangwyn had released a parachute flare. The plane wheeled. One wing slanted at the earth. Wind screamed in the wires. A cold, clammy hand seemed to clutch Jimmy's stomach. The field by the barn rushed up to smite him, vanished. There was a gentle jounce, and a harsh scraping as wheels and tail-skid touched the ground.

A perfect landing.

The black plane came to a stop near the converted barn. The landing lights went dark. The engine, with a final click, died. Jimmy heard a scraping behind him; looked back, and saw Miss Brangwyn scrambling down.

"Wait for me here," she said. "I want to take off these coveralls."

Jimmy heard her running toward the hangar, then the distant squeaking of a hinge. He said, in a low voice to his companion:

"It was mighty kind of you to let me come along."

"I wanted you," Storm said. "I may need you. This is apt to be pretty difficult for me, and I need an unprejudiced viewpoint. You might tell me now what you think."

Jimmy felt uncomfortable. But he spoke frankly.

"For one thing," he said, "you're still in love with that girl."

"Didn't I conceal it any better than that?"

"No sir."

"Then let's take up the other thing. You can understand why I'm a little apt to be biased."

"Whether or not she murdered her uncle?" Jimmy said bluntly.

"What's your opinion?"

"I think she did. I think her whole story is phony. I think she put cyanide into those cakes out of revenge. And I think she came flying over to you in a state of hysterics. She thinks she can pass the buck to Gans. She thinks your presence in the courtroom—plus her beauty—will sway the hardest-boiled jury in the world."

"But her story holds water on one point—that flash of green that I saw and that she saw in Gans' hand."

"Maybe she faked that."

"If she did, who killed Burke Nally?"

"Maybe her brother did. Her brother's serving time now for being a crook, isn't he? Maybe her brother poisoned young Nally and she poisoned old Nally—to get the Nally fortune. Anyhow, that's my theory."

He heard Storm sigh wearily. Then a short, sharp scream from the hangar caused them to sit up quickly. The scream occurred again.

The two men scrambled out of the plane and ran toward the hangar. As they came near it, a pocket flashlight sent a cool white beam upon the figure of a tall, broad-shouldered man in blue, and a girl in white, who were struggling.

The white light glinted on chromium-plated steel. There was a click and a man's gruff voice said: "I've got her, Pete. Hold that light steady."

Corrine cried: "I wasn't trying to get away."

"Yeah?" the big man growled skeptically. "Mebby you wasn't tryin' to make a break an hour ago when you slid down that pipe outside your bathroom window."

"I went to consult my lawyer. He's out there in that plane."

She reminded Jimmy, with the flashlight on her, of an actress. She was no longer wearing the coveralls, but a slim white silk dress, golden stockings, white shoes. Her face was almost as white as the dress. Her eyes looked black and very large. Even with handcuffs on, she was like a princess—an extremely dangerous princess.

The light suddenly flashed to Jimmy's face, and Storm's. One of the men exclaimed:

"Good Gawd! It's Andy Storm!"

One of the two found a wall switch and turned on a powerful bulb. Jimmy recognized one of the men as Mike Halpern, of the Steel City homicide squad. The other he recognized as merely a "flatfoot"—Pete Something-or-other. Mike Halpern, a big, red-faced man with beady blue eyes, was staring at Storm.

"Is—is that right, Mr. Storm? Did Miss Brangwyn fly over to Malvern and fly you back?"

"That's right," Storm affirmed.

"Can you beat that, Pete?" Mike Halpern marveled. "She goes for her lawyer in her plane just like you or I would take a taxi! Who is this guy with you, Mr. Storm? His face is very familiar."

"He is acting more or less as my bodyguard," Storm answered. "What are you going to do with Miss Brangwyn?"

"Turn her over to the Chief."

"Is Pat Wren out here?"

"Yes sir. Up at the house."

"Who else?"

"The prosecutin' attorney, some fingerprint experts and some city chemists. They've turned the kitchen into a regular laboratory. Say! Chief Wren is cert'n'y gonna be surprised to see you, Mr. Storm. The last time we saw you—"

"Any reporters?" Storm curtly interrupted.

"No sir. We've got guards posted at all entrances, and Pete and me are here to give the air to any reporters who try to fly in. Pete, you stay here while I take Miss Brangwyn to the Chief."

"Are handcuffs necessary?" Corrine Brangwyn asked.

"Yes ma'am. There is a general alarm out for you. The Chief thought you were headin' for Mexico or Canada."

Mike Halpern led the way through the hangar and up a winding path bordered by dwarf cedars. The handcuffs on the girl's wrists clinked.

Jimmy's heart was thumping with excitement. Within those cold gray walls, what mysteries stalked!

CHAPTER VII

MIKE HALPERN put his beefy shoulder to an oak door and twisted a bronze knob with a mighty hand. It opened as heavily, as silently, as the door of a bank vault.

An odor of chemicals smote Jimmy's sensitive nostrils as he stepped into the gloomy arched hall. A white-faced maid in a blue-and-white service dress was seated in a chair against the wall, staring straight ahead as if she were hypnotized. The buzz of men's voices came from a room down the hall.

"In the library," Mike said.

A TALL man of military bearing with a crisp white mustache and eyes of the color and hardness of blue marbles came through a doorway, saw the advancing group and halted.

He looked sharply at Miss Brangwyn, stared at Storm, dismissed Jimmy Mullen with a brief glance and looked inquiringly at Mike Halpern. Jimmy dropped into the background. He did not wish to be recognized by the chief of the homicide bureau.

Then Pat Wren said harshly:

"What is the meaning of this, Halpern?"

"They just come in in her ship," Mike Halpern answered. "Not five minutes ago, Chief."

The Chief of the homicide bureau leveled his cold, hard eyes on Corrine.

"I trusted you not to run away," he said. "You have put me to a great deal of inconvenience."

"I did not run away," the girl answered indignantly. "And I'm sorry if I put greater importance on my life and liberty than on your convenience, Mr. Wren. I wanted to consult and retain the best qualified lawyer I could find. I got Mr. Storm."

"Come in here, please."

Jimmy was the last one to enter the library. He caught an impression of a comfortable dark room lined with books, of a black fireplace in which logs burned and crackled. Two men were seated before the fire. They arose. One was thick-set, forty, with a large, square-shaped head, a small black mustache, a thin, cruel mouth, a fighter's jaw. Jimmy recognized him as Maitland Hamp, the district attorney. The other man was Elery Gans. This was the man Corrine Brangwyn accused of murdering her uncle. Jimmy had seen Elery Gans at Storm's trial and Seth Brangwyn's trial. He was more firmly convinced than ever that Gans was not capable of murder.

Elery Gans was not, by any stretch of the imagination, the criminal type. He was a slender man of medium height who carried himself with a slight stoop. His hair, thinning at the temples, was mouse-colored. Mild hazel eyes peered out through the thick lenses of tortoise-rimmed spectacles which gave him the air of an absent-minded professor.

The district attorney was staring coldly at Anthony Storm. Surprise was written vividly in his hard, square face. He took a step forward, then stopped, clamped his thin lips together, placed his feet apart, and put his hands behind his back.

Elery Gans at sight of Storm, smiled, and came quickly over to him with outstretched hand.

"Andy," he said, in a mild, pleasant voice, "it's good to see you again. I'm so glad that you've recovered your health."

"Health?" Storm repeated, releasing his hand.

"Miss Brangwyn," Maitland Hamp stiffly asked, "where have you been?"

The girl gave her explanation in a tired voice. "I flew over to Malvern for Andy. I knew he would help me if anyone could."

The district attorney flashed a look at Storm.

"Are you planning to represent this girl, Mr. Storm?"

Storm shrugged and said, "I haven't yet decided."

"You will be making a great mistake if you undertake

anything of the kind, Mr. Storm. You will also be making a mistake if you enter a criminal court in a professional capacity. This girl, we are firmly convinced, killed her uncle. I am obliged to tell you now that that old charge against you can at any time be reopened."

Storm lit a cigar with steady hands. He puffed and said: "I'll bear that in mind."

"Silence, please." Pat Wren had seated himself at the desk against one wall of the library. There was a French-type telephone in his hand. He called the Steel City police headquarters, and when the connection was made said: "We have the Brangwyn girl. Never mind."

Jimmy, in the doorway, was watching Anthony Storm and Elery Gans. Gans was filling a briar pipe. Storm was looking, it seemed to Jimmy, at Gans' feet. Jimmy, following his eyes, saw what appeared to be a streak of dried mud on the cuff of Gans' left trouser-leg. As Jimmy watched, Storm dropped his cigar to the rug, and stooping down, made something of a business of recovering it.

The unpleasant silence was broken by Storm, who said: "There seems to be a unanimous opinion that Miss Brangwyn murdered her uncle. Whether I take her case or not, we have got to take the attitude that she is innocent until she is proved guilty. You all believe she is guilty, don't you?"

"I'm convinced of it," the district attorney said.

"There's no question about it in my mind," Pat Wren said.

Storm looked at Elery Gans. "How about you, Elery?"

THE secretary to the late Joshua Nally sadly shook his head.

"I'm afraid, Andy, that all indications point to her. It seems incredible, but what else are we to accept?"

"Why," the girl burst out hotly, "do all indications point to me? Who but you is pointing them? You're lying to cover yourself! You murdered my uncle! Did you tell these men what happened to the cup and saucer my uncle used?"

Elery Gans looked distressed. He said: "Mr. Hamp, can't these unpleasantnesses be avoided?"

"We examined the cup and saucer," the district attorney said. "There was no trace of cyanide in either, but Dan Hoyt found enough cyanide in every one of the cakes you made to kill several men. There was enough cyanide in your uncle's stomach to have killed five men."

"Have you proved," Storm asked, "that it was she who introduced the cyanide into the cakes?"

"We have sufficient proof."

"Have you traced the purchase of cyanide to Miss Brangwyn?"

"Not yet," Pat Wren answered. "I'm having the records of every drug-store in a radius of a hundred miles gone over. I claim she didn't buy it in a drug-store, but in a photographic store. Miss Brangwyn has gone in for amateur motion-picture photography. She develops her own films."

"Cyanide of potassium is not used in any photographic process that I know of," Corrine interrupted.

"Where is your dark-room?" Storm asked her.

"In the cellar."

Storm asked Pat Wren if he had looked into the dark-room.

"Yes."

"Did you find cyanide?"

"We found ferrocyanide. It's an entirely different chemical. There was no cyanide in her dark-room."

"Have you found the container in which Miss Brangwyn kept the cyanide you accuse her of having used?"

"We have," the district attorney answered. "A bottle of cyanide of potassium in very strong solution was found hidden away at the back of a pantry shelf."

"Did you look for fingerprints?"

"That was a routine matter. There were plenty of fingerprints on it—all Miss Brangwyn's."

"I want to see that bottle!" Corrine cried.

"And I want a word with the chemists," Storm added.

Jimmy stood aside, making himself as inconspicuous as possible, as the group moved out of the room toward the kitchen. He followed them down the hall, trailed them through a large vaulted dining-room and was the last to enter the large kitchen.

It was a large, old-fashioned kitchen. Copper pots and kettles hung gleaming on hooks. The air was moist and thick with chemical smells.

Three chemists were busy over an array of paraphernalia which was arranged on a long, low table near the coal stove. Jimmy got an impression of test-tube racks, retorts, bottles of reagents, a glass retort used as a miniature still. On a square of black paper covered with cabalistic chalk-marks, stood a slender blue glass bottle with a cut glass stopper.

"That," Maitland Hamp said, "is the bottle." And Jimmy could hear him dramatically introducing it before a packed courtroom as material exhibit B for the State.

Corrine gasped: "Andy! That's one of my perfume bottles! I must have thrown it in the wastebasket in my bathroom a week ago!"

"There are no fingerprints on that bottle," the district attorney said firmly, "but your own, Miss Brangwyn."

Storm put in dryly: "Corrine, they seem to have you neatly mounted on a cork, don't they? Why don't you go to your room and let me handle this?"

"I'm taking her away in five minutes," said Chief Wren. "Believe me, Mr. Storm, you are wasting your time. I've got enough evidence on this girl to send her to the chair right now."

"The trouble is," Storm answered, "I am skeptical of all this evidence. Please keep her here a while longer. I want to look around."

"You won't," Pat Wren said, "find a damned thing. My men have been over this house and the grounds with a fine-tooth comb. —All right. Mike, take her to her room —and don't let her slide down eavespipes."

"Where," Storm asked, "is the cellar door?"

"Right there. We've been over every inch of that too."

Storm turned to Elery Gans. "Elery," he said pleasantly, "have you been out of this house since Mr. Nally died?"

The dead man's secretary blinked at him through his thick lenses. "No, Andy. I haven't left the house."

Storm took Jimmy Mullen's arm.

"Come with me," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

JIMMY, wondering, followed the lawyer down the cellar stairs. It was a large cellar, and it had evidently been modernized not many years before. Floors and walls were of smooth concrete. At the far end stood a modern steam-heating plant equipped with what appeared to be an automatic oil burner. At the other end was a new pine door set in the wall. The door was a few inches ajar.

Beyond was the dark-room, which, Storm said, had once been the wine cellar. It was filled now with neatly ordered shelves of chemicals, round cans of cinematographic film, developing tanks and a printing machine. They inspected the dark-room and went out again.

Jimmy asked Storm what he was looking for.

"Mold. White mold. The kind found in damp cellars."

"This," Jimmy pointed out, "is not a damp cellar. What will it prove if we find mold?"

"Sometime recently," Storm answered, "Gans rubbed his left foot and the cuff of his left pants leg against white mold. I'm just curious to find where that happened."

AT this Jimmy chuckled. "You sound like *Sherlock Holmes*, Mr. Storm. Will finding a spot of white mold prove that at five this afternoon Mr. Gans dropped cyanide in Joshua Nally's teacup?"

"It might."

"Don't you think that that blue bottle up there absolutely hangs the job on Miss Brangwyn?"

"I do not," Storm answered. "I am proceeding on the theory, until I am proved I'm wrong, that Miss Brangwyn is telling the truth—that Elery Gans committed the murder and shifted the blame to Miss Brangwyn by taking the most elaborate pains with the most trivial details. You keep your theory and I'll keep mine."

"What you mean," Jimmy said, "is that you want to convince yourself that Miss Brangwyn is innocent. And the easiest way to do it is to prove that Gans did it all. All right. It won't be hard to stick to my theory. How do you explain the blue bottle?"

"I say Gans picked it out of her wastebasket, and either wore gloves or used a piece of paper so he wouldn't leave fingerprints. If I were a detective, which I am not, I would, whenever possible, look about the scene for an expression of the suspect's character traits—his or her outstanding character trait. I know that Elery Gans is a precisian. I know that he has no imagination. No detail is too trivial for him."

"What makes you say he has no imagination?"

"I say that he killed Burke Nally and Joshua Nally by the same method—cyanide of potassium in something to drink—a Scotch highball in one case, a cup of tea in the other. Aside from the question of his imagination, it is a known fact that a man who is successful with one form of murder will, if he is called upon to commit another murder, often employ the same method. Ever hear of the man who killed his wives, one after another, by drowning them in bathtubs? The method was so successful he didn't bother thinking up new methods."

Jimmy would have argued this point at length, but he was curious about the mold.

"How do you know that stuff on Gans' pants leg is mold?"

"I've been in prison," Storm answered dryly. "I know mold."

So Jimmy started at one end of the large cellar and Storm started at the other, and though they searched it thoroughly, they found no mold. From end to end, the cellar was as dry as bone. But Storm was not satisfied.

They went upstairs again, and on up to the bedroom floor.

Mike Halpern lounged in a bedroom doorway with a black cigar, dead, poking from one corner of his large mouth. Corrine was lying face down on her bed. At the sound of Storm's voice, she rolled over and sat up. She still wore the handcuffs. Her cheeks were tear-stained.

"Andy!" she cried. "What have you found?"

"Nothing. I want to ask you a few questions. When did you take up motion-picture photography?"

"Shortly after I took up flying."

"That was after my arrest."

"Yes, Andy. I wanted something to take up my time and occupy my mind. At first, I didn't care whether my plane crashed or not. Then it became a release from—everything. After I'd been flying a while, one of my instructors got me interested in aërial photography. He'd been an aërial photographer in the war and it sounded tremendously interesting. So I took it up. I had a darkroom built in the old wine-cellar. Then I got interested in aërial motion-picture photography. I wanted to do everything, so I bought a printing machine and developing tank for printing and developing positive films from negatives."

"Did Gans ever go into your dark-room?"

"Often."

"Did he ever buy your chemicals?"

"Never. I bought them myself from Grosset and Lynch, in Steel City."

"Did you ever buy cyanide of potassium?"

"Never. As I said in the library, so far as I know, there's no use for cyanide of potassium in photography. I used a great deal of ferrocyanide, but the two are entirely different chemicals."

"What is ferrocyanide used for?"

"To thin dense films. In taking a picture, especially an aërial picture, the great danger is overexposure. An overexposed film comes out of the developer very black-looking. When this happens, you run the film through a bath of ferrocyanide, which cuts down the blackness. Ferrocyanide is known as a reducer."

"Do you use much of this stuff?"

"Not as much as at first. I don't overexpose films so much."

"Are you certain, Corrine, that you've never purchased cyanide?"

"Never."

"Is ferrocyanide a deadly poison?"

"Not to compare with cyanide."

Storm was looking at her with a frown, as if puzzled; and Jimmy wondered what was behind these questions. He felt sorry for Storm—it was so obvious he was in love with her. If Corrine loved him, Jimmy was sorry for her too. Never had a pair of lovers faced a more threatening future.

"What," Storm asked, "can you tell me of Gans' interests?"

"He has only three—golf, money and Italy."

The lawyer's eyes brightened. "Italy?"

"He's always been mad about Italian art, literature, history, ever since he spent that winter in Florence and Rome with my uncle a couple of years ago. He has a library of rare editions on Florence alone."

"Is there any place here," Storm asked, "where he might have gone to hide, say, a bottle of cyanide—where he could have scuffed against mold—white mold?"

CORRINE stared at him incredulously. "Andy, are you serious?" she asked.

"Very serious. Gans says he has not been out of this house. Yet I saw mold on his left shoe and his left trouser leg. I want to know where that mold came from. Maybe it's a fantastic idea, but it's aroused my curiosity. Is there another cellar?"

"No, only the one. But why should he have had another bottle? Why not the blue bottle that was found in the pantry—covered with my fingerprints?"

"We must assume," Storm answered, "that he poured cyanide into your uncle's tea out of some kind of small container. Knowing his character, knowing that no detail is too slight to be unimportant to him, we assume that he somehow disposed of that container. He would know that this house would be searched from cellar to attic by experts. Would he throw it out a window—or throw it away anywhere on these grounds? I think not."

"Andy," the girl said, "I think you are being fantastic.

The container he used could not have been larger than an eye-dropper. Wasn't it in the palm of his hand? A hole kicked in the ground with his toe would have been large enough."

"I'm not saying what an ordinary man would have done," Storm argued. "I'm saying what Gans would have done. I say he is not only a master of detail, but a slave to detail. And I'm looking for white mold."

"I can't think," Corrine said, "of a place where there might be white mold. It would have to be damp and dank, wouldn't it?" She stared at him with her large dark eyes. A vertical groove formed between them. She nipped her lip between her teeth. Jimmy, attending all this with shrewd young eyes, was growing impatient. He admired Anthony Storm for trying to build a defense for this girl out of small shreds. Yet the small shreds, when you pieced them together, meant absolutely nothing. It was simply too bad that this ill-fated pair loved each other. But no matter how much Storm loved Corrine Brangwyn, he could not undo the murder of her uncle.

The girl's eyes had suddenly brightened. She exclaimed: "The murphy vault!"

"What," Storm asked, "is a murphy vault?"

"It's an old, joking name they used to give, years ago, to potato cellars. When this was a farm, they stored potatoes in the murphy vault, so they wouldn't freeze during the winter. I haven't been near it in years—since I visited here as a girl. Go out the back way to the stables. Beyond them, on the far side of the paddock, you'll see a little hill with a rather steep face. You'll find a green door set pretty far in. That's it. The murphy vault goes into the hill perhaps fifteen feet. As I remember it, the vault was always damp and moldy."

"Did Gans ever mention this murphy vault to you?"

"No, Andy." She looked up at him with her handcuffed hands in her lap. Huskily: "Have—have you decided to take my case?"

Storm glanced at Jimmy and surprised in the reporter's eyes a hard, rebellious glint.

"I have," he said. . . .

When they were in the hall, Jimmy abandoned self-restraint and said: "Mr. Storm, you told me to be frank: I think you're making a big mistake. If you go into court to defend Miss Brangwyn, it's going to excite a terrific amount of public interest. Every newspaper in the country will play it to the limit. It will stir up more excitement than the Hall-Mills case. If you don't get a verdict for Miss Brangwyn, you're sunk."

"But I intend to get a verdict for her."

Storm was looking at Jimmy with dark, thoughtful eyes, in which Jimmy could have sworn he detected a twinkle of amusement.

Jimmy plunged on: "How?" he cried. "By buying judges, bribing the jury, using perjured witnesses and pulling a flock of stunts?"

"Do you believe I'd be capable of stooping to any trick to free a client who I'm convinced is innocent?"

It was dangerous territory, but Jimmy said recklessly: "You told me to be frank. Okay! Sure, I do! And I'll go farther and say that this isn't what Martin Tulifer left you that ten million for!"

Storm did not look angry or even resentful. Jimmy, looking at him, was surprised to see him slowly smile.

"I brought you along," the lawyer said, "to scrap with me. Keep it up!"

Jimmy laughed. "Don't worry! I'll keep it up. What do you expect to find out there in that murphy sarcophagus?—a motion picture of Elery Gans in the act of spilling cyanide into the old man's teacup?"

CHAPTER IX

THE inquiring beam of the pocket flashlight in Anthony Storm's hand played on the shabby green door set in the side of the little hill. A fine drizzle was slanting down on him and Jimmy. A raw wind whispered in the branches of the tall black pines which, the reporter was certain, were the only kind of trees that Joshua Nally had cared about.

There was something a little disturbing about all this to Jimmy. That stealthy walk from the house had put his nerves on edge. He was inclined to jump at sounds, inclined to look uneasily behind him.

What was in that vault? The word had suddenly acquired very unpleasant meanings. It looked, indeed, very much like a family vault in a graveyard. Without stretching his imagination, Jimmy could visualize tiers of caskets, each in its niche, bronze and black and plain varnished oak.

Storm was examining the door and the ground about it. He ran the beam of the light along the edges of the door. Cobwebs, dirty gray with dust, seemed not to have been disturbed.

Jimmy said, in a whispered explosion: "Listen, Mr. Storm: this is the bunk. Let's let the dead alone."

Storm smiled slightly.

"Are you nervous?"

"I swear, somebody is stalking us back there. I can feel eyes in the small of my back. We should have brought Pat Wren along."

He jumped slightly as Storm gave the old green door a kick. It flew open noisily, slammed against a wall.

The fine white beam leaped in, played along damp walls of red brick, arched overhead.

"Mold!" Jimmy exclaimed. "Lousy with mold!"

Storm went in, and Jimmy gingerly followed. On their left was a pile of rotting planks, black with moisture, frosty-white at the inner ends.

"More mold!" Jimmy said.

"Hold this light."

"Here are the fingerprints!" Hoyt exclaimed. "Plenty! These are pretty familiar, Mr. Wren."

Jimmy accepted the light. It required both his hands to hold the light steady. Why, he demanded of himself, was he so nervous? After all, this was nothing but an abandoned storage-place for Irish potatoes—plain spuds. He could not, he argued, get over a spooky feeling at being alone with Anthony Storm. As long as he lived, that terrifying image of Storm in the electric chair would come flashing unbidden into his mind to unsteady him.

"Look here!" Storm snapped.

Holding the light as steady as he could, Jimmy looked down. Storm was facing the left-hand wall. Below him, at his left, was the pile of lumber. By shifting his left foot, Storm rubbed it against the white mold which grew in a fungus at the plank-ends.

He stepped quickly aside. "Hold the light down. There!" The beam flickered on a white streak on the cuff of Storm's left trouser leg. There was some of the stuff on his left shoe.

"Give me that light!"

Jimmy gladly surrendered the flashlight. His insides were doing a jig. There was something almost uncanny about all this. He wildly wondered if that six seconds in hell as, the tabloids called it, had given Anthony Storm a preternatural sense.

Storm was reaching up on the wall, fumbling at loose bricks.

"Honest," Jimmy panted, "if you pull out one of those bricks, they're all apt to fall in on us. Let's play safe and keep this a potato graveyard!"

The lawyer stepped farther to the right, toward the inner wall of the vault. His exploring fingers seemed to fly like white moths over the bricks.

"Let's give it up," Jimmy suggested. The look on Storm's face, the expression in his eyes, frightened him.

Storm had found a brick looser than its fellows. The brick slid out. Storm was standing on tiptoes. He reached his hand into the oblong aperture. Jimmy would not have been surprised if he had pulled out a human rib.

"Take this!" Storm snapped. "Wait a minute!" He withdrew his hand as if it had been bitten by a scorpion.

"What you got?" Jimmy gasped.

"Bottles! Several of them! And something made of metal!"

He whipped out a handkerchief. "Don't touch these with your hands. Have you a handkerchief?"

"Y-y-yes!" Jimmy stuttered.

"Handle them with your handkerchief. There'll be fingerprints."

He folded the handkerchief about his hand and plunged it into the oblong hole again. It came out with a bottle, which Jimmy tremulously accepted in his own handkerchiefed hand. Another bottle followed. He saw Storm's face beginning to sweat. It glistened in the light thrown back from the wet brick faces.

Storm was pulling out more bricks—three of them. He tossed them to the floor of the vault. His hand came out of the enlarged hole with a porcelain mortar and pestle, then a cast-iron crucible, then a plumber's gasoline blow-torch.

"What's it all about?" Jimmy muttered.

"It's Gans' laboratory."

Jimmy stacked the bottles, the iron objects and the blow-torch on the pile of planks.

"That's all. No!"

The lawyer's handkerchiefed hand appeared again. It contained this time a small square white box. Carefully he removed the lid and played upon its interior with the flashlight beam.

Jimmy felt the hairs on the nape of his neck stir as he stared into the box.

The brightest, largest, most beautiful emerald Jimmy had ever seen lay twinkling and glinting on a white satin cushion in the little box. It measured at least an inch in length by half an inch in width. The flashlight struck brilliant green fire from its highly polished surfaces. Two small diamonds, inset, flashed red and white.

A familiar phrase flashed into Jimmy's mind. He exclaimed: "Something green flashed in his hand!"

He was suddenly so excited he could hardly breathe.

Storm's hand, holding the box, was shaking. He too was the sudden victim of an electrical excitement.

"Yes," Storm said in a strange, harsh voice. "Something green flashed in his hand. This is it."

Jimmy let out his breath. "Look at it closely!" he cried. "It's an owl! Those diamonds are eyes!"

CHAPTER X

STORM poked the amazing green gem with his fingernail. The emerald owl rolled over on its white satin bed, and Jimmy saw a pair of thick, stubby feet. The owl's back was emerald matrix, opaque. There was a round black spot in the middle of it.

"Well, Jimmy," the lawyer said eagerly, "what do you think of your theory now?"

"Me?" Jimmy gasped. "Think? What do you expect me to think with?"

"This must be a container of some kind. That black spot must be a plug that unscrews. It may be full of cyanide."

"How does it work?"

"We'll find out later. Let's look at the rest of this stuff. Did you touch any of it with your bare fingers?"

"No sir. I used a handkerchief with every piece. What's in these bottles?"

Storm held the flashlight close to them. Both bottles were brown and similar to the ones they had seen on the dark-room shelves. The label on one read:

EXSICCATED FERROCYANIDE OF POTASSIUM

On the other was the label:

CARBONATE OF POTASSIUM

"No cyanide?" Jimmy inquired.

"Evidently not. I'll look again." Storm examined the niche again, but it was empty.

He played the light on the iron crucible, the mortar, the pestle and the blow-torch.

"What," Jimmy wanted to know, "are you going to do with this stuff? Chief Wren ought to see it."

"I'm not so sure," said Storm.

"But doesn't it prove what you've been saying? Doesn't it prove that Miss Brangwyn is innocent and Gans is guilty? It certainly does to me."

"You're convinced now, are you?"

"I certainly am. This green owl convinces me. I'd leave the stuff here and get Pat Wren and show him just how we found it. Have a showdown. He's sure to find Gans' fingerprints on it."

"Jimmy, would you take the witness stand and testify as to how we stumbled upon these things?"

"Sure, I would."

"Then I'm going to play a hunch. I don't trust Pat Wren, and I don't trust Maitland Hamp. I'm not saying they're crooked. All I say is that they are so convinced of Miss Brangwyn's guilt that they will hesitate to believe any evidence I produce proving her innocence. They suspect and distrust me. They think there's nothing I wouldn't stoop to, to get her off. My scheme is to take these things to Steel City for a conference with Ben Carewe, who is one of the greatest fingerprint men in America, and Oscar Schlate, the chemist. With your testimony and theirs, I can spring a surprise in court which may completely upset the case against Miss Brangwyn. I am trusting you, you see, to the very limit."

"Yeah," Jimmy said, "but you're holding out on me. What you really mean is, you know damned well Gans could buy both Pat Wren and Maitland Hamp if the cards went against him. They are a pair of high-pressure crooks, and you know it. They'd sell their own sisters if enough jack was involved."

Storm was silent.

"Look here," the reporter said, "why not let me sneak this junk out of here? I'm pretty good at oozing in and out of estates. I can walk to Blue River and grab a taxi. I'll meet you in Steel City. Where does this lane lead to?"

"It's an old wagon-road leading to the Blue River Turnpike," Storm said.

"Let's walk over to the stables and get an empty grain-bag to stow this stuff in," Jimmy suggested. "I'll hike out on this lane and meet you in the lobby of the Astorbilt. Okay?"

Storm hesitated, then agreed to the reporter's suggestions. They crossed the paddock and entered the stable. From a pile of empty sacks, Jimmy selected one and shook the dust out of it. Returning to the potato vault, they carefully stowed the bottles, the mortar, pestle, crucible and blow-torch in it.

"I'll park this stuff safely somewhere," Jimmy said, "and wait in the Astorbilt lobby until you show up." He stopped and stared toward the black mass of the stable.

The light drizzle had turned into cold rain. It was beginning to fall heavily.

"What was that?" Jimmy gasped. . . .

As he spoke, a knife-blade of blue-red flame jetted at them from a spot in the darkness fifty or sixty feet away. It was accompanied by a sharp explosion.

Other blue-red flames jabbed at them. Bullets thudded into the hill behind them.

"Hey!" Jimmy shouted. "Who you shooting at?"

The invisible gunman fired once again. Jimmy heard the bullet as it thumped into the brick wall of the potato vault. He heard a brick fall, then the thud of others. The walls, the ceiling, seemed to be collapsing.

"It's Gans!" Jimmy growled. "That's who it is!"

"You hit?"

"No! You?"

"No."

"What the hell," a gruff voice inquired, "is going on here? Put your hands up, you guys!"

Jimmy lowered the precious sack to the ground and lifted his hands obediently as a flashlight beamed on them. He swore softly as he caught the gleam of brass buttons. As the flashlight's owner came swinging toward them, Jimmy's suspicion was verified.

"A cop!" he snorted. "Of all the dumb klucks!"

THE policeman strode up to them. "Keep your mitts up!" he snapped.

Storm said angrily: "Were you doing that shooting?"

"I was," the policeman growled.

"On whose orders?"

"Chief Wren's. What you guys got in that sack? What you doin' in that cave?"

Jimmy, seething with fury, replied: "Picking daisies!"

The officer flicked his light into the murphy vault, which was now nothing but a mound of fallen bricks. The earth walls were beginning to cave in.

"Whatever you were doin'," the policeman said, "you can tell the Chief about it. You walk ahead of me and I'll carry the sack."

He escorted them in this manner to the kitchen door. Pat Wren was talking with the city chemist. He looked with sharp, hard eyes from Storm, to Jimmy, to the policeman with the sack, and said:

"What's this all about?"

"Chief, I found these two guys," the policeman explained, "skulkin' around in back of the stable. You said to bring anybody in I found, so I brought 'em in."

Pat Wren shifted his hard blue eyes inquiringly to Storm's face.

"I was following a clue," the lawyer said, "and I found some interesting things hidden away in an old potato cellar. They were handled with handkerchiefs, and if you will have your fingerprint men inspect them, I believe we'll soon know who actually did murder Joshua Nally."

"What have you got?"

"Bottles of chemicals, a gasoline blow-torch, a porcelain mortar and pestle, and an iron crucible." Jimmy wondered if Storm would mention the emerald owl. Storm didn't.

Pat Wren was frowning. "What do they prove?"

"We'll need the services of a fingerprint man and a chemist," Storm answered, "to find out."

"Don't you think," the chief of the homicide squad asked impatiently, "that you're wasting our time, Mr. Storm?"

"I do not."

"You're still sticking to your ridiculous theory that the Brangwyn girl is innocent?"

"I am."

"Then you are saying that Mr. Gans is guilty."

"I won't say anything until an expert has examined these articles."

"All right," Pat Wren said with a weary air, and called to one of the chemists. The young man who came over was pale and slender. He looked intelligent.

"This," the Chief said, "is Dan Hoyt, our head chemist. Dan is an expert along both lines. Will you kindly tell Dan just what you want to know?"

"I have some articles here," Storm obliged, "which I just found, carefully hidden away in an old potato cellar. For certain reasons I am convinced that the person who murdered Joshua Nally handled and used these articles. In removing them to this bag, handkerchiefs were used, so that whatever fingerprints might be on them would not be disturbed."

Dan Hoyt removed a pair of thin rubber gloves from a coat pocket and put them on. He carefully lifted out of the bag and ranged in a row on a table the articles it contained.

"Supposing," Storm said, "we bring Mr. Gans and Miss Brangwyn here."

"Do you think," Pat Wren asked with heavy irony, "you are about to make some startling exposure?"

"I might," Storm admitted.

The chief of the homicide squad sent one of the chemists to tell Gans and Miss Brangwyn to come to the kitchen.

Dan Hoyt had picked up the bottles. He was evidently a slow and deliberate young man. He read the labels. Then, one at a time, he removed the corks and sniffed at the white powder in each bottle.

JIMMY glanced from him to the doorway. He wanted to watch Elery Gans' face when he saw the exhibit on the table. Gans was the first to come. He entered the kitchen, saw Pat Wren and came walking over. He did not notice the strange array of objects on the table until he was within ten feet of it.

The reporter was conscious of sharp disappointment. If Gans had registered astonishment at seeing those articles, the fastest photographic lens in existence could not have caught it. Perhaps his mild hazel eyes narrowed slightly, but Jimmy could not be certain.

Gans said in his mild voice: "Some new developments, Mr. Wren?"

"Mr. Storm thinks so," the chief of the homicide squad answered. "He found this bunch of junk in an old potato vault. He thinks that the fingerprints we find on this stuff will be those of the murderer of Mr. Nally. Maybe he's right."

"He's right," Dan Hoyt said. "This is a very interesting collection of evidence, Mr. Wren. I'd say it is the most interesting discovery that has been made so far, and it ought to prove the most incriminating."

Corrine Brangwyn had come in, closely followed by Mike Halpern. She looked at the collection of articles on the table with wide dark eyes.

"Where," she said breathlessly, "did those things come from?"

"The potato vault," Storm told her.

"You just found them?" she gasped.

"Yes."

"Then you were right."

"It remains to be seen," Storm said. . . .

Jimmy was watching Gans. He knew now that Gans was a very clever and very dangerous man. As no one officially agreed with him, Jimmy moved about until he was standing behind Gans. If that mild-looking man started trouble of any kind, Jimmy was ready to pounce.

PAT WREN said impatiently: "Well, Dan, if it's so important, let's have it."

"You've been anxious," the city chemist answered, "to find the source of the cyanide of potassium that was used in killing Mr. Nally. Here's the source!"

The chief of the homicide squad peered at the two bottles.

"What do you mean, Dan? You've got a bottle of ferrocyanide and a bottle of carbonate of potassium. Where's the cyanide?"

"I'll show you, Chief." The city chemist pumped up the blow-torch and struck a match. When the torch was roaring, he dumped some of the ferrocyanide into the iron crucible. To this he added a pinch of the white powder from the other bottle. Then he turned the blow-torch flame on the crucible. When the crucible was glowing redly, he turned off the flame. Quickly he decanted the molten mixture into the porcelain mortar. But not all of it. When the substance had cooled, he picked up the porcelain pestle and pounded the stuff in the mortar until it became a white powder.

"There," he said dramatically, "is enough cyanide to kill the entire Steel City police force. Simply heat these two powders to redness—and you have one of the deadliest poisons known!"

"What we want to know," Storm said grimly, "is—who used this apparatus?"

"Look for fingerprints, Dan," Pat Wren said curtly.

Jimmy eagerly watched Dan Hoyt as he looked for fingerprints—watched him dust, first, the blow-torch, then the mortar, next the pestle, with powder—watched him blow it off and search the surfaces through a hand magnifying glass.

"No fingerprints," he announced.

Jimmy groaned with disappointment.

"Try the bottles," Pat Wren directed.

Dan Hoyt dusted the ferrocyanide bottle with the powder, blew off the dust, investigated with his glass and exclaimed: "Here are the fingerprints! Plenty!" His triumph suddenly evaporated. He said, in a disappointed voice: "These are pretty familiar, Mr. Wren."

"Whose are they?" Storm snapped.

Jimmy held his breath. Elery Gans had not moved, had made no effort to snatch the bottles.

"Miss Brangwyn's," the chemist said.

This breath-taking story of an innocent man condemned to death, then almost incredibly returned to life—and of how he brought the real murderer to justice—reaches a dramatic climax in the next, the April, issue.

That's Sam Hatfield

Wherein an Arizona Ranger sets out to find a lady who is lost, and encounters much excitement—by the able author of "My Deputy."

By ROBERT WINCHESTER

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

THE heavy Transcontinental came to a brake-grinding stop at the top of the grade in the Granite Wash mountains in Arizona. So suddenly were the brakes applied that a fat colored woman lurched forward in her seat on the observation platform and almost fell out of it. The pretty little girl by her side saved herself from doing likewise by clutching hastily the arms of her chair.

"Mah goodness! Ah reckons Ah was asleep, Miss Jinny. Ah come mighty neah sailin' right smack ovah dat rail!"

The little girl settled herself more firmly in her chair, in the corner formed by the railing and car. She was more than a little sleepy herself. "You better had keep awake, Emma," she said sternly. "I'm right sleepy myself. I can't keep awake for both of us."

"Dat's right, Miss Jinny. Honey, does you sit still an' ol' Emma go and git a drink of dat ice-watah. Dat wake me up, Ah reckon."

What Emma really wanted to do was to go and talk to the porter of the car ahead.

"Go ahead," answered Miss Virginia Marie Calvert—aged nine—royally, stifling a yawn with dainty fingers. "I'm comin' myself as soon as the train starts."

"Dat's a nice girl, honeychile!" And Emma disappeared.

Miss Calvert sat quietly for a few moments; then she spied some delicate little blue and white mountain flowers growing down the side of the embankment. The train had stopped with part of it in a cut, but where the observation car stood, one side was open country.

Jinny stood up to get a better view. They certainly were pretty flowers. "I reckon I'll get me some," announced Jinny to the mountains. She leaned over the rail and saw one of the brakemen, his back to her, standing by the train near where the forward part of the train disappeared around a curve. This brakeman should have been at least five hundred yards at the rear of the train; but it was very hot, the loose rod that caused the stopping was easily repaired, he knew that they would be on their way in less than five minutes; so instead of going back with his flag he lingered in the shade, as brakemen have been known to do before.

"I can get back as soon as he can," little Miss Calvert decided as she climbed over the rail and jumped down. It wasn't any feat for her, this climbing over a rail and swinging lightly to the ground. As a matter of fact, just before leaving Prince George County, Maryland, with her aunt—to meet her father and mother who were returning from the Orient—she had put up a valiant, if losing, battle to be allowed to go 'coon-hunting at night with the rest of the Calvert, Howard, Garrett and Dinwiddie clans in general, calling attention to the fact that she could "swim and run and ride as good as any of 'em!"

As she stepped now to the ground, something happened which proved that she had received and absorbed some of the lore of the hunting-school. Stooping to reach for the flowers, a cold, cucumber smell came to her delicate little nostrils and there came the sinister *"r-r-r-r-r"* of a rattlesnake's warning. It is next to impossible to locate the snake unless he is in the open and seen at the time he warns or before, for the sound seems to come from all around.

Miss Virginia Calvert proved right there that she was a worthy scion of the "huntin' Calverts." She could see that the ground ahead of her was clear, and without a split second's hesitation, her little body straightened out like an arrow and she literally dived down the bank toward the stream. It landed her at least ten feet away; as she lit, her arms were up around her head to shield her face, as she had been taught to fall. After she hit the ground she bounced up like a rubber ball, to locate the enemy. It had been well for Miss Calvert that the rattlesnake is the gentleman among snakes, and when possible, gives warning, and also well for the young lady that she had smelled and heard rattlers before in her native Maryland. But the snake, which had been coming up toward the track, seeing that his warning had been obeyed, had uncoiled and gone about his business.

"Oh, my goodness me!" gasped Jinny. "Look at my dwess! I wish I had a wock!" Under stress she quite forgot the *"r's"* she was so proud of having mastered.

Just then the engineer blew the whistle; the brakeman, after a quick look forward and back, gave the go-ahead signal, and swung on board. The Transcontinental began to move away.

Jinny could see the tops of the moving cars from where she stood at the foot of the embankment. Up she started, swinging out a little from where she had located the snake, which was what any person with any brains would do. It took longer for her to reach the top and as many persons have found out, it took much longer to climb up than it had to go down. . . .

The train had been going down the west side of the mountains for at least twenty minutes before Emma concluded her conversation with the porter and decided to go back to Miss Jinny. When she arrived on the platform and saw it was empty, she turned loose a screech that echoed from hill to hill. She charged out, moved folding-chairs out of places a mouse couldn't have hidden behind, peered over railings, looked at the long ribbon of track unfolding, and yelled again: "Oh, Lordy, Lordy! My Miss Jinny's done been stole!" Then she turned and ran back through the observation-car which was still empty.

The porter had heard the screams, and started for the rear end to see what was the matter. He met some two hundred and sixty-odd pounds of black tornado and sat down on the floor with a gasp. Emma didn't even know he was there. Into the forward car she ran, announcing her arrival with, "Miss Celia! Somebody done got Miss Jinny! Ah nevah took mah eyes offen dat chile till Ah goes to—"

A lovely girl put her magazine down and stood up. "That will do," she drawled, in a soft cool voice. "Stop that right away, Emma. Sit down here and take hold of yourself!"

Emma obeyed. The Howard colored people all knew that when their "white folks" used that tone, they were to be obeyed at once, no matter what the stress.

"Now tell me," ordered Miss Cecelia Howard.

"Miss Celia, Ah was out dere wid Miss Jinny and Ah goes in when de train stops to git me a drink of water, and when Ah goes back mah Miss Jinny was gone! Oh, mah Lordy me! Way up in the mountains mah little Miss Jinny done—"

"Stop that, Emma! You went to get a drink after the train had stopped and left Miss Jinny on the platform? Was there anyone else out there?"

"No ma'am, Miss Celia; not a soul."

"You didn't go back until after the train started?"

"No ma'am, Miss Celia. Ah—"

By this time the Pullman conductor and the train conductor had both arrived. The other passengers in the car had crowded close, and one old lady was ordering: "Stop the train, some one! Have them back up at once. That little girl and—"

"No backing up on this grade!" answered the train conductor. "The Limited is right behind us. What is the trouble?"

Emma started to tell him, but he only listened to the beginning. "She may have got by you. We'll search the train. If she did unload, we'll be in Radnor in five minutes, long before we could back up, even if the Limited wasn't in the way. The dispatcher will clear the road and send an engine and searchers back for her."

He had never been gentle with women or children. "Take her!" he shouted. "I will teach her manners!"

The train was searched, but no Miss Virginia Marie Calvert was found.

"Get our things together, Emma," commanded Miss Howard, her face white. "We will get off at Radnor. And once for all, Emma, I want you to behave. You can give way all you please after we have found her, but not now. You hear me, Emma!"

"Yas'm, Miss Celia, Ah heahs you. Honey, I'm dat fussed up thinkin' about mah little— Yas'um, Ah'm doin' 'er, Miss Celia."

"If you don't," said Miss Howard, her lovely lips tight to keep from trembling, "I will not take you with me. You will stay right on this train all by yourself!"

This threat steeled Emma into a stony calm.

Radnor consisted of a water-tank, a shack depot and telegraph-office, a loading platform, two or three corrals, two general stores and several cabins.

The conductor of the Transcontinental got off with Miss Howard and Emma. The young telegraph operator, who had gazed in amazement when the train came to a stop, jumped for his key and tapped busily as the train again got under way.

"There'll be an engine out of Tarlton in five minutes," the operator reported, as he stood up. "Don't worry at all; they'll find her. Those mountains are as safe as a church." This was a big lie but the young telegrapher told it calmly and it had a soothing effect on Emma, if not on Miss Howard. "That cut where they pulled down to—" The young man stopped and ran to the open window. "Oh, Sam! —Doggone, he didn't hear me! Bob, get Sam Hatfield! He just went into Connor's!"

He came back to where Miss Howard and Emma were standing.

"That was luck, Sam being in town!" he said. "He'll go out and find her for you, *pronto*. That jasper knows every blame' place in—"

A young man came in. He was a thin-flanked, blue-eyed, heavily bronzed young man with a hawklike nose.

"What's the idea of your bawlin' like a sick calf?" he demanded sternly as he entered. "I heard you, feller! I got me plenty business to tend to without foolin' around you!" Then he saw Miss Howard and his hat came off abruptly.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It's right dim in here and I didn't know that anyone else was here but this gent."

"We'll excuse you this time," answered the telegrapher, with a grin. "Sam, this young lady has—"

"Oh," interrupted Miss Howard, her taut nerves giving a little, "I — please — get me some one that knows the way to—to where that train stopped! I — I don't believe I can s-stand it much longer. Little Jinny there all alone and—"

Emma, seeing her Miss Celia beginning to break, tightened up herself. "Dat chile is all right, Miss Celia, honey. Does you keep a stiff uppah lip, now, an' we—"

Sam Hatfield's embarrassment promptly took wings and it was Mr. Samuel Hatfield, Arizona Ranger, who took a step forward. "Keep quiet, you!" he commanded Emma, which so surprised that lady of color that she promptly did, though her mouth was still wide open. "Now, tighten up and tell me just what it is," he went on to Miss Howard. The tone of his voice was not one that Miss Cecelia Taylor Howard had heard many times before—in fact, never before, when addressed directly. Her proud little head went up.

"My niece," she began coldly, "was on the observation platform of the Transcontinental—"

Hatfield listened without asking a question until she had finished. Then he turned to the telegrapher. "Where was it?"

"Up in the Brannon cut at the top of the grade."

"All right, come on. Leave your baggage here." And he started out.

"They're clearing the line, Sam," called the telegrapher after him. "An engine is going up with—"

Hatfield turned. "Yeah? That's fine; and in the meantime—" He saw that Miss Howard and Emma were still standing where they had been when he said, "Come on." His blue eyes became a little frosty.

"Didn't you hear me tell you to—" he began. Then he sensed the mental strain and physical sickness of fear that held both the lovely girl and the big old colored woman in spite of their efforts to hide it. Mr. Hatfield usually was very easy to get along with, but he had been on his way to Nogales, and now, with his cherished twenty-four hours' furlough swiftly disappearing, he was, as he frankly admitted afterward, a little fussy. But he changed his sentence to: "Shucks, she's all right, don't worry a-tall! There isn't a thing in these mountains to hurt her. You wait right here and I'll get my car. We'll have her right back in your arms, woman,"—this last to Emma,—"before supper. —John, you phone to Sam and Bill Earp and Red River Thomas. Tell 'em to start in from the south. Get the Turkey Trot and tell Captain Hardy to come in from the east. Round up any of the boys and—"

"Can't get the Turkey Trot," answered the telegrapher. "That wire's been down for two days, and—" But Hatfield had gone.

"Oh," said Miss Howard, one pretty hand to her heart. "Do you think—can he—will he find her?"

"Find her?" echoed John in amazement. "My gosh, that's Sam Hatfield! Darn' right he'll find her, and *pronto*. She can't hide any place that he couldn't!" He went to the telephone. Miss Howard heard him begin to spread a cordon of Rangers and deputy sheriffs around the Granite Wash mountains.

The car driven by Mr. Hatfield was an old dilapidated touring car of popular make. As Miss Howard and Emma came up, he looked at Emma a little dubiously, then said to Cecelia: "This here bus will hold you and me—but I don't know about *her*."

Emma promptly began to plead: "Please, suh, Capt'n, it's mah little Miss Jinny dat's lost way up in dem mountains! Ah got to go, please, suh. Capt'n, please suh, Ah knowed lots of Hatfields, when Ah was in Kentuck. Aint no Hatfield goin' to leave ol' Emma behind when she's got to—"

"Oh, for Pete's sake," said young Mr. Hatfield, whose people had come from Kentucky—and whom Emma had sized up most shrewdly. "Get in, then! Sit down darn' easy, though. The springs are—" He got out and helped Emma wiggle sideways into the rear seat, which she filled comfortably. If it had not been that Miss Howard had in her eyes and mind a picture of Jinny alone somewhere in the mountains, she would have been amused at the spectacle of the wiry young man, not so very much taller than she, trying to ease Emma into that seat—like some trim white fox terrier determined that a big clumsy Newfoundland should go somewhere.

AT last Emma was seated and Sam started. He called to one or two men standing by the store as he went by. "Lost girl. Brannon cut. Get goin', you jaspers! Pass the word!" Without a second's hesitation the men ran to where their horses were tied. Tears came in Miss Howard's eyes as she saw the prompt action.

"I—I— You don't know how thankful I am that you —that everyone is h-helping m-me—"

Mr. Hatfield squirmed uneasily. A girl or woman crying was something he didn't care at all to hear.

"Stop that," he commanded sternly. "My gosh, now is no time to bawl! Wait till we—"

It had the required effect on Miss Howard, but not quite as Sam intended. "What? I am not bawling! That is what you said a calf did. You are not to talk to me like that, either!"

Sam, much relieved at his success at stopping the tears, grinned cheerfully. "That's the girl! Sit tight and don't pull leather. We'll find her, no foolin'. Tighten up yore belt."

Miss Howard didn't care much for this. It was very seldom indeed that the Howards had to be told to tighten their belts and not reach for the saddle-horn for support. In fact, as far as this particular Howard went, it had never happened before. She eased around a little so that she could look directly at Mr. Hatfield. As she gazed at him with clear eyes for the first time, she placed him promptly, as Emma had done. This Mr. Sam Hatfield, Arizona Ranger, was just the same exactly as Miss Howard's menfolks in Maryland, even if he didn't use quite the same language.

"Do you think that my belt needs tightening, Sam?" she asked. "Look at me, Sam, and tell me."

MR. HATFIELD looked at the lovely face and from that moment was lost; he did not know it, but he was, just the same.

"Well, suh," he answered, "on looking right smack at you, Miss Celia Honey, I know that you don't. No suh, if I were huntin' for people to have tighten their belts, I sure would never crack down on you!"

"That's better, Sam! —And what did you call me?"

"Miss Celia Honey," answered Sam gravely. "Isn't that your name? Emma, here, called you that."

If it had not been for Jinny, lost in the hills, Miss Howard would have been delighted to give battle, but now she said: "My name is Cecelia Taylor Howard—not Celia Honey. Sam, you tell me the truth right away. Is Jinny in danger? I want you to tell me the truth, Sam."

The young Arizona Ranger looked at the pretty Southern girl for a moment. Then he said: "Unless she is found by night, she is, Miss Howard! There are a great many wild animals in the Granite Wash mountains. I do not think they would attack a moving human being in the daytime; mostly they would run when they caught the scent. But at night she would be in danger, yes. But right now, there are headin' into the hills men that have ridden the high line all over them. This little Jinny will be safe in yore arms in three hours, I bet you," he lapsed into Ranger talk again.

"I—I hope that you win the bet, Sam," replied Miss Howard, trying hard not to let her lips quiver. "I—is this as fast as you can go?"

"If I tried to go any faster, we'd stand a mighty good chance of breakin' down. Better take it a little easy—and get there. We'll have to quit the car and get to walkin', soon as we hit the foothills."

"That's right, Sam," Miss Howard agreed, although her hands were tightly clenched. "Reckon you know best."

When they reached the foothills and Sam stopped, he looked at Miss Howard's pumps. The heels were not very high, but after Sam looked at them and at Emma, who had finally wiggled out, he shook his head.

"You and Emma stay right here. It may be a right smart ways before I pick her up. There's the Brannon cut, up there."

"No, Sam," answered Miss Howard firmly. "I am going with you. I can walk in these shoes. Emma, I reckon you better stay right here until we come back with Miss Jinny."

"No ma'am, Miss Celia. Ah goes to find mah little Miss Jinny. Ah lost her an' Ah—"

"Listen, woman," Sam interrupted sternly. "You see those mountains? How long would it take you to climb one? We would have to wait for you—and in the meantime your Miss Jinny might get eaten up."

At this Emma let out a piercing screech and began to clamber back into the flivver. "Ah stays, Mist' Hatfield! Please, suh, hurry up and bring mah Miss Jinny back to me."

"I thought that would land her!" Sam grinned as he and Cecelia walked up the zigzagging path.

"You shouldn't have scared her like that," replied Miss Howard severely. "She loves little Jinny and—"

"Yeah?" said Sam. "How come she let her Miss Jinny get away if she loved her so darn' much?"

"She didn't! It was my fault. I should have been out on the platform myself. Reckon you don't know colored people, Mr. Sam Hatfield, if you say Emma would have—"

"Save your breath for this climb," interrupted Mr. Hatfield—much delighted with his success so far in distracting Miss Howard from worrying.

"I won't save my breath! That is just exactly the same as telling me to shut up. If I weren't so worried about Jinny, I would right soon explain to you just how you should address a lady, Mr. Sam Hatfield. Reckon you haven't been accustomed to—"

"Shucks," drawled Mr. Hatfield. "Don't you worry about Miss Jinny a-tall. Man howdy, with Sam and Bill Earp and Red River Thomas and all the rest out, that little old Jinny will walk right smack into one of them, no foolin'. Go ahead and tell me just how a jasper should act—I mean how a gentleman should talk when he's with a lady. I sure would like to know."

"Some other time," answered Miss Howard. "Right now I'm going to do as you suggested, Mr. Hatfield. I am going to shut up—and walk."

"Doggone it, I never did tell you any such thing!" Sam protested earnestly. "I wouldn't tell any woman that."

"You did me," stated Cecelia firmly; "and I'm going to."

They were on top of the first hill by the time Sam finally persuaded Miss Howard to admit: "Well, I reckon that you didn't say just those words—but that was what you meant, just the same."

"It is round, just the same," Sam said with a grin. . . .

Miss Virginia Marie Calvert had reached the track as the roof of the observation-car dipped from sight. "My goodness! That darn' old train has gone off and left me! Reckon I'll sit down in the shade until it comes back. First, though, I'll get me a stick so if that snake comes back—" She found a stick and went down the embankment again to a tree and calmly sat down. It never occurred to the young lady from Prince George County, Maryland, to be frightened. To her the great mountains and wooded slopes were just like hills and trees of her Maryland, and the idea that anyone in the world would want to harm her instead of obeying orders promptly also never occurred to Miss Calvert. So much at ease did she feel that she once more dozed off, after finding a smooth place on the granite side-wall of the cut to rest her back.

She woke up a few minutes later as the Limited thundered past.

"Oh, my gracious!" she cried. "Reckon my Aunt Cissy and that darn' old train don't know I'm here!" She sat still for a few moments, thinking the matter over; then she rose with a triumphant little smile on her lips. There was a narrow path down the mountain where a small stream, not much more than a ditch, was running.

A long lean yellow body lying on one of the ledges rose, and a wicked-looking head came up.

It really was a ditch, one of the pump ditches from a mine far above and the path was the footpath used by the men when they came in and out once every two or three months. Miss Calvert was a sociable little person and when she hadn't anyone else to talk to, made no bones about talking to herself. "There is a path," she announced, "and Bud and Wes always say 'Follow down a stream and you'll get somewhere.' Reckon I'll follow it down and get some one to take me into San Francisco!"

Just where San Francisco was she did not know, but she was Jinny Calvert—and surely all that would be necessary would be for her to announce that fact. That is all that would have been necessary in Prince George and several adjoining counties in Maryland.

It was cooler walking down alongside the little stream and Jinny sauntered along as she would through the woods on the big plantation in Prince George County. As she did, a long lean yellow body lying out on one of the ledges far to the left, rose, and a wicked-looking head came up, the nose twitching as the scent came down the wind.

A mountain lion, even if a mother with hungry cubs, will rarely attack human beings, as Sam had said, especially if the person is on his or her feet and moving. But this one had not made a kill for days and its cubs were hungry. Caution was blunted by the terrible pulling pain of hunger. The lion began to slink down the mountain-side.

The going was downhill for Jinny and while it was rather rough on her dainty little slippers she was making fairly good time, stopping whenever she wished to look at the flowers and to watch the small wild life that scurried out of sight on both sides of the path. It was an hour later that she began looking for some sign of a house. "My goodness," she murmured. "Reckon the plantations round here must be mighty big ones! It's about time I—"

She stopped short, as around a bend in the path came four Mexicans, fugitives from the rebel army. They had their rifles and around each man's waist was a belt of cartridges, from which swung a holstered revolver. Three of them were hardly more than boys; the other was a much older man.

They had seen the little girl as soon as she had seen them and one of them spoke in excited Spanish. They walked on toward her. Suddenly the youngest one pointed, shouting, *"Madre de Dios! El leona!"* and raised his rifle. The Mexican boy's keen eyes had picked out the long yellow body as it shrank back against the overhanging rock just ahead of Jinny.

The big cat had arrived at the same time that the Mexicans did. Driven by its own hunger and the thought of its hungry cubs in the hills, it would have sprung as Jinny passed. The Mexican boy fired and the body came twisting down in death-agony, almost at Jinny's feet.

Miss Calvert promptly sat down on a rock. All at once the realization was brought home to her that she was quite a distance from home and those she loved and all alone.

"I am *not* going to cwy!" she announced firmly. "No Calvert ever cwys unless hurted. But I do wish that my daddy—or Bud, or Tommy Dinwiddie, was here, wite now!"

While she was making this fruitless wish, the elder of the four men was snarling at the boy that shot. "If the shot was heard, what then, poor crazed one? Do you wish to bring *los Rangeros* down upon us?"

"But the lion!" the boy protested. "It would have sprung on the *niña*."

"It had already started to run. Now, because of you, we may all be running, *pronto!*" Then he turned and looked at Jinny, who had risen. The others also looked at her, their rifle-butts on the ground.

To Jinny they were not quite the same as the men at home, but she felt no fear of them.

"I am Miss Jinny Calvert," she announced, "and I weckon I'm lost. You boys take me to the nearest big house wite away!" It was a command.

The Mexicans looked at each other. They all understood a little English but it was border stuff. "You hear me?" went on Jinny, a little crossly. She was tired and had begun to realize that she was missing desperately her Aunt Celia, and Emma.

The Mexicans were talking among themselves now and the boy who had done the shooting said, pointing at Jinny: "See—the *niña's* clothes are of a richness. She has strayed from some *carro*. Her people will pay well for her."

"That is so, Juan," answered the man who had spoken about the shot. "We will take her to Gomez." He stepped forward and picked her up.

But as he reached for her, the Calvert temper blazed up and Jinny struck at the outstretched arm. It was necessarily not a hard blow but it landed on a ill-bandaged wound in the forearm, and the Mexican snarled an oath. He was half Yaqui Indian, this Mexican, and had never been gentle with women or children.

"Take her!" he shouted. *"Por Dios,* I will teach her manners. You, Juan, and you, Francisco!"

IT was a situation that few ladies would have cared at all to be in, no matter how old. The snake, the train leaving her, the body of the big cat almost at her feet, these strange-acting men who instead of taking off their hats and saying, "Yes'm, Miss Jinny, us takes you dere right away. Honey, does you want to ride on mah shouldah?" had actually reached out to seize her. It was just a little too much for the youngest Calvert, and tears came into the pretty eyes. "You better had be good boys," she threatened valiantly. "My daddy will smack you good and then—"

"Better let me attend to the smackin'," drawled a voice from behind the Mexicans.

The Mexicans whirled around, their hands on their revolver-butts. From the shelter of Cecelia's arms Jinny looked at the young man standing in the trail, the blue of his eyes like steel of a sword-blade, his right hand a little out, with the fingers spread. She didn't know him, but she knew her kind of menfolks had arrived!

THE young man had an entirely different effect on the Mexicans. As one man their hands lifted from the gun-butts, they dropped the rifles and both hands went high in the air. As they were doing it, the man who had reached for Jinny said warningly: *"El Rangero! El* Señor Hatfield—*muy mal hombre.* Stand very still, *compañeros!"*

Hatfield looked at them, then at Cecelia and Jinny. Then he said to the Mexicans in Spanish: "Well, come on—you've all got guns on. Don't any of you yearn to do a little shooting?" To Jinny he said: "I'm telling them to be good boys"—and he smiled. Jinny promptly smiled in return and walked over to his side as Cecelia put her down.

"But no, *Señor Rangero,*" protested the man in broken English. "We are very much of the *amigo.* We have not hurt the *niña.*"

"If you had," drawled Hatfield, "do you think you would be alive now, foolish one? What are you doing on this side of the line and so far up?"

"*Señor Rangero,* we are of the army of the so-brave General Fausto Topete. The Federal Army, they have so many men and the ships that fly and drop bombs. We—"

"You can all put your hands down," interrupted Hatfield. "But keep 'em still and away from your guns." They obeyed with audible sighs of relief. They were between the devil and the deep sea, and they all knew it. To go back over the line into Mexico meant death, either at the hands of the rebels, from whom they had deserted, or the Federals. To fight a Ranger also meant death to two or more of them at least and for the rest later. They were not afraid to die, but they all wanted to live and they knew that the man who started any trouble was committing suicide.

Jinny held up her arms to the tall young ranger, commanding: "Take me up. I'm tired!"

Hatfield stepped around her so that she was on his left. "Wait just a minute, darlin'." Then to the Mexicans in Spanish: "The señorita wishes me to lift her into my arms. That being so, you will take the guns from your holsters and lay them on the ground, one at a time, butt first. And do it very slowly, señors of the rebel army, if you wish to live! *You* first"—and he nodded to the older man. His right hand slipped under his coat. The Mexicans saw that gesture and knew what it meant. Man after man slowly drew out his revolver and laid it on the ground beside the rifles.

"Fair enough," said Hatfield, as the last one went down. "Now, honey, come to yore old Uncle Sam!" And he raised Miss Virginia Marie Calvert to the crook of his left arm.

The four Mexicans watched one of ner arms go around his neck.

The face of the boy who had shot the big cat suddenly brightened. *"Senor Rangero,"* he said eagerly, "—see the big lion! She was about to spring on the so-beautiful *niña.* And had I not shot—*ah, Madre de Dios!* She who is safe in your arms! Where now would the so-lovely *niña* be, but for Juan Cordova?"

It made contact—and it was the only thing that would have. They were due for a trip back over the line as far as Mr. Sam Hatfield went.

"That's so," agreed Jinny, and she nodded gravely. "If that boy hadn't shot that—that—" She looked at the

dead cat and classified it to her satisfaction, "that big tiger, it would have eated me up."

Sam looked at Cecelia, then at the four Mexicans. Then he rubbed Jinny's soft little cheek with his.

"That being so," he said in English, "I think that—" He talked for a moment in Spanish and the Mexicans drew long relieved breaths, interspersed with exclamations of, *"Si, si, señor! Muy bueno! Pronto! Si, si, Señor Rangero!"* When he finished, they picked up their rifles and the revolvers, and started up the trail on a dog-trot.

"And that's that," said Sam with a grin, as he shifted Miss Calvert to his right arm and a more comfortable position.

"What did you tell them, Sam?" asked Cecelia as they started down the path.

"I told them there was a trail farther up that crossed this one and that the one on the right led to where some of their people had a big mountain ranch and the one on the left led to the border. I told 'em to take— Doggone, I bet you I got mixed and I told 'em to take the one that led to the ranch! And if they met any more Rangers to say that I passed 'em along. Doggone it, if I chased them back over the line," he added defensively, "they'd all get killed—and it was their shot that brought us to this here little ol' scoundrel!" And he gently tickled little Jinny, much to her delight.

Emma saw them coming and left the flivver like a great blackbird. Sam grinned. "Doggone! Mayheso she couldn't climb hills—but she is sure makin' this hundred yards in nothin'!"

Once back in the flivver Miss Calvert sat in Emma's lap, beginning at once to tell her all about it. "I saw some pretty flowers, and—"

Cecelia looked at the lean, tanned young Ranger. "Sam," she said softly, "when we found you, where were you going?"

"I had twenty-four hours' furlough and was goin' into Prescott."

"And won't you get it? I mean, won't they let you take another twenty-four hours?"

"I doubt 'er," answered Sam with a grin. "Capt'n Billy Yancey might, though—considerin' I was on duty."

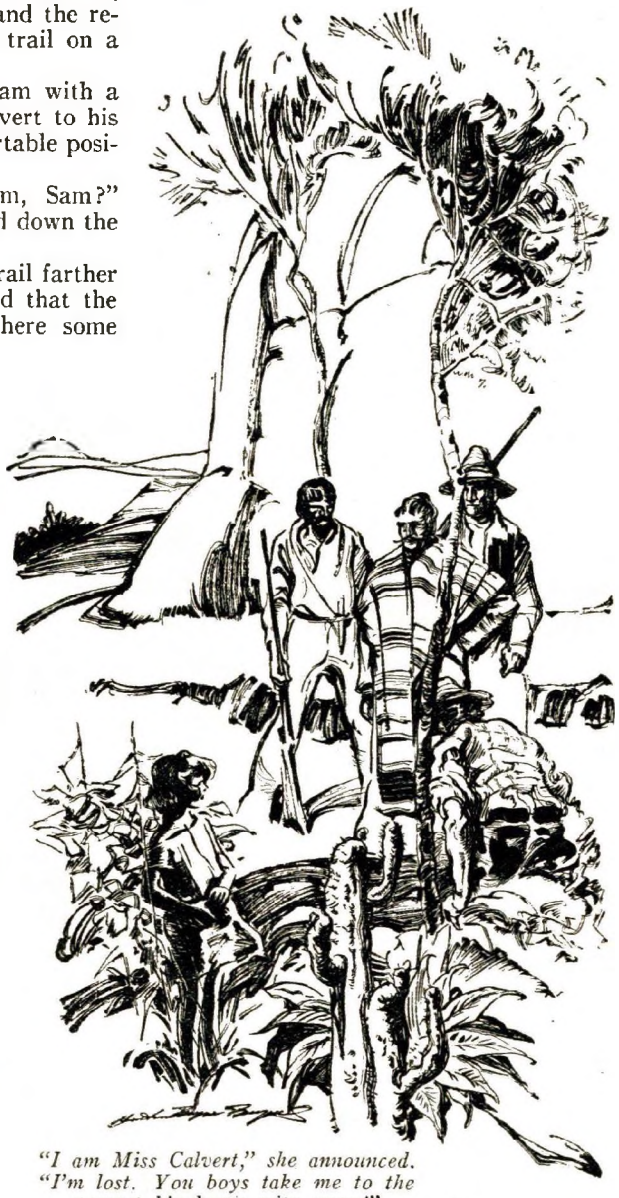
"Sam, I'm right sorry that we—we made you lose your holiday."

Mr. Samuel Hatfield, Arizona Ranger, slowed down a little and looked sternly at Miss Howard of Maryland. With her hair of bronzed gold, her little straight nose, her skin like a poinsettia bud in its clear color, her velvety black eyes and exquisitely curved lips, Miss Howard was well worth looking at.

"Do you think that I'd put a furlough against meetin' you?" he demanded.

"Why, Sam! You didn't act right pleased when we started and—"

"Answer my question," insisted Mr. Hatfield firmly.



"I am Miss Calvert," she announced. "I'm lost. You boys take me to the nearest big house wite away!"

Miss Howard was quite herself again, with Jinny safe in Emma's arms. "Reckon I don't have to answer any questions you ask, especially when—Sam, why are you turning off here?"

"No train until tomorrow afternoon and no hotel in Radnor," explained Sam. "This road goes to the Lazy U. Ma will be mighty glad to see you and I've got a lot of telephoning to do *muy pronto* to call the gents in that are combin' the hills."

"But, Sam, perhaps your mother won't like to see so many people come in on—"

"Wouldn't yore ma?" drawled Sam, as he eased the car around a chuck-hole in the road.

"My mother? What has my mother got to do with it?" demanded Miss Howard hotly. "Reckon things are different in Maryland."

"Yeah? How?" asked Sam.

The little dancing lights began to flicker in the black eyes.

"I see that I will have to put it in words of one syllable so you will understand," she began sweetly. "In Maryland and Virginia, Mr. Hatfield, there are always many guests coming and going and three or four more never make any difference. I am not familiar enough with life in Arizona to—"

Miss Jinny Calvert had finished now telling Emma all about it and as she caught the tone of Cecelia's voice she slid off Emma's lap. Her pretty little face appeared over the back of the seat, between Cecelia and Sam. "Are you fussin' at my Sam?" she demanded sternly. "You stop it, right now! Reckon you don't remember that he saved me from those bad boys and tooked me up and down hills in his arms!"

"Oh, my gracious goodness," said Cecelia. "That's right, darlin'. He did, didn't he? I won't fuss with him another minute. But, honey child, you tell him not to fuss with me, either!"

Miss Calvert turned and looked at Sam. "You mustn't fuss with my Aunt Celia," she stated just as sternly, "because she loves you!" This last was palpably an imitation of some elder person among the Calverts.

At this astounding revelation both Cecelia and Sam

laughed uncontrollably. Finally Sam was able to answer. "Well, suh, Jinny, I didn't remember that either. I sure won't do any more fussin'."

Jinny didn't know what it was she had said that was so funny, but she smiled. "Reckon I'll come over and sit with you," she said, climbing over.

"That's a nice girl," Cecelia answered, as she put an arm around Jinny and drew her close. "Now, if this old Mr. Samuel Hatfield begins to fuss at me, you—"

"He won't," answered Jinny lazily. "He loves you too, honey."

"Hot dog!" Sam grinned. "Are you sure she loves me, Jinny? I'd hate like the dickens to go on lovin' her if she doesn't love me."

"Mr. Hatfield asks a right smart lot of questions, doesn't he?" said Cecelia. "Oh, Jinny darlin', you don't know how glad I am that you are safe. You're a bad girl, Jinny Calvert, and I ought to smack you good for getting off that train. Darlin', are you sure that you're not hurt any? Oh, my goodness, there's a bruise on your knee!" Miss Calvert was wearing white socks—or rather they had been white early that morning. She straightened out the offending knee and regarded it sternly. "I reckon I did that when I jumped away fwom that dratted snake. It don't hurt me, Aunt Cecelia. I've got hurt lots worse out huntin'."

Cecelia laughed. "Well, as long as we mustn't fuss—what I meant was this, Sam. I didn't know whether your mother could put us up for the night without inconveniencing herself."

"I knew that was it," Sam answered gravely. "Well, suh, maybeso Ma can find room. There's some cots around somewhere—and Ma and I can sleep out in the open."

"Samuel Hatfield! You take us back to that railroad station right away! Do you think I would allow your mother to sleep out of doors on a cot? And Sam, would you really have her do a thing like that? I reckon that maybe we've— I mean I have been making a mistake about—"

"Jinny," interrupted Sam, making no effort to stop as ordered, "she's fussin' at me!"

"I am not! But I do not intend to—" Just then the flivver topped a slight rise and Miss Howard could see, spread out in a little valley, beside a grove of trees and a clear stream, the buildings of the Lazy U ranch. She could see at first glance that the house was quite as large, if not larger, than any of the plantation-houses in Maryland or Virginia. The feed barns and corrals covered a lot of ground, and over near the stream there were clean, orderly-looking bunkhouses. Miss Howard was looking at one of the most famous ranches in Arizona.

She knew in that first look that "Ma" would have no trouble in taking care of three guests—or thirty-three—and also knew Mr. Hatfield had been "stringin'" her.

"Is that the Lazy U?" she demanded icily.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Sam meekly.

"Where you and Ma have to take cots outdoors and sleep on them when two or three guests come?" went on Miss Howard.

"Doggone it," defended Sam, "I didn't say we had to; I said we *could*. Ma loves the open, and—"

"You need not explain," interrupted Miss Howard. "You deliberately went out of your way—"

"Jinny," pleaded Sam, "please wake up. Doggone it, this girl is fussin' at me somethin' awful!"

"She's all right," answered Jinny sleepily from the crook of Cecelia's arm. "Fuss right back at her!" That was such a contradiction to her former orders that both Sam and Cecelia laughed.

Ma, the widow of a Ranger and the mother of two more, came out on the wide gallery as the car stopped at the steps. "I see you've found them, Sam," she said. Then as she saw Cecelia and Jinny, who had roused, she walked up to the car.

"Ma, you been hollerin' about not havin' any women-folks around," Sam observed. "So I found some for you and brought 'em home."

"Better let me attend to the smackin'," drawled a voice—and the Mexicans whirled.

"You go right in and commence telephoning," commanded Ma. "There isn't a man left on the place, and Captain Yancey and three more of the boys just rode into the hills." Ma held out her arms to Jinny and smiled. "Come to Ma, darling!" Jinny looked at the sweet old face, then held up her arms.

"That's a good girl," said Ma. Then she went on to Cecelia: "Honey, I'm right glad to see you. My goodness, how tired you look! Get right out, darlin', and—"

"You're from Kentucky," accused Cecelia gayly as she obeyed.

"That's right, a long time ago. I'm a Shelby from Grayson County."

"I'm Cecelia Taylor Howard, Prince George County, Maryland and—"

"I'm Jinny Marie Calvert," announced the young lady in Ma's arms, "from Prince George County too."

"Darlings, you're home. If I'd known that any of the Howards or the Calverts were lost, I'd have gone in the hills looking myself!"

Emma had managed to get out unassisted, Sam having already gone in to do the telephoning. As she came around the flivver, Cecelia said, "This is Emma, Jinny's nurse, Mrs.—I mean, Ma."

Ma Hatfield, formerly Miss Shelby of Grayson County,

Kentucky, smiled at the immense Emma, who tried for a curtsey but couldn't make it. "I'm glad to see you, Emma. Go right in and air that corner room on the left upstairs. You'll find fresh linen in the highboy."

"Yas'm!" Emma's grin showed all her firm white teeth. "Ah does hit right away, Miss—"

"Elizabeth," supplied Ma, as she kissed Jinny. "Come in, darlings. You're home at the Lazy U."

THE old Calvert plantation-house looked cool and inviting, surrounded as it was by giant old pines and maples. The weather was hot even for Prince George County.

Jimmy Calvert came up to where three pretty Southern girls were sitting on the east veranda. "Reckon I'll go fishin'," he announced. "Come on, Cissy. I know darn' well that this lazy old Sally wouldn't go if all she had to do was to throw a line out on the lawn."

"That's right, darlin'," agreed Sally, "I wouldn't. I thought you got fishin' enough in Japan."

"I did—of Japanese fishin'. I'm talking about Saint Mary's River fishing in Maryland, honey."

"I'd go with you, Jimmy," Frances Garrett said lazily, "but I've got to drive in to Washington and get Anse and William Henery Norcross."

"Doggone it, I never saw such a no-'count bunch of scoundrels! Come on, Cissy. Get up from there and come fishin' with your darlin' brother-in-law."

"I don't want to go fishing," answered Cecelia Taylor Howard. "I don't want to do anything, either."

"What? Have I lived to see the day that the lovely Howard scorns fishin'?" jeered Lieutenant-Commander Calvert, U.S.N. "Last night you wouldn't go 'coon-huntin' and the day before you wouldn't ride with the Fairfax Hunt. What's the matter, Cissy darlin'? Ever since we got back, you've been goin' around susy-eyed as the dickens."

Miss Howard sat up. "I have not! I have not been goin' around s-susy-eyed, whatever that is! Reckon you better had go fishin' right away, Mr. James Calvert. If I don't want to go—"

"Why, of course not," interrupted Jimmy, delighted at getting a rise out of Cecelia. "You don't have to, darlin'. Susy-eyed means 'why am I thusly'—or—"

"You stop teasin' Cissy right away," ordered Sally, also sitting up. "And what is more, I reckon that you—"

"I surrender!" cried Jimmy. "One Howard is plenty to fight at one time, let alone two! Last call—anyone coming with me? No? Then, good-a-by, John!" And he fled.

"Do you know," said Frances Garrett who was noted for her literalness, "I think Jimmy is right, Cissy. You have been moonin' around ever since you came home from California. Do you know, darlin', I think you fell in love with that Ranger that Jinny is always talkin' about."

Cecelia laughed. "Sugar, I only saw him for about six hours altogether," she drawled.

"That's long enough to fall in love," answered Frances. "Did you, Cissy?"

The lovely Miss Garrett was noted for the way she would calmly probe for information.

"No, I did not," answered Miss Howard shortly.

"Are you sure, darlin'? When Jinny talks about him I've noticed that your eyes shine and—"

"I don't care a darn what you've noticed," stated Cecelia, very crossly this time, as she rose. "And I wish you would stop that—that old questioning, France Garrett!"

"Why, of course I will, honey, if you don't like to answer. I never do, sugar, unless whoever I am asking questions really likes to answer. You do, though."

"I do what—like to answer questions? Well, I don't, Miss Frances Taliaferro Garrett."

"No, that isn't what I mean. I mean that you do love him."

Cecelia laughed at that and kissed pretty Frances. "Darlin', if you say that I love this no-'count old Ranger named Hatfield, then I do—and I reckon that you better write him and—" She stiffened suddenly.

Coming around the corner of the veranda was Miss Virginia Calvert, her little hand held tightly in the thin tanned one of Mr. Hatfield, Arizona Ranger. It was as if Cecelia was a magician and had conjured him out of the ground when she called his name.

"Why," she gasped, a hand flying to her heart, "it is—Sam! It is really you!" And she ran to meet them.

"He drove down from Washington to see me and you," Jinny stated, as Cecelia approached.

"I'm right glad that he did, darlin'," Cecelia answered. "My goodness, reckon I better go and telephone right over to Howard and have them find a cot for my mother to sleep outdoors on!"

"I've got me my war-bag in the car," Sam answered gravely, as he took her pretty hands in his, Jinny letting go with great reluctance. "And there is an extra blanket that your ma can have."

Sally and Frances smiled as they heard Cecelia's happy laugh and when she brought Sam up, Mrs. Sally Calvert promptly kissed him.

"You saved Jinny, darlin'," announced Sally firmly, "and I love you. Cissy, reckon you better take this no-'count scoundrel of a Sam right away, because if you don't I'm liable to kiss him again."

Frances Garrett looked at the wiry, thin-faced young Arizona Ranger, her beautiful blue eyes making a calm survey. She smiled at him. "I'm right glad you have come, Sam. You must have Cissy bring you over to Garrett so that you can meet my brother Anse and—"

"I will," promised Cecelia. "I will, France, honest and truly—but right now I'm going to take this Sam Hatfield somewhere and have him explain what he means by—by sneakin' up on us this way."

Cecelia led Sam down on the lawn, Jinny being prevented from joining in the procession by concerted main strength.

"Now," said Miss Howard as they sat down, "tell me all about everything, right away. First, how is Ma?"

"Ma sent her love to you and said for you to hurry right back and help her boss a lot of no-'count menfolks."

"Did she, Sam?" Cecelia smiled happily. "I love her. Go on."

"The Lazy U had a right good spring round-up, and shipped three thousand head to—"

"Sam Hatfield! You better had stop that!"

"Doggone it!" Sam tried to look very surprised. "You said to tell you everything!"

"You know what I mean. How did you happen to come East and how long can you stay? Oh, Sam, dar— I mean I'm very glad to see you again."

"I'm glad to see you, too—darn' good and glad."

"Oh, that reminds me. I want to be there when France Garrett starts that old questioning of hers. You both ask direct questions and give right direct answers. You will like her, Sam dar— My goodness, I can't keep from saying it all the time!"

"I wish you would, Miss Celia Honey!" Sam grinned.

"Now," declared Miss Howard hotly, "I won't—ever! I told you not to call me that, way down in Arizona."

"Doggone it, so you did. If I tell you how come me here, will you call me those names?"

"No, I won't. You needn't think that just because people here in Maryland and Virginia say darlin' and honey all the time that they— Why, everyone calls everyone else darlin' and—"

"Will you please go a little slower?" pleaded Sam. "I got lost right after the first darlin'."

Then, both being young and happy, they laughed.

"You go right ahead and tell me, Sam," she ordered.

"Well, there was a big Federal case broke down there and some folks in Washington wanted to know how come. The Rangers were in it, and Captain Billy sent me up."

"Why did he send *you*, Sam?"

"Because I asked him to," answered Sam with a grin.

"Why did you ask him to send you?" went on the lovely Cecelia. "My goodness, this questionin' and answerin' is a right good thing, isn't it, darlin'? There, it slipped right out—and I didn't mean to say it, either."

"Which one do you want me to answer first?"

"Answer the one, why did you ask him to send you?"

"Because if he did send me, I was hopin' to see you."

"But, Sam, why did you hope to see me?" Miss Howard was playing with fire—and she realized it when Sam answered calmly: "Because I love you, honey."

"What? You love— Sam Hatfield! How could you l-love me when you only saw me for—"

"It can happen in a second," explained Sam, his blue eyes intent on her lovely face.

"Why—that's right! It can, can't it?"

"Yes suh, she sure can. So when I got through in Washington I came right down here to tell you."

"Is that all, Sam?" asked Miss Howard softly.

"No, it isn't all. I came down to tell you that and ask you if you thought you could love me and come to Arizona to live. I've got two weeks before I have to go back. I love you, honey, and— Cissy, do you love me? Don't you think that—"

Miss Howard rose. "My goodness, I can't think of a thing right now. Perhaps I can in two weeks. We'll go over to Howard and—"

"You can think of one thing," Sam said sternly, as he came close to Cecelia—who for some reason did not draw back even a little step. "And that is the answer to—do you love me?"

"Why, Sam, how can I until I— Oh, I do, darlin'! Of course I'll marry you and go to Arizona, and—"

Miss Howard was obliged to finish her sentence later, for several reasons—the first one being that when she said "*and*" her lips met Mr. Hatfield's, who now that the talkin' was over, acted with his usual swiftness.

Rumble Seat Evidence

Nine lawyers in a huddle couldn't tell who was going to jail after Skilletface Pegram had got all the trouble started.

SKILLETFACE PEGRAM—of color—couldn't develop any luck in tuning out on his home broadcasting station. Otelia, his wife, kept right on talking, on all wave-lengths and too many kilocycles.

Skilletface as a business-man was both her theme and audience—Skilletface, as compared with the resplendent Calhoun Pond, the big bitters and real-estate boy of Fourth Avenue.

"Whut you gwine do wid dat set of books you done bought off de man?" she was inaugurating Husband's Hour around the homestead now. "Two dollars down—*my* two dollars—when de side-meat an' de cawnmeal done both 'bout gone! —An' you caint read nohow!"

"Dey looks good in de front room—"

"Fo' *how long?* So did dat big brass French hawn whut dey tooken 'way from you las' week after you falls down *kerflunk* on dc payments!"

"Took all de money to pay de 'stalments on de enlarged picture of myse'f dat week," Skilletface made bad matters worse.

"Uh-huh! Aint hit so! An' who buy dat picture nohow, when you aint got money 'nough in de house to git gas fo' yo' taxi?"

"Man talk me into hit," mumbled Skilletface feebly. Old argument was fixing to turn out wrong. But then, everything sounded worse when Otelia got to telling it—everything, that was, except Calhoun Pond.

"Easy mark, you is!" Otelia was plainly trying for distance now. And getting it. Away over on Fourth Avenue, Mr. Pond would have to be deaf not to hear her. "Why aint you make some money? Be a business-man like Mist' Calhoun Pond is. *He* aint w'ar patches fo' pants! But naw, you got be easy mark. An' lemme tell you somep'n else—from now on you quits buyin' ev'ything you sees an' half you hears 'bout! You 'tend to yo' taxi an' *I* 'tends to de agents. —What dat you mumblin'?"

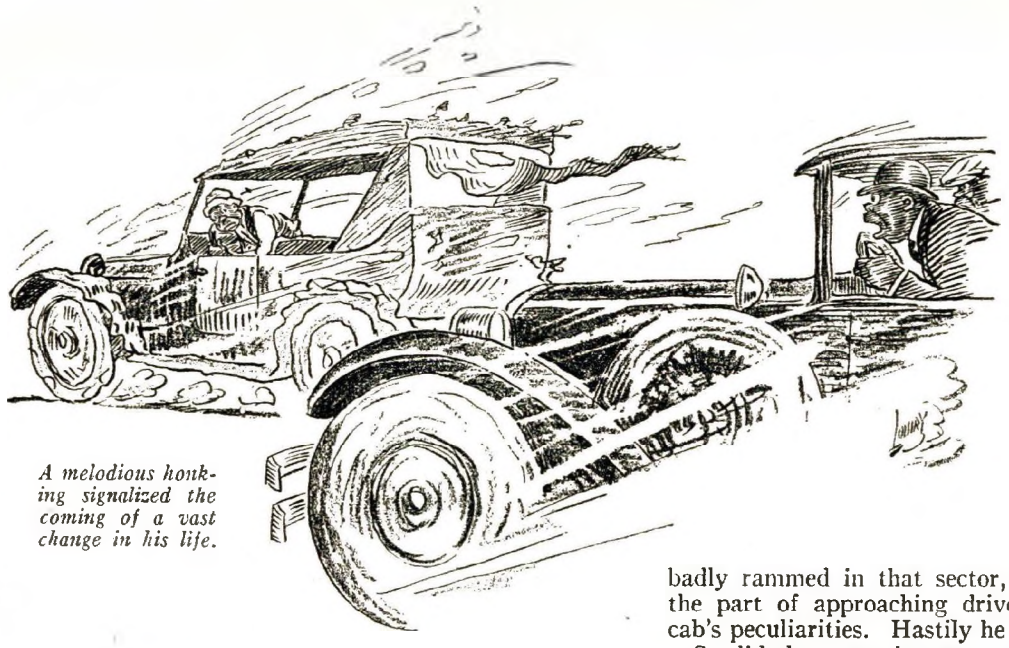
"Says womens aint und'stand business. I—"

"Dey aint, aint dey? Well, I und'stands *dis!* Whut you ridin' in? Old tax'cab whut rains parts all over de road ev'y time you goes nowhar in hit. An' whut Calhoun Pond ridin' in? Fine new car wid a cut-out, an' shinin' all over. —Dat's diff'ence 'tween a easy mark an' a business-man!"

"Diff'ence 'tween business an' bitters, you means," muttered Skilletface rebelliously.

"Huccome *bitters?*" Otelia's tone was sharp.

Mr. Pegram edged nearer the door, for personal reasons. "Ev'ybody know Calhoun jes' real-'statin' on de side," he retorted from his safety-zone. "Dat boy makin' he *big* money out dem one-eighty proof alc'hol bitters he done tu'n out. Give a moto'cycle fo' swallers dem bitters an' hit feel like a bus!"



A melodious honking signalized the coming of a vast change in his life.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

"Dem bitters all right. One dose done make me fo'git my mis'ry," Otelia defended them belligerently. "Calhoun 'scribes 'em pussonal fo' me."

"Yeah, an' if Calhoun keep on comin' round heah makin' talk wid you while I's out makin' a livin', I's gwine—"

"While you's out makin' *whut?*"

Skilletface knew when to take an argument outside—his half of it, at any rate. He had experience and two knots on his head to prove that a man whose wife didn't understand him was a whole lot better off than the husband of one who did. And everything was heading up one way now: he had to make a showing as a business-man on his home grounds. Otherwise he was liable to find a note instead of supper on his kitchen table some night when he came home.

Ruefully Mr. Pegram shuffled toward his taxi, parked in the alley before his home. He regarded it critically. In the light of recent conjugal comment concerning Calhoun's new car, it didn't look so hot, Skilletface was forced to admit. Having his taxi's wheels each of a different size lent individuality but not grace. And the place on the hood where a boy kicked it while he was hand-cranking the motor was beginning to show a bad dent. Not to speak of the obviously hopeful spirit in which junkmen had taken to following him, jackal-like, along the dusty streets of the Tittisville area.

In fact, this morning everything was normal about the Pegram taxi, including its standard equipment of two flat tires and a leaking radiator. But Skilletface could outpump and outpour such trifles as these, and shortly he was bowling noisily out Avenue F in search of fares.

Yet he could not roll from beneath the burden that was upon his mind. Added to the formidable rivalry being developed by Calhoun for the dazzled Otelia's affections, was the depressing fact that the taxi was not going to last much longer. No car could continue to give off parts indefinitely, and run—which eventuality would simply tie a fresh knot in Skilletface's personal luck. For when the home broadcast got to be about new car *versus* no car at all, the going was likely to become hard indeed for husbands!

A great and melodious honking from behind him signalized but did not advertise the coming of a vast change in his life. Rather, Mr. Pegram's first thought was to protect his rear. Twice in the recent past he had been badly rammed in that sector, through miscalculation on the part of approaching drivers who did not know his cab's peculiarities. Hastily he drew over to the curb now.

So did the oncoming car—a big blue roadster with its curtains drawn close, and traveling fast. As it halted behind him, Skilletface plainly foresaw trouble. White folks were all the time wanting to see a boy's cab-driving license. Which was all right when you had one, but simply brought on a lot of talk when—like Skilletface—you didn't!

But when the doors opened simultaneously on both sides of the blue car, he saw that it was no license matter this time. Two large well-dressed colored men hit the street as one. And if time was money, these two boys must be millionaires, the way they hustled about and kept a sharp lookout behind them. Briskly they descended upon the apprehensive taxi-man at the wheel of his perambulating wreck.

"Dat yo' car, boy?" snapped one of them, all business.

"Jes' made de las' payment on hit," responded Mr. Pegram uneasily. "Car so good hit last dat long."

One business-man looked at the other, questioningly—also back up the avenue; then nodded imperceptibly.

"You like sell hit?" he followed up the nod, in Skilletface's direction.

Warning echoes of Otelia's remarks lingered in her husband's ears. But this was different. She had said buying. This was selling. . . .

"Sell anything, if de price right," he gave what he considered a correct imitation of General Motors negotiating the sale of a spark-plug.

"Well, it's like this," returned the larger of the two strangers, glancing hastily behind him again. "You is a business-man, Mister—er—"

Skilletface swelled. Other people could see it, if Otelia couldn't!

"—Pegram," he supplied. "Gawge Pegram. Ev'ybody calls me 'Skilletface' fo' shawt—on 'count whut my wife-befo'-last done to hit once wid fryin'-pan."

" 'Xactly. And, as business-man, you will und'stand when us tells you us needs a *diff'rent* car. Right away. Fact is, aint but two of us, and us aint need sich a big car—"

"Sho' aint!" interpolated the smaller stranger reminiscently.

"—So us thinkin' 'bout gittin' rid of it, fo' a smaller one whut look diff'ent."

The pair paused, and eyed Mr. Pegram and his taxi expectantly. Skilletface blinked. These rich-looking boys

had started in talking about buying his taxi: now they were sounding just like trading in their car on it—same as the white folks did that had got him messed up trading in his mouth-organ on that French horn.

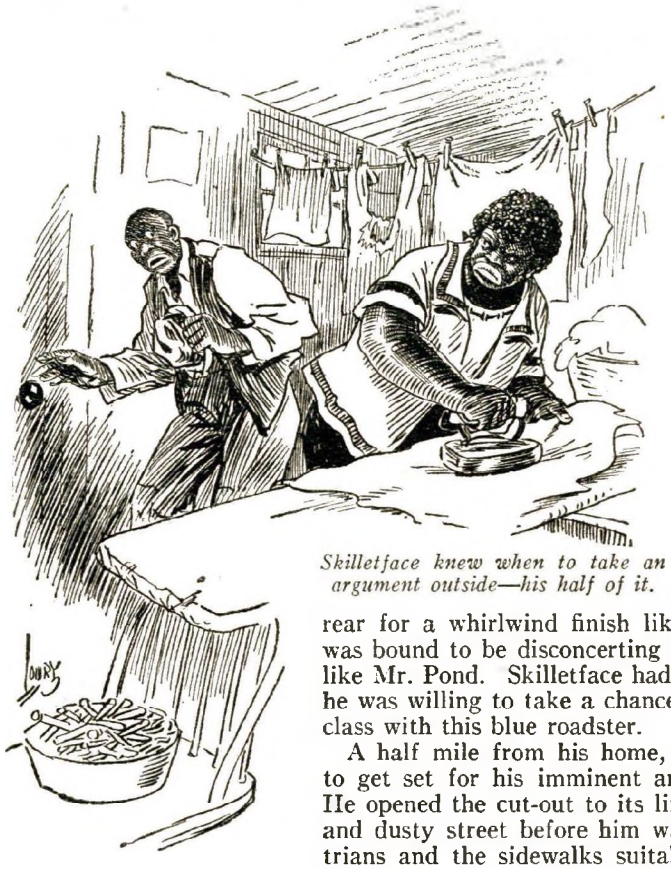
"Sure, he wants to trade!" the larger Crœsus cut in on his perplexity. "An' make it snappy, Cla'ence; make Mist' Pegram a lib'ral offer, an' then le's us git gwine."

Skilletface swallowed air. Offer? Trade? *That* car for his? He toyed with a dream that he knew couldn't last.

Yet what a crushing answer to Otelia's caustic comments about his lack of business ability, should it really happen! Any boy who drove away in what he had been piloting, and came back in what these fancy-looking strangers were talking about trading him into, was liable to wind up as president of a bank shortly. Then what would Otelia think of the bitters business?

The hurried pair evidently misunderstood his indecision, for: "Co'se, us aint p'pared to give you nothin' to boot fo' yo' car, Mist' Pegram," the one called Clarence further astonished him. "But you'll find dis heah blue car's r'arin' to ride you—complete wid fo' wheels an' a engine."

He paused again to look up the avenue in the direction from which they had come. Skilletface looked too, and didn't see anything. "You means us trades even?" he returned to their muttons.



Skilletface knew when to take an argument outside—his half of it.

"As is," countered Clarence, "—soon as us unloads de baggage out de back."

Skilletface came out fast—before they should change their minds. Why these two should be in such haste was none of his affair—not when he was on the point of making a trade that would prove without the aid of geometry that he was nine times better as a business-man than Otelia gave him credit for. Then let Calhoun offset that with her!

"You can git five miles out dem tires wid one pumpin'," he closed the deal as he came over the side of his former wreck.

Four seconds later, the visiting business-men were disappearing down the avenue at a speed that Skilletface hadn't known was in his old cab. Triumphantly he climbed into the big blue car, and started it up. One thing was sure: life was fixing to grow pleasant. Watching Otelia's face when he drove up before his own home would contribute to that. Hearing her take back all that talk about Calhoun being a better business-man than he would be another attractive feature of his impending home-coming. In fact, Mr. Pegram was sorry that Otelia hadn't said more—so she could take that back too! An easy mark, was he? Then how about this trade? It wasn't enough for a married man to *claim* to be smart: he had to prove it—which Skilletface was now about to do. He turned his new purchase swiftly into an intersecting street, and set out for Tittisville and triumph.

From far up the avenue came the fast *put-put-put* of two hard-driven motorcycles. In his driving mirror, Skilletface saw the begoggled officers astride them shoot past the opening in the Avenue parkway shrubs behind him; and a turn of his head permitted further view of them, roaring past the struggling taxi that had once been his, and turning into the Montevallo road hell-bent-for-rubber toward its distant intersection with the Montgomery Highway.

"White folks sho' after somebody!" admired Mr. Pegram expansively, and he drove slowly that he might plan largely.

Six blocks were occupied with visualizing the envy of Calhoun Pond and the shock of revelation to Otelia. She wanted a business-man, did she?

Three blocks more, and Mr. Pegram was feeling sorry for Calhoun's coming discomfiture. To see a mere husband in patched pants come up from the rear for a whirlwind finish like this—Calhoun's finish—was bound to be disconcerting to a visiting home-breaker like Mr. Pond. Skilletface hadn't seen Calhoun's car, but he was willing to take a chance now that it wasn't in the class with this blue roadster.

A half mile from his home, Mr. Pegram really began to get set for his imminent and dramatic arrival there. He opened the cut-out to its limit; he saw that the wide and dusty street before him was suitably clear of pedestrians and the sidewalks suitably filled with prospective admiring spectators.

Then he stepped on the gas.

With a roar, the big car shot forward. Dust and stray fowls spurted madly from beneath its tires. One of those horns that have aroused the nationwide musical envy of Eddie Cantor gave melodious warning that Skilletface Pegram, business-man, was riding the wind.

All too soon it was over. Scream of locked brakes mingled with screech of skidding rubber and swish of loose gravel, and in a cloud of dust and glory Mr. Pegram slid nonchalantly from beneath the wheel of his purchase, before the vine-clad porch on which Otelia rocked and strung snap-beans for dinner.

Otelia's jaw dropped gratifyingly at the sight. In fact, a warm glow spread over Skilletface as he perceived that the impression he was making upon her was all, and more, than he had dared hope. Her eyes were projecting like a crab's and she was, for the first time since their marriage, at loss for language! Any car that could strike Otelia dumb *was* a car!

"W-w-whar at you git dat thing?" she at length achieved speech.

"Jes' li'l trade I makes," Skilletface deprecated undue disturbance over a small matter. Now that he had turned his mind and hands to business, Otelia must expect to be astonished often at the magnitude and magnificence of his operations. "I swaps off my taxicab fo' hit."

If possible, Otelia seemed to become even nearer a stroke of some sort.

"Swaps yo' tax'cab fo' hit?" she repeated thickly. "You —you swap *yo'* tax'cab fo' *dat* car?"

"Even," returned Skilletface easily. "Now whut you got say 'bout me not bein' no business-man, huh?"

"Whut *I* got say? Boy, whut you wants know is whut *Calhoun Pond* got say!"

"He aint got nothin' say. An' you wants shet up 'bout Calhoun Pond round heah, too. Dat big boy look like nothin' wid de lid loose, to me. An' I's better business-man dan he is, wid one dollar tied behind me. Look at dis car! Me and you and hit aint none of Calhoun's business no mo'!"

Otelia snapped into coherence. "Hit aint, aint hit?" she demanded sharply. "Well, den, Big Business, tell *me*—befo' you has to tell de jedge. Whar-at you git Calhoun Pond's new car from?"

A couple of planets, or something, fell on Skilletface and disconcerted him.

"*C-C-Calhoun's* car?"

"Uh-huh! Whut wuz stole jes' 'bout houah ago when he leave hit parked in front he bitters place, wid de key in hit."

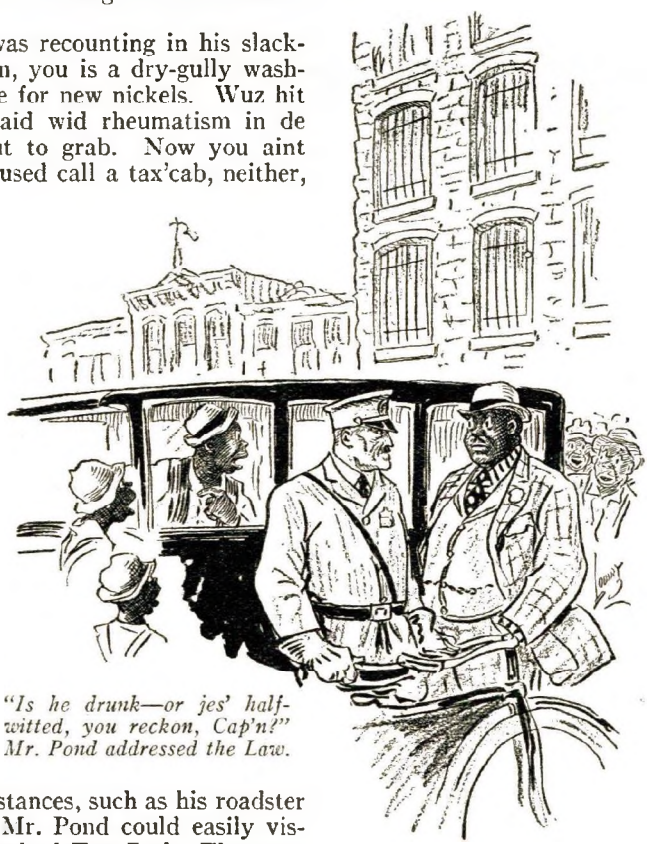
Skilletface remembered things—the two rich strangers, their haste to be rid of what they so evidently feared to be found in, their other actions, the speeding motorcycle police so soon to appear. With a moan, he watched distant Red Mountain dip and sway while nausea and revelation wracked and weakened him.

Otelia kept on relentlessly assembling the facts into a sorry system for him:

"Like I say all time," she was recounting in his slack-jawed face, "as a business-man, you is a dry-gully wash-out. You'd pay a dollar apiece for new nickels. Wuz hit rainin' money, you'd be in baid wid rheumatism in de poorhouse, an' couldn't git out to grab. Now you aint even got dat pile of parts you used call a tax'cab, neither, is you?"

"Spect I better drive on way from heah while I does my thinkin'," hazarded Skilletface feebly. "Dem motor-cops li'ble come back."

Calhoun Pond, the big bitters and business-man, hastened up Fourth Avenue, chewing nervously on a dime cigar and trying to remember something important. A rose under any other name might be just as sweet; but Pond's Bitters under any label—or no label at all—wasn't bitters: it was 180-proof alcohol, and as such much sought after by both patrons and Prohibition officers.



"Is he drunk—or jes' half-witted, you reckon, Cap'n?" Mr. Pond addressed the Law.

Which, under certain circumstances, such as his roadster falling into the wrong hands, Mr. Pond could easily visualize as coming under the head of Too Bad. That was what had the prosperous-appearing Calhoun worried now. His car had just been stolen, which was serious enough. But in the excitement following his discovery of its loss, he had overlooked something worse that was capable of landing him in Atlanta—under the Jones Law—if it were not attended to right away.

In brief, Mr. Pond had made two errors. And the second—which made the first so menacing—was that he had at once reported the loss of his car to the police. So now the burning question with Birmingham's big bitters man was not where to park but whether that rumble-seat load of his bitters in the lost roadster had been in labeled or unlabeled bottles. In the answer to that lay the answer to the even more important question now of where he was liable to spend the next ten years.

For, were the bottles labeled *Bitters,* the law might take the label's word for it when the car was recovered. In which event it was a simple case of automobile theft. But should they be unlabeled, olfactory and chemical tests might follow, with consequences that the nervous Mr. Pond hated to contemplate.

All of this made it neither the time nor the place for him to receive further disquieting news. Ipecac Ingalls bore it, and evidently knew nothing of its import.

"Whut dat Skilletface boy doin' drivin' yo' blue car downtown while 'go, Calhoun?" he queried sociably.

The cigar fell from Mr. Pond's startled mouth. Ipecac hastened to get his foot on it and Calhoun's mind off it. "Funny thing," he commented further, "dey wuz two cops follerin' on behin' him, jes' out of sight, on moto'cycles —like dey wuz waitin' see whar at he gwine in hit."

Calhoun's brain sent up rockets. Cops and his car! There couldn't be a worse mixture, with this label business still unsettled in his mind. Until he could get the real facts on the rumble-seat situation, he couldn't risk claiming his own car now, he realized, even if it were brought to him. He surely had slipped up when he reported its loss to the police before he thought of the full meaning of its contents.

Ipecac employed these moments of indecision on Mr. Pond's part to finish salvaging the fallen cigar. Skillfully he removed its band, to render identification more difficult.

But Calhoun was busy watching mental movies instead of Ipecac. Movies of Skilletface Pegram driving his new car through the streets and he, Calhoun, not even able safely to claim it or admit its ownership until he could settle the matter of its alcoholic content. Skilletface, his rival, the husband of Otelia—

Which sent Mr. Pond's brain off on a fresh tangent. Every possibility indicated a gumming up of his hard-won present standing with Otelia. Undeniably she knew a good man when she saw one. Especially when she saw him in a new blue roadster. This latter fact might prove a boomerang; Skilletface was in that roadster now—improving his standing hourly in her eyes, no doubt. That would certainly have to be stopped!

Under these perturbing influences, Calhoun rounded the corner southward into Twenty-first Street, with Ipecac, puffing happily now upon Calhoun's ex-cigar, at his heels

—a turning that threw them directly opposite the "Big Rock," as the white-folks' jail-house at that intersection was well and unfavorably known to them. And, speaking of jail houses—

A dim and distant light appeared on Calhoun's personal horizon—unaided as yet by any helpful hints from his ways and means committee. But the idea itself, he saw, was sound. And appealing. In fact, it grew upon him. In a nutshell, if any going to jail were to be done, why not let George do it? Otherwise, Mr. George Pegram—or Skilletface for short. Nothing was in the way but the price. That appeared enormous, at the moment. But it might be worth it: its advantages and simplicities would be numerous. With the husband in the case thus legally out of the way, the road to Otelia's heart would be greatly smoothed and sweetened for Mr. Pond himself. That was undeniable.

But two important and interlocking points were left to be solved: How to get Skilletface in jail for automobile stealing without accompanying him there himself on the graver charge of transporting illicit alcohol; and how to get his car back without admitting its ownership.

Mr. Pond wrestled unsuccessfully with these twin difficulties for a block.

Then again light came, via Ipecac the dark—inadvertently and unintentionally though it was on his part.

"Let's us cross over heah in front de courthouse an' see de sale," proposed that sawed-off bearer of bad tidings, as a clustering of spectators along the Third Avenue sidewalks across the way attracted his attention.

"Whut sale?" gloomed Mr. Calhoun Pond, who had other troubles.

"Automobile sale. White folks auction off cheap de cars whut dey done tooken away from de bootleggers whut wuz haulin' liquor in 'em. Heaps times you c'n git a good car fo' mighty nigh nothin'."

Ipecac impressed Calhoun unfavorably as the sort of boy who would interrupt a funeral to watch a dog-fight. But he might as well humor him. No harm in keeping contact with a darky like Ipecac who told all he knew.

But midway of crossing the street to gratify the Ipecacian curiosity, Calhoun thought he had been struck by a trolley-car. Then he realized it was merely the impact of an idea—or, rather, the rest of an idea—the important part of a previous and incomplete one. But he had it all now! An idea that would do everything—from getting Skilletface into custody of the convict-camps to permitting himself, Calhoun, to repossess his blue roadster with small sacrifice and reasonable freedom from risk. Following which he could already see himself in his mind's eye, Otelia by his side, riding furiously over the roads made by the striped-suited Skilletface during a long sentence for automobile theft with liquid complications. As a frame-up, it would be perfect; as a means of putting a rival in his place, it ranked with transatlantic flights!

"Keep my seegar, Ip'cac," he delicately let his companion in on the secret that his source of a smoke *was* no secret. "I got turn back heah an' 'tend to somep'n. —Which way you say Skilletface comin' from?"

Never before had Mr. Skilletface Pegram so shunned prominence. Yet every time he turned a fresh corner in that big blue roadster now he felt that he was fixing to achieve it in a most unpalatable way. He kept imagining too that he heard motorcycles behind him. And every time he heard them he thought of Avenue F and the speeding police who had disappeared so fast out that thoroughfare. They would be back too, which point was the very crux of what Mr. Ingalls was on his way to attend to now. For all those cops ever did for a boy was to introduce him to a judge. And Skilletface had never had any luck around judges.

Mr. Pegram regarded his taxi critically. It didn't look so hot, he was forced to admit.

That he was now on a noble errand, based on the purest and most self-preservative of motives wouldn't do him any good, either, if he got caught midway in its execution. Never had he been in a more ticklish position. Everything from Otelia to appearances was against him now. All was gone, save honor, and it was hanging by a mighty slender thread.

Put-put-put sounded those dreaded machines in the near distance behind him. *Put-put-put* went Skilletface's heart in shrinking response.

Ahead, a colored country family in a flivver missed the import of a stop sign, but they didn't miss the ice-wagon that rumbled into their gala path. Mules, darkys, and machine mingled madly upon the pavement, and precipitated the long-dreaded crisis for Skilletface as they blocked the roadway.

One of the following motorcycle officers took the traffic case under adjustment, but the other recognized bigger game.

"Where'd you get that blue car, boy?" he froze Skilletface to his seat.

Mr. Pegram trembled visibly in four new places. This was bringing things to a conclusion with a rush—under circumstances where the truth would sound exactly like a lie. So would a lie, for that matter.

"Buys hit," he stuttered weakly. "Jes' fixin' take—"

"Yeah? Bought it from who?"

"Aint know, Cap'n. Aint never see dem befo', so he'p me Gawd. I jes' trades 'em old broke'-down taxi even-money fo' hit. I's jes' fixin' take—"

"Tell that to the judge—and see how far you get! Drive on ahead of me when they get this ice-wagon moved now. Straight to headquarters—and I'll follow right behind you. And don't you try any monkey business, stepping on that gas, either!"

Whichever way Skilletface looked, he saw stripes running around his clothes, while a white gentleman with a shotgun stood at the side of the road he was building and watched him work. In his efforts to become a business-man he had merely opened the way to become a road-builder for the county, in person!

Desperately he looked about him. And saw relief coming! What more opportune? What more plausible? How better could he establish his defense, bolster his case, fix everything? Right when he needed a savior, the one person who could save him—undesirable though he otherwise was—was at hand!

"Make haste an' come on over heah, Calhoun!" he called out in husky appeal to the approaching big-business and bitters man. "White folks done got me wrong—jes' when I's on my way to give you yo' car whut couple of niggers done stole from you an' sold to me, when I sees you comin'! Praise de Lawd! Let somebody else build dem roads now! You tell 'em, Calhoun, 'bout knowin' me an' all 'bout how hit is!"

BUT at what followed Mr. Pegram instituted a hasty check-up on his eyes and ears, to see if they were working right. If not, he needed six or seven specialists in those fields. But if they *were*, he needed half the good lawyers in Birmingham! For Calhoun Pond was doing and saying unbelievable things.

"Whut you talkin' 'bout, black boy?" Calhoun was answering Skilletface's wild appeal. "Dat aint my car. An' I never saw *you* befo' in my life. Whut he been doin', Cap'n—bootleggin'?"

"Quit yo' kiddin' now, Calhoun!" implored the tearful Mr. Pegram. "I aint mean whut I say 'bout you all time comin' round makin' talk wid my wife! I aint mean to keep yo' car! I jes' drivin' hit back to you when de white folks gits me heah! Sho' 'nough, I wuz!"

"Is he drunk—or jes' half-witted, you reckon, Cap'n?" Mr. Pond merely addressed further sympathetic questions to the Law. "*I* aint never see him befo'. Wisht dat *wuz* my car! Sho' is good-lookin'. Wonder whar-at he stole hit from?"

Calhoun was unfathomable. Also unfinished, it was to appear. For the disowning of his own car, his unrecognition of Skilletface, were but the preliminaries to carrying out the inspiration which had swept him as he had neared that official auctioning of bootleggers' cars earlier in the afternoon.

"Man,"—he was looking straight at the distraught and shivering Skilletface, still firmly in the clutches of the law,—"I aint never see *you* befo' in yo' life, but I sees right through yo' game. And yo' tryin' to pull a 'spectable business-man like me into hit is whut makes me jine up wid de law to settle yo' hash right now!"

Skilletface gasped and tried to remember back to when he wasn't in trouble.

"I bet dat car's yourn, nohow," continued Mr. Pond startlingly. Here was where bitters became evidence! "As I done said befo', hit aint mine. You jes' aint want admit hit's yourn beca'ze you got liquor in de back. Dat de reason you's so dawggone anxious to git loose, an' tellin' all dem lies 'bout you bringin' *me* back a car whut you owns an' I don't. Tryin' hang yo' liquor-runnin' on me—dat whut you doin'! Well, boy, you aint dat smart—whoever you is! Dat's yo' car—not mine. An' jes' to prove de rest of hit, Cap'n,"—he was addressing the policeman now—"s'pose us raises up de back an' let you look in. I bet dey's 'nough bottles in dar to put dat runty boy on de road fo' a yeah!"

Calhoun paused for effect. Old frame-up was going fine. That rumble-seat full of bitters would attend to putting Skilletface away for years. And the auction would permit him to buy his confiscated car back cheaply and anonymously a little later.

"—Yo' car hit is—an' whut dey finds in hit is jes' dat much ev'dence 'gainst you," Calhoun was recounting with ill-concealed gloating, as the officer lifted the lid.

A judge can alter a man's whole future with one sentence. —But so could a motorcycle policeman, it dawned on the suddenly staggered Calhoun as the investigating cop loosed a cold eye and a bewildering announcement upon him—one which Mr. Pond realized with sinking heart put his business right back where it was after he passed the jail-house and before he came to the inspiration of the car auction. Here was a situation grown serious indeed! And if he was collapsing feebly against the ruined ice-wagon, so was his hope of Otelia, his case against the wall-eyed Skilletface. Times were different—but no better! Nine lawyers in a huddle wouldn't be able to tell *now* who was going to jail—or for what; but a new and shrewd suspicion in that respect was sending cold shivers both ways on his spine—a feeling which was not helped by the advent now of the first officer. For, "What the hell?" he instantly voiced a reaction—and a recognition—that chilled Mr. Pond anew as the two policemen went into conference.

"—I tell you, there wasn't no evidence against this little darky *in* that rumble-seat," the latter reiterated the cause of Calhoun's sickness. "Wasn't nothing in there at all but some tools. Looks to me just like—"

"Co'se dey wuzn't!" the shipwrecked Skilletface suddenly saw land at last, and chimed in, high-keyed and hoarsely, as he caught the new direction of the wind. "I ricollects now: When us trades, dem two git whut dey calls dey 'baggage' out de back an' take hit wid 'em. *Dat* whar Calhoun's liquor done gone!"

"Shet up 'bout liquor! Tell you hit *aint my car!*" hissed Mr. Pond savagely.

And then for him the final blow, the boomerang! Blind justice that sent him reeling and without recourse, taken at his word upon the barren streets of Tittisville!

"—Yeah?" the first officer was closing the conference with his partner. "Well, all I know is, I was there when this big sick-looking boy here"—indicating the pallid and palpitant Calhoun—"came galloping into headquarters this morning hollering about his car being stole. —And now he says it aint even his! Looks like a frame-up to me—and No Case, if we get messed up in it—"

"Well, why bother the judge, then?" the second officer drew on his gauntlets. "If this big boy says it aint his car he ought to know—and if it aint his, it *must* be this little slab-footed coon's that came here in it, after all! Give it to him, and let's go!"

IN a rear room of his Eighth Avenue flat that evening, Mr. Calhoun Pond, Birmingham's newest and self-made pedestrian, mixed bitters and bitterness in equal portions as ever and anon there drifted up to him from the street below a sound that set his teeth to grinding in rage.

Yet each time it was prompted by a little thing; no more, indeed, than the murmured words of Otelia, snuggled coyly against a grinning and triumphant Skilletface as he drove slowly back and forth on Mr. Pond's block in a big blue roadster:

"Blow dat hawn ag'in, honey! Hit sho' do make you sound like a business-man to me!"

TARZAN

Guard of the Jungle

The Story So Far:

INTO the heart of Tarzan's own domain there had come a party of communists bent upon looting the treasure-vaults of Opar of their fabled gold, and using this wealth in conquering the world for the communist cause. But the Russian leader of the party, one Peter Zveri, secretly planned to betray his comrades and make himself emperor of Africa, with his beautiful secretary Zora Drinov as his empress. This plan he had mentioned to no one save Zora herself, who had evaded any promises except that of continued secrecy.

Tarzan, listening from the trees above the base camp, had learned of the communist plans, and to demoralize their morale, had repeatedly struck terror to the hearts of the blacks accompanying the party. He journeyed to Opar to warn the inhabitants, but was taken off-guard and imprisoned. By chance, he discovered as a fellow-prisoner the high priestess La, who had been dethroned in a conspiracy among her people. Tarzan escaped from Opar, taking La with him, but while he was hunting for food in the jungle they became separated and during La's attempts to find him she came upon the base camp of the communists. Zveri had departed with his comrades in his second attempt upon Opar, leaving in charge of the camp the Sheik Abu Batu and his Aarab followers, another division of the motley groups which formed Zveri's party. Zora Drinov had remained with these. She welcomed the weary La, and the two girls became friends. They were in unsafe hands, however, for the treacherous Sheik deserted camp after looting it of everything valuable, bound the girls and took them along to sell as slaves. Meanwhile Zveri's second foray upon Opar failed as had the first, for the weird cries of the Oparian half-men frightened his warriors away—though there was left captive Wayne Colt, the wealthy young American member of the party. A little Oparian priestess, Nao, released Colt a few hours before the time set for his execution, and he started through the jungle to regain the camp.

When Tarzan released the shaft it buried itself in the sentry's leg.

Among the Aarabs fleeing with their captives, dissension had arisen. One of the young men, desiring to obtain La for himself, separated the two girls by a ruse. But La killed him with his own knife, and escaped into the jungle where she came upon Jad-bal-ja, a lion who had once attached himself to Tarzan. The lion recognized her as a friend of his master and became her bodyguard. Zora, after La had gone, tried to escape from her captors, and her ensuing struggle with Abu Batu was luckily witnessed by Wayne Colt, who leaped upon the Sheik and killed him. After Colt and Zora had evaded pursuit by the rest of the Aarabs, Colt told her of Zveri's second failure at Opar, and that the communist party was now reduced to Zveri, two other Russians,—Michael Dorsky and Paul Ivitch,—a Mexican named Miguel Romero, and Colt's little Filipino friend Antonio Mori, besides Kitembo, an African chieftain and his black Galla warriors and camp-boys.

Zora and Colt, drawn together by their common plight, felt a deep though unspoken understanding begin to grow between them. But their ignorance of the jungle made the obtaining of food very difficult; they were both weakened and half-starved when one day while Colt was away hunting Zora was carried off by a great ape. Colt, finding her gone, began a frantic search. He had fallen exhausted when he was menaced by the lion guarding La, who came to his rescue, gave him food and water, and conversing in the halting English she had learned from Zora, found that he was a friend of the Russian girl's.

In this extraordinary and unique narrative the greatest adventurer of our time achieves some of his most remarkable exploits.

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

Zveri, who had returned to the site of his base camp and found it deserted, dared not leave to search for Zora until the reinforcements and fresh supplies he had ordered should arrive. While he was awaiting these, a black runner brought him a message which disturbed him greatly, but which he showed to none of his comrades.

Zora Drinov, unconscious from terror, was being carried deep into the jungle, when Tarzan suddenly confronted the great ape. They prepared to battle for her, but To-yat the ape, hearing the approach of the mighty elephant Tantor, dropped the girl and fled. Tarzan bore her gently away to a secluded glade where he fed and nursed her back to health and strength, though he never spoke to her. By night she was guarded by this silent forest god, and during the day by the great bull elephant.

When the girl had fully recovered, Tarzan took her in his arms and leaping into a tree carried her thus, to her amazement, a long way through the jungle to a spot within sight of Zveri's camp, where he lowered her to the ground and released her. With an apparently fruitless effort at thanks, Zora started toward camp, Tarzan following in the trees to insure her safety. Near the camp, Paul Ivitch, seeing something move in a tree, lifted his gun and fired. Tarzan of the Apes fell unconscious to the ground, blood running from a wound in the side of his head. One of the blacks identified him as the Lord of the Jungle and Zveri, knowing Tarzan as an enemy, drew his revolver and advanced to dispatch him. At this Zora, horror-struck, threw herself across the ape-man, shielding his body with hers.

"You cannot kill him," she cried. "You must not!"

(The story continues in detail:)

"DON'T be a fool, Zora," snapped Zveri.

"He saved my life and brought me back here to camp. Do you think I am going to let you murder him?" she demanded.

"I am afraid you can't help yourself, Zora," replied the man. "I do not like to do it, but it is his life or the Cause. If he lives, we fail."

The girl leaped to her feet and faced Zveri. "If you kill him, Peter, I shall kill you—I swear it by everything that I hold most dear! Hold him prisoner if you will, but as you value your life, do not kill him."

Zveri went pale with anger. "Your words are treason," he said. "Traitors to the Cause have died for less than what you have said."

Zora Drinov realized that the situation was extremely dangerous. She had little reason to believe that Zveri would make good his threat toward her, but she saw that if she would save Tarzan she must act quickly. "Send the others away," she said to Zveri. "I have something to tell you before you kill this man."

For a moment the leader hesitated. Then he turned to Dorsky who stood at his side. "Have the fellow securely bound and taken to one of the tents," he said. "We shall give him a fair trial after he has regained consciousness, and then place him before a firing-squad." And then to the girl: "Come with me, Zora, and I will listen to what you have to say."

In silence the two walked to Zveri's tent. "Well?" inquired Zveri, as the girl halted before the entrance, "what have you to say to me that you think will change my plans relative to your lover?"

Zora looked at him for a long minute, a faint sneer of contempt curling her lips. "You *would* think such a thing," she said. "You are wrong. But however you may think, you shall not kill him."

"And why not?" demanded Zveri..

"Because if you do I shall tell them all what your plans are, that you yourself are a traitor to the Cause and that you have been using them all to advance your own selfish ambition to make yourself Emperor of Africa."

"You would not dare," cried Zveri; "nor would I let you—for as much as I love you I shall kill you here on the spot, unless you promise not to interfere in any way with my plans."

"You do not dare kill me," the girl taunted. "You have antagonized every man in the camp, Peter, and they all like me. Some of them, perhaps, love me a little. Do you think that I should not be avenged within five minutes after you had killed me? You will have to think of something else, my friend, and the best thing that you can do is to take my advice. Keep Tarzan of the Apes a prisoner if you will, but on your life do not kill him or permit anyone else to do so."

Zveri sank into a camp-chair. "Everyone is against me," he said. "Even you, the woman I love, turn against me!"

"I have not changed toward you in any respect, Peter," said the girl.

"You mean that?" he asked, looking up.

"Absolutely," she replied.

"How long were you alone in the jungle with that man?" he demanded.

Zora shrugged.

"Don't start that, Peter," she said. "He could not have treated me differently if he had been my own brother and certainly, all other considerations aside, you should know me well enough to know that I have no such weakness in the direction your tone implied."

"You have never loved me, that is the reason," he said. "But I would not trust you or any other woman with a man she loves or with whom she was temporarily infatuated."

"That," she said, "has nothing to do with what we are discussing. Are you going to kill Tarzan of the Apes, or are you not?"

"For your sake, I shall let him live," replied the man. "Even though I do not trust you," he added. "I trust

no one. How can I? Look at this,"—and he took a code message from his pocket and handed it to her. "This came a few days ago. The damn' traitor—I wish I could get my hands on him! I should like to have killed him myself; but I suppose I shall have no such luck, as he is probably already dead."

Zora took the paper. Below the message, in Zveri's scrawling hand, it had been decoded in Russian script. As she read it her eyes grew large with astonishment.

"It is incredible," she said.

"It is the truth, though," said Zveri. "I always suspected the dirty hound!" With an oath, he added, "I think that damn' Mexican is just as bad."

"At least," said Zora, "his plan has been thwarted, for I take it that his message did not get through."

"No," said Zveri. "By error it was delivered to our agents instead of his."

"Then no harm has been done."

"Fortunately, no; but it has made me suspicious of everyone and I am going to push the expedition through at once before anything further can occur to interfere with my plans."

"Everything is ready, then?" she asked.

Zveri nodded.

"Everything is ready," he replied. "We march tomorrow morning. And now tell me what happened while I was at Opar. Why did the Aarabs desert and why did you go with them?"

"Abu Batu was angry and resentful because you left him to guard the camp. The Aarabs felt that it was a reflection upon their courage and I think they would have deserted you anyway, regardless of me. Then, the day after you left, a strange woman wandered into camp. She was a very beautiful white woman from Opar and Abu Batu conceived the idea of profiting through the chance that Fate had sent him and so he took us with him with the intention of selling us into captivity on his return march to his own country."

"Are there no honest men in the world?" demanded Zveri.

"I am afraid not," replied the girl—but as Zveri was staring moodily at the ground he did not see the slightly contemptuous curl of her lip that accompanied her evasive reply.

She told him of the luring of La from Abu Batu's camp and of the Sheik's anger at the treachery of Ibn Dammuk; then she told of her own escape, though she did not mention Wayne Colt's connection with it, but led Zveri to believe she had wandered alone in the jungle until the great ape captured her. She dwelt at length upon Tarzan's kindness and consideration and told of the great elephant who had guarded her by day.

"Sounds like a fairy story," said Zveri, "but I have heard enough about this ape-man to believe almost anything concerning him, which is one reason why I believe we shall never be safe while he lives."

"He cannot harm us while he is our prisoner and certainly, if you love me as you say you do, the man who saved my life deserves better from you than ignominious death."

"Speak no more of it," said Zveri. "I have already told you that I would not kill him." But in his treacherous mind he was formulating a plan whereby Tarzan might be destroyed, while still Zveri adhered to the letter of his promise to Zora—that he would not kill Tarzan.

Early on the following morning the expedition filed out of camp, the savage black warriors arrayed in the uniforms of French Colonial troops while Zveri, Romero, Ivitch and Mori wore the uniforms of French officers.

The three friends stood in silent communion as the shadows lengthened.

Zora Drinov accompanied the marching column, for though she had asked to be permitted to remain and nurse Tarzan, Zveri would not permit her to do so, saying that he would not again let her out of his sight. Dorsky and a handful of blacks were left behind to guard the prisoner and watch over the store of provisions and equipment that were left in the base camp.

As the column had been preparing to march, Zveri gave his final instructions to Dorsky.

"I leave this matter entirely in your hands," he said. "It must appear that he escaped, or, at worst, that he met an accidental death."

"You need give the matter no further thought, Comrade Zveri," replied Dorsky. "Long before you return this stranger will have been removed."

A long and difficult march lay before the invaders, their route lying across southeastern Abyssinia into Italian Somaliland, five hundred miles of rough and savage country.

It was Zveri's intention to make no more than a demonstration in the Italian colony, merely sufficient to arouse the anger of the Italians still further against the French and to give the fascist dictator the excuse which Zveri believed was all that he awaited to carry a dream of Italian conquest across Europe.

Perhaps Zveri was a little mad, but then he was a disciple of mad men whose greed for power wrought distorted images in their minds, so that they could not dif-

ferentiate between the rational and the bizarre.

Too, Zveri had for so long dreamed his dream of empire that he saw now only his goal and none of the insurmountable obstacles that beset his path. He saw a new Roman emperor ruling Europe and he saw himself as Emperor of Africa making an alliance with this new European power against all the balance of the world. He pictured two splendid golden thrones; upon one of them sat the Emperor Peter I, and upon the other the Empress Zora—and so he dreamed through the long hard marches toward the east. . . .

It was not until the morning of the day following that upon which he had been shot, that Tarzan regained consciousness. He felt very weak and sick and his head ached horribly. When he tried to move he discovered that his wrists and ankles were securely bound. He did not know what had happened and at first he could not imagine where he was, but, as recollection slowly returned and he recognized about him the canvas walls of a tent, he understood that in some way his enemies had captured him. He tried to wrench his wrists free from the cords that held them, but they resisted his every effort.

He listened intently and sniffed the air, but he could detect no evidence of the teeming camp that he had seen when he had brought the girl back. He knew that at least one night had passed, for the shadows that he could see through the tent opening indicated that the sun was high in the heavens, whereas it had been low in the west when last he saw it. He heard voices and knew that he was not alone, though he was confident there must be comparatively few men in camp.

Deep in the jungle he heard an elephant trumpeting, and once, from far off, came faintly the roar of a lion.

Tarzan strove again to snap the bonds that held him, but they would not yield. Then he turned his head so that he faced the opening in the tent and from his lips burst a long low cry.

Dorsky, who was lolling in a chair before his own tent, leaped to his feet. The blacks, before their own shelters, who had been talking animatedly, grew suddenly quiet and seized their weapons.

"What was that?" Dorsky demanded of his black boy.

The fellow, wide-eyed and trembling, shook his head. "I do not know, Bwana," he said. "Perhaps the man in the tent has died, for such a noise may well have come from the throat of a ghost."

"Nonsense," said Dorsky. "Come, we'll have a look at him." But the black held back and the white man went on alone.

The sound, which had come apparently from the tent in which the captive lay, had had a peculiar effect upon Dorsky, causing the flesh of his scalp to creep and a strange foreboding to fill him; so as he neared the tent he went more slowly and held his revolver ready in his hand.

When he entered the tent he saw the man lying where he had been left, but now his eyes were open and when they met those of the Russian, the latter had a sensation similar to that which one feels when he comes eye to eye with a wild beast that has been caught in a trap.

"Well," said Dorsky, "so you have come to, have you? What do you want?"

The captive made no reply, but his eyes never left the other's face. So steady was the unblinking gaze that Dorsky became uneasy. "You had better learn to talk," he said gruffly, "if you know what is good for you!"

Then it occurred to him that perhaps the man did not understand him, so he turned in the entrance and called to some of the blacks, who had advanced, half in curiosity, half in fear, toward the tent of the prisoner.

"One of you fellows come here," he said.

At first no one seemed inclined to obey, but presently a stalwart warrior advanced. "See if this fellow can understand your language. Come in and tell him that I have a proposition to make to him, and that he had better listen to it."

"If this is indeed Tarzan of the Apes," said the black, "he can understand me." And he came warily to the entrance of the tent.

The black repeated the message in his own dialect, but by no sign did the ape-man indicate that he understood.

Dorsky lost his patience. "You damned ape!" he said. "You needn't try to make a fool of me. I know perfectly well that you understand this fellow's gibberish and I know too that you are an Englishman and that you understand English. I'll give you just five minutes to think this thing over and then I am coming back. If you have not made up your mind to talk by that time, you can take the consequences."

Then he turned on his heel and left the tent.

CHAPTER XVI

"Kill, Tantor, Kill!"

LITTLE NKIMA had traveled far. Around his neck was a stout thong, supporting a small leather bag, in which reposed a message. This eventually he had brought to Muviro, war chief of the Waziri, and when the Waziri had started out upon their long march, Nkima had ridden proudly upon the shoulder of Muviro. For some time he had remained with the black warriors, but then, moved perhaps by some caprice of his erratic mind, or by a great urge that he could not resist, he had left them and, facing alone all the dangers that he feared most, had set out by himself upon business of his own.

Many and narrow were the escapes of Nkima as he swung through the giants of the forest. Could he have

resisted temptation, he might have passed with reasonable safety, but that he could not do and so he was forever getting himself into trouble by playing pranks upon strangers, who, if they possessed any sense of humor themselves, certainly failed to appreciate little Nkima.

Nkima could not forget that he was the friend and confidant of Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle, though he seemed often to forget that Tarzan was not there to protect him when he hurled taunts and insults at other monkeys less favored. That he came through alive speaks more eloquently for his speed than for his intelligence or courage, so much of the time was he fleeing in terror, emitting shrill screams of mental anguish. Yet he never seemed to learn from experience, and having barely eluded one pursuer intent upon murdering him he would be quite prepared to insult or annoy the next creature he met, especially selecting, it would seem, those who were larger and stronger than himself.

Sometimes he fled in one direction, sometimes in another, so that he occupied much more time than was necessary in making his journey. Otherwise he would have reached his master in time to be of service to him at a moment that Tarzan needed a friend as badly, perhaps, as ever he had needed one before in his life.

And now, while far away in the forest Nkima fled from an old dog baboon, whom he had hit with a well-aimed stick, Michael Dorsky approached the tent where Nkima's master lay bound and helpless. The five minutes were up and Dorsky had come to demand Tarzan's answer. He came alone and as he entered the tent his simple plan of action was well formulated in his mind.

The expression upon the prisoner's face had changed. He seemed to be listening intently. Dorsky listened then too but could hear nothing, for by comparison with the hearing of Tarzan of the Apes Michael Dorsky was deaf, and what Tarzan heard filled him with quiet satisfaction.

"Now," said Dorsky, "I have come to give you your last chance. Comrade Zveri has led two expeditions to Opar in search of the gold that we know is stored there. Both expeditions failed. It is well known that you know the location of the treasure vaults of Opar and can lead us to them. Agree that you will do this when Comrade Zveri returns and not only will you not be harmed, but you will be released as quickly as Comrade Zveri feels that it would be safe to have you at liberty. Refuse, and you die!" He drew a knife from its sheath at his belt. "If you refuse to answer, I shall accept that as evidence that you have not accepted my proposition."

As the ape-man maintained his stony silence, the Russian held the sharp blade low before his eyes. "Think well, ape," he said, "and remember that when I slip this between your ribs there will be no sound. It will pierce your heart and I shall leave it there until the blood has ceased to flow. Then I shall remove it and close the wound and later in the day you will be found dead and I shall tell the blacks that you died from the accidental gunshot. Thus your friends will never learn the truth. You will not be avenged and you will have died uselessly."

The dagger was very near Tarzan's face now. Of a sudden, like a wild beast, he raised his body and his jaws closed like a steel trap upon the wrist of the Russian.

With a scream of pain, Dorsky drew back. The dagger dropped from his nerveless fingers and at the same instant Tarzan swung his legs around the feet of the would-be assassin and as Dorsky rolled over on his back, he dragged Tarzan of the Apes on top of him.

The ape-man knew from the snapping of Dorsky's wrist-bones between his teeth that the man's right hand was useless and so he released it. Then to the Russian's horror, the ape-man's jaws sought his jugular vein, while from the giant's throat there rumbled the growl of a savage beast at bay.

Screaming for his men to come to his assistance, Dorsky tried to reach the revolver at his right hip with his left hand, but he soon saw that unless he could rid himself of Tarzan's body he would be unable to do so.

Already he heard his men running toward the tent, shouting among themselves; then he heard exclamations of surprise and screams of terror, and the next instant the tent vanished from above them and Dorsky saw a huge bull elephant towering above him and his savage antagonist.

Instantly Tarzan ceased his efforts to close his teeth on Dorsky's throat and at the same time rolled quickly from the body of the Russian. As he did so, Dorsky's hand found his revolver.

"Kill, Tantor!" shouted the ape-man. "Kill!"

The sinuous trunk of the pachyderm twined around the Russian. The little eyes of the elephant flamed red with hate and he trumpeted shrilly as he raised Dorsky high above his head and wheeling about hurled him out into the camp, while the terrified blacks, casting affrighted glances over their shoulders, fled into the jungle. Then Tantor charged his victim. With his great tusks he gored him; then, in a frenzy of rage, trumpeting and squealing, he trampled him—until nothing remained of Michael Dorsky but a bloody pulp.

From the moment Tantor seized the Russian, Tarzan had sought ineffectually to stay the great brute's fury, but Tantor was deaf to commands until he had wreaked his vengeance upon this creature that had dared attack his friend. But when his rage had spent its force and nothing remained against which to vent it, he came quietly to Tarzan's side and at a word from the ape-man, lifted the big brown body gently in his powerful trunk and bore him away into the forest.

Deep into the jungle to a hidden glade, Tantor carried his helpless friend; there he placed him gently on soft grasses beneath the shade of a tree. Little more could the great bull do other than to stand guard. As a result of the excitement attending the killing of Dorsky and Tantor's concern for Tarzan, the elephant was nervous

"Think well, ape," said the Russian, "and remember that when I slip this between your ribs there will be no sound."

The sinuous trunk twined around the Russian and the great elephant trumpeted shrilly as he raised Dorsky high above his head.

and irritable. He stood with upraised ears, alert for any menacing sound, waving his sensitive trunk to and fro, searching each vagrant air-current for the scent of danger.

The pain of his wound annoyed Tarzan far less than the pangs of thirst.

To little monkeys watching him from the trees he called: "Come, Manu, and untie the thongs that bind my wrists."

"We are afraid," said an old monkey.

"I am Tarzan of the Apes," said the man reassuringly. "Tarzan has been your friend always. He will not harm you."

"We are afraid," repeated the old monkey. "Tarzan deserted us. For many moons the jungle has not known Tarzan, but other Tarmangani and strange Gomangani came and with thundersticks they hunted little Manu and killed him. If Tarzan had still been our friend, he would have driven these strange men away."

"If I had been here the strange men-things would not have harmed you," said Tarzan. "Still would Tarzan have protected you. Now I am back, but I cannot destroy the strangers or drive them away until the thongs are taken from my wrists."

"Who put them there?" asked the monkey.

"The strange Tarmangani," replied Tarzan.

"Then they must be more powerful than Tarzan," said Manu. "So what good would it do to set you free? If the strange Tarmangani found out that we had done it, they would be angry and come and kill us. Let Tarzan, who for many rains has been Lord of the Jungle, free himself!"

Seeing that it was futile to appeal to Manu, Tarzan, as a forlorn hope, voiced the long, plaintive, uncanny help-call of the great apes. With slowly increasing crescendo it rose to a piercing shriek that drove far and wide through the silent jungle.

In all directions, beasts, great and small, paused as the weird note broke upon their sensitive ear-drums.

None was afraid, for the call told them that a great bull was in trouble and, therefore, doubtless harmless, but the jackals interpreted the sound to mean the possibility of flesh and trotted off through the jungle in the direction from which it had come, and Dango the hyena heard and slunk nearer on soft pads, hoping he would find a helpless animal that would prove easy prey.

Far away, and faintly, a little monkey heard the call, and recognized the voice of the caller.

Swiftly, then, he flew through the jungle, impelled as he was upon rare occasions by a directness of thought and a tenacity of purpose that brooked no interruption.

Tarzan had sent Tantor to the river to fetch water in his trunk. From a distance he caught the scent of the jackals and the horrid scent of Dango and he hoped that Tantor would return before they came creeping upon him.

He felt no fear, only an instinctive urge toward self-preservation. The jackals he held in contempt, for he knew that though bound hand and foot he still could keep the timid creatures away—but Dango was different; if the filthy brute realized Tarzan's helplessness, those powerful jaws would make quick work of him.

The jackals came first, standing at the edge of the little glade and watching him. Then they circled slowly, coming nearer, but when he raised himself to a sitting position they ran yelping away.

Three times they crept closer, trying to force their courage to the point of actual attack; then a horrid slinking form appeared upon the edge of the glade, and the jackals withdrew to a safe distance—Dango the hyena had come!

Tarzan was still sitting up and the beast stood eying him, filled with curiosity and with fear. He growled and the man-thing facing him growled back and then from above them came a great chattering and Tarzan, looking up, saw little Nkima dancing upon the limb of a tree above him.

"Come down, Nkima," he cried, "and untie the thongs that bind my wrists."

Nkima hesitated, trembling.

"Dango! Dango!" he shouted. "Little Nkima is afraid of Dango."

"If you come now," said Tarzan, "it will be safe —but if you wait too long Dango will kill Tarzan and then to whom may little Nkima go for protection?"

"Nkima comes," shouted the little monkey, and dropping quickly through the trees he leaped to Tarzan's shoulder.

The hyena bared his fangs and laughed his horrid laugh.

"Quick, the thongs, Nkima," urged Tarzan; and the little monkey, his fingers trembling with terror, went to work upon the leather thongs at Tarzan's wrists.

Dango, his ugly head lowered, made a sudden rush, and from the deep lungs of the ape-man came a thunderous roar that might have done credit to Numa himself.

With a yelp of terror the cowardly Dango turned and fled to the extremity of the glade, where he stood bristling and growling.

"Hurry, Nkima," said Tarzan. "Dango will come again. Maybe once, maybe twice, maybe many times before he closes on me—but in the end he will realize that I am helpless and then he will not stop or turn back."

"Nkima's fingers are sick," said the little Manu. "They are weak and they tremble so that they will not untie the knot."

"Nkima has sharp teeth," Tarzan reminded him. "Why waste your time with sick fingers over knots that they cannot untie? Let your sharp teeth do the work."

Instantly Nkima commenced to gnaw upon the strands. Silent perforce because his mouth was otherwise occupied, Nkima strove diligently and without interruption.

Dango, in the meantime, made two short rushes, each time coming a little closer, but each time turning back before the menace of the ape-man's roars and savage growls, which by now had aroused the jungle.

Above them, in the tree-tops, the monkeys chattered, scolded and screamed and in the distance the voice of Numa rolled like far thunder, while from the river came the squealing and trumpeting of Tantor.

Little Nkima was gnawing frantically at the bonds when Dango charged again, evidently convinced by this time that the great Tarmangani was helpless—for now, with a growl, he rushed in and closed upon the man.

With a sudden surge of the great muscles of his arms that sent little Nkima sprawling, Tarzan sought to tear his hands free that he might defend himself against the savage death that menaced him in those slavering jaws, and the thongs, almost parted by Nkima's sharp teeth, gave at the terrific strain of the ape-man's efforts.

As Dango leaped for the bronzed throat, Tarzan's hand shot forward and seized the beast by the neck, though the impact of the heavy body carried him backward to the ground.

Dango twisted, struggled and clawed in a vain effort to free himself from the death-grip of the ape-man; but those steel fingers closed relentlessly upon his throat until, gasping for breath, the great brute sank helplessly upon the body of its intended victim.

Until death was assured, Tarzan did not relinquish his grasp, but when at last there could be no doubt, he hurled the carcass from him and, sitting up, fell quickly to the thongs that secured his ankles.

During the brief battle, Nkima had taken refuge among the topmost branches of a lofty tree, where he leaped about, screaming frantically at the battling beasts beneath him.

Not until he was quite sure the fearsome Dango was dead did he descend. Warily he approached the body, lest perchance he had been mistaken, but again convinced by closer scrutiny, he leaped upon it and struck it viciously, again and again; then he stood upon it shrieking his defiance at the world with all the assurance and bravado of one who has overcome a dangerous enemy.

Tantor, startled by the help-cry of his friend, had turned back from the river without taking water. Trees bent beneath his mad rush as, ignoring winding trails, he struck straight through the jungle toward the little glade in answer to the call of the ape-man, and now, infuriated by the sounds of battle, he came charging into view, a titanic engine of rage and vengeance.

Tantor's eyesight is none too good and it seemed that in his mad charge he must trample the ape-man who lay directly in his path. But Tarzan spoke to him and the great beast came to a sudden stop at his side and pivoting, wheeled about in his tracks, his ears forward, his trunk raised, trumpeting a savage warning as he searched for the creature that had been menacing his friend.

"Quiet, Tantor! It was Dango. He is dead," said the ape-man, and as the eyes of the elephant finally located the carcass of the hyena he charged and trampled it, as he had trampled Dorsky.

His ankles freed of their bonds, Tarzan was upon his

Nkima was gnawing frantically at the bonds when Dango charged again, evidently convinced by this time that the great Tarmangani was helpless.

feet and, when Tantor had vented his rage upon the body of Dango, he called the elephant to him.

Tantor came then quietly to his side and stood with his trunk touching the ape-man's body, his rage quieted and his tingling nerves soothed by the reassuring calm of the ape-man.

And now Nkima came, making an agile leap from a swaying bough to the back of Tantor and then to the shoulder of Tarzan, where, with his little arms about the ape-man's neck, he pressed his cheek close against the bronzed cheek of the great Tarmangani who was his master and his god.

Thus the three friends stood in the silent communion that only beasts know, as the shadows lengthened and the sun set behind the forest.

CHAPTER XVII

"Turn Back!"

THE privations that Wayne Colt had endured had weakened him far more than he had realized and before his returning strength could bring renewed powers of resistance, he was stricken with fever.

The high priestess of the Flaming God, versed in the lore of ancient Opar, was conversant with the medicinal properties of many roots and herbs and, as well, with the mystic powers of incantation that drove demons from the bodies of the sick.

By day she gathered and brewed and at night she sat at the feet of her patient, intoning weird prayers, the origin of which reached back through countless ages to vanished temples, above which now rolled the waters of a mighty sea. While she wrought with every artifice at her command to drive out the demon of sickness that had possessed this man of an alien world, Jad-bal-ja the golden lion hunted for all three, and though at times he made his kill at a distance he never failed to carry the carcass of his prey back to the hidden lair where the woman nursed the man.

Days of burning fever, days of delirium, shot with periods of rationality, dragged their slow length. Often Colt's mind was confused by a jumble of bizarre impressions, in which La might one moment be Zora Drinov, a ministering angel from heaven the next, and then a Red Cross nurse; but in whatever guise he found her it seemed always a pleasant one and when she was absent from his side, as she was sometimes forced to be, he was depressed and unhappy.

When, upon her knees at his feet, she prayed to the rising sun, or to the sun at zenith, or to the setting sun, as was her wont, or when she chanted strange, weird songs in an unknown tongue, accompanying them with the mysterious gestures that were a part of the ritual, he was sure that the fever was worse and that he had become delirious again.

And so the days dragged on and while Colt lay helpless, Zveri marched toward Italian Somaliland, and Tarzan, recovered from the shock of his wound, followed the plain trail of the expedition, and from his shoulder little Nkima scolded and chattered through the day.

Behind him he had left a handful of terrified blacks in the camp of the conspirators.

They had been lazing in the shade, following their breakfast, one morning a week after the killing of Dorsky and the escape of his captive.

Fear of the ape-man at liberty, that had so terrified them at first, no longer concerned them greatly. Psychologically akin to the brutes of the forest, they happily soon forgot their terrors, nor did they harass their minds by anticipating those which might assail them in the future, as it is the silly custom of civilized man to do.

And so it was this morning that a sight which burst suddenly upon their astonished eyes found them entirely unprepared.

They heard no noise, so silently go the beasts of the jungle, however large or heavy they may be, yet suddenly in the clearing at the edge of the camp there appeared a great elephant and upon his head sat the recent captive, whom they had been told was Tarzan of the Apes, and upon the man's shoulder perched a little monkey.

With exclamations of terror, the blacks leaped to their feet and dashed into the jungle upon the opposite side of camp.

Tarzan leaped lightly to the ground and entered Dorsky's tent. He had returned for a definite purpose and his effort was crowned with success, for in the tent of the Russian he found his rope and his knife that had been taken away from him at the time of his capture.

For bow and arrows and a spear he had only to look to the shelters of the blacks and, having found what he wanted, he departed as silently as he had come.

When La, upon her knees, prayed to the sun, Colt was sure that the fever was worse and that he had become delirious again.

Now the time had arrived when Tarzan must set out rapidly upon the trail of his enemy, leaving Tantor to the peaceful paths that he loved best.

"I go, Tantor," he said. "Search out the forest where the young trees have the tenderest bark and watch well against the men-things, for they alone in all the world are the enemies of all living creatures."

He was off through the forest then, with little Nkima clinging tightly to his bronzed neck.

Plain lay the winding trail of Zveri's army before the eyes of the ape-man, but he had no need to follow any trail. Long weeks before, as he had kept vigil above their camp, he had heard the principals discussing their plans and so he knew their objectives. He knew too how rapidly they could march and therefore about where he might hope to overtake them.

Unhampered by files of porters sweating under heavy loads, earthbound to no winding trails, Tarzan was able to travel many times faster than the expedition.

He saw their trail only when his own chanced to cross it as he lay a straight course for a point far in advance of the sweating column.

When he overtook the expedition night had fallen and the tired men were in camp. They had eaten and were happy and many of the men were singing.

To one who did not know the truth it might have appeared to be a military camp of French Colonial troops, for there was a military precision about the arranging of the fires and the temporary shelters and of the placing of the officers' tents that would not have been undertaken by a hunting or scientific expedition, and in addition there were the uniformed sentries pacing their beats.

All this was the work of Miguel Romero, to whose superior knowledge of military matters Zveri had been forced to defer in all matter of this nature, though there had been no diminution of the hatred which each felt for the other.

From his tree Tarzan watched the scene below, attempting to estimate as closely as possible the number of armed men that formed the fighting force of the expedition, while Nkima, bent upon some mysterious mission, swung nimbly through the trees toward the east.

Tarzan realized that Zveri had recruited a force that might constitute a definite menace to the peace of Africa, since among its numbers were represented many large and warlike tribes who might easily be persuaded to follow this leader, if success were to crown his initial engagement.

It was, however, to prevent this very thing that Tarzan of the Apes had interested himself in the activities of Peter Zveri, and here before him was another opportunity to undermine the Russian's dream of empire while it was still only a dream and might be effectively dissipated by trivial means.

Tarzan fitted an arrow to his bow. Slowly his right hand drew back the feathered end of the shaft until the point rested almost upon his left thumb. His manner was marked by easy, effortless grace. He did not appear to be taking conscious aim and yet when he released the shaft it buried itself in the fleshy part of a sentry's leg precisely as Tarzan of the Apes had intended that it should.

With a yell of surprise and pain the black collapsed upon the ground, more frightened however than hurt, and as his fellows gathered around him, Tarzan of the Apes melted away into the shadows of the jungle night.

Attracted by the cry of the wounded man, Zveri, Romero and the other leaders of the expedition hastened from their tents and joined the throng of excited chattering blacks who surrounded the victim of Tarzan's new campaign of terrorism.

"Who shot you?" demanded Zveri, when he saw the arrow protruding from the sentry's leg.

"I do not know," replied the man.

"Have you an enemy in camp who might want to kill you?" demanded Zveri.

"Even if he had," said Romero, "he couldn't have shot him with an arrow—because no bows or arrows were brought with the expedition."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Zveri.

"So it must have been some one outside camp," said Romero.

With difficulty and to the accompaniment of the screams of their victim, Ivitch and Romero cut the arrow from the sentry's leg, while Zveri and Kitembo discussed various conjectures as to the exact portent of the affair.

"We have evidently run into a group of hostile natives," said Zveri.

Kitembo shrugged noncommittally. "Let me see the arrow," he said to Romero. "Perhaps that will tell us something."

As the Mexican handed the missile to the black chief, the latter carried it close to a camp fire and examined it closely while the white men gathered about him waiting for his findings.

At last Kitembo straightened up. The expression upon

his face was serious and when he spoke his voice trembled slightly.

"This is bad," he said.

"What do you mean?" demanded Zveri.

"This arrow bears the mark of a warrior who was left behind in our base camp," replied the chief.

"That is impossible," cried Zveri.

Kitembo shrugged. "I know it," he said. "But it is true."

"With an arrow out of the air the Hindu was slain," said a black headman, standing near Kitembo.

"Shut up, you fool," snapped Romero, "or you'll have the whole camp in a blue funk."

"That's right," said Zveri. "We must hush this thing up." He turned to the headman. "You and Kitembo," he said, "must not repeat this to your men. Let us keep it to ourselves."

Both Kitembo and the headman agreed to guard the secret, but within half an hour every man in camp knew that the sentry had been shot with an arrow that had been left behind in the base camp and immediately their minds were prepared for other things that lay ahead of them upon the long trail.

The effect of the incident upon the minds of the black soldiers was apparent during the following day's march. They were quieter and more thoughtful and there was much low-voiced conversation among them; but if they had given signs of nervousness during the day, it was nothing as compared with their state of mind after darkness fell upon their camp that night.

The sentries evidenced their terror plainly by their listening attitudes and nervous attention to the sounds that came out of the blackness surrounding the camp. Most of them were brave men who would have faced a visible enemy with courage, but to a man they were convinced that they were confronted by the supernatural, against which they knew neither rifle nor bravery might avail. They felt the ghostly eyes were watching them and the result was as demoralizing as would an actual attack have been.

Yet they need not have concerned themselves so greatly, for the cause of all their superstitious apprehension was moving rapidly through the jungle, miles away from them; every instant the distance between him and them was increasing.

Another force, that might have caused them much greater anxiety had they been aware of it, lay even further away upon the trail they still must traverse to reach their destination.

Around tiny cooking fires squatted a hundred black warriors, whose white plumes nodded and trembled as they moved. Sentries guarded these stalwart warriors—sentries who scorned to be timorous or afraid, since these men had little fear of ghosts or demons. They wore their amulets in leather pouches that swung from cords about their necks and they prayed to strange gods, but deep in their hearts lay a growing contempt for both. They had learned from experience and from the advice of a wise leader to look more to themselves and their weapons for victory than to their god.

They were a cheerful, happy company, veterans of many an expedition. Like all veterans, they took advantage of every opportunity for rest and relaxation, the value of both of which is enhanced by the maintenance of a cheerful frame of mind, and so there was much laughing and joking among them, and often both the cause and butt of this was a little monkey, now teasing, now caressing, and in return being himself teased or caressed. That there was a bond of deep affection between him and these clean-limbed black giants was constantly apparent.

When they pulled his tail they never pulled it very hard, and when he turned upon them in apparent fury, his sharp teeth closing upon their fingers or arms, it was noticeable that he never drew blood. Their play was rough, for they were all rough and primitive creatures; nevertheless it was all playing and it was based upon a foundation of mutual affection.

THESE men had just finished their evening meal when a figure, materializing as though out of thin air, dropped silently into their midst from the branches of a tree which overhung their camp.

Instantly a hundred warriors sprang to arms and then as quickly they relaxed, as with shouts of "Bwana! Bwana!" they ran toward the bronzed giant standing silently in their midst.

As to an emperor or a god they went upon their knees before him and those who were nearest him touched his hands and his feet in reverence, for to the Waziri Tarzan of the Apes, who was their king, was yet something more and of their own volition they worshiped him as their living god.

But if the warriors were glad to see him, little Nkima was fairly frantic with joy. He scrambled quickly over the bodies of the kneeling blacks and leaped thence to Tarzan's shoulder, where he clung about the bronzed neck, jabbering excitedly.

"You have done well, my children," said the ape-man, "and little Nkima has done well. He bore my message to you and I find you ready where I had planned that you should be."

"We have kept always a day's march ahead of the strangers, Bwana," said Muviro, "camping well off the trail that they might not discover our fresh camp sites and become suspicious."

"They do not suspect your presence," said Tarzan. "I listened above their camp last night, and they said nothing that would indicate they dreamed that another party was preceding them along the trail."

"Where the dirt of the trail was soft a warrior who marched at the rear of the column, brushed away the freshness of our spoor with a leafy bough," explained Muviro.

"Tomorrow we shall wait here for them," said the ape-man, "and tonight you shall listen to Tarzan while he explains the plans that you will follow."

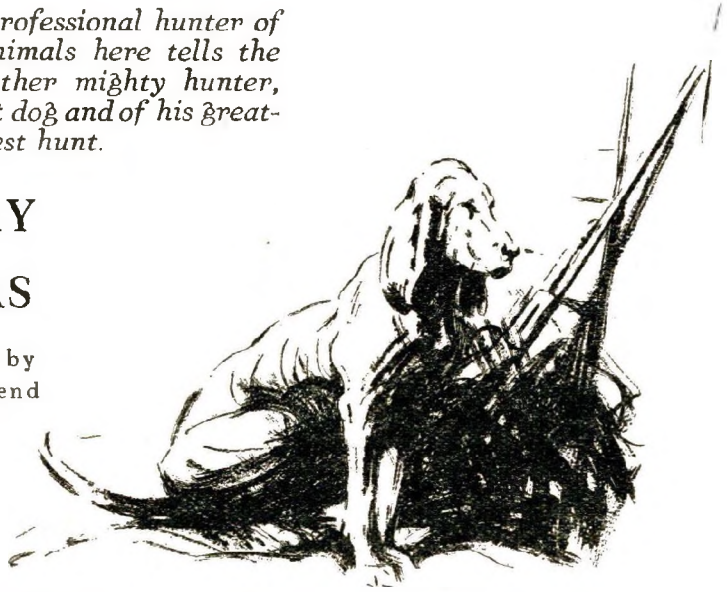
The undefeated Tarzan still is the great Lord of the Jungle—his enemies are routed, their plot frustrated—in the forthcoming April issue.

The Bear Hound

A one-time professional hunter of predatory animals here tells the story of another mighty hunter, of his bravest dog and of his greatest hunt.

By JAY LUCAS

Illustrated by Lee Townsend



OLD Tom Jackson laid down his cleaning-rod, and held the long, old-fashioned rifle at arm's-length to survey it critically. Not a speck of rust anywhere on the shining barrel; not a single dull spot on the carved walnut-root of the stock. It looked—to old Jackson, at least—as sleek as the day it had first come from the gunsmith's hands. The old man laid it aside lovingly, lit his stubby pipe, and sat staring absently through the open door of his cabin.

Before him stretched a wild maze of cañons and buttes. Soft green of pine and juniper blended with vivid crimson of rock-walled cliff. Here and there, on the ledges, clung tiny groves of Arizona cypress. The Apache plume was in flower, and a hummingbird hovered an instant in the door opening before darting away with a musical little whirr of wings.

The soothing low of a distant range cow floated up the gulch to the log cabin, and on a distant ridge he could see, silhouetted against the sky, a band of wild horses. How proudly that stallion leader stood with his high head, arching neck, and long flowing mane!

Cañon within cañon; cliff upon cliff—a country that looked as though some giant had hacked it with a mighty sword, laying bare the blood-red rocks within. But kindly Nature had covered it with her softest verdure in compassion, peopled it with soft-stepping things to drink from the cold springs that had been exposed. Deer there were in thousands, and little bands of antelope to flit across the open mesas. Flocks of bronze-winged wild turkeys roosted in the pines, and under them padded the gentle black bear in search of tender roots and succulent grubs for the clumsy, lovable youngsters at her heels.

Down in the deeper, rougher cañons were other things. The diamond-back rattlesnake basked in the sun, his gaping mouth armed with lethal barbs. He too asked nothing but to be left alone—those whirring rattles were not a challenge but a warning. He too wanted peace—peace to bask in the hot rays of the sun.

But when the rosy flush of sunset faded in the west, other things stirred in the cañons. The tawny mountain lion crept forth then toward the wild horse's bed-ground. The bronze-winged turkey sought the higher branches of his roosting-tree lest he fall to the needle claws of the spotted lynx-cat. Sometimes the eerie howl of a giant timber wolf would echo through the forest, and the shrill answer of his little cousin the coyote would come from afar.

And then a huge gray bulk would come pad-padding across the stones, with great arching loins swaying as he went. The king of the cañons, the mighty grizzly, was abroad, and the proudest range-bull of the mountains must flee or be mangled by those dreadful cabled arms and long chisel claws. One terrible blow, and the strongest cow lay moaning out her life at his feet. And then that evil, rattling roar would shake the very ground, silencing the other voices of the woods. . . .

Over the bearded face of old Tom Jackson came a little smile of satisfaction. There were now few lions left to disturb the slumbers of the deer, and the mighty grizzly was seldom met. Old Tom loved those timid four-footed things that peered at him from the brush with nervous eyes. Of course he would not tell others—they might laugh at him—but he fully believed those gentle creatures knew him for their friend, and ran from him more in shyness than in fear. All his life he had been their protector.

Let's see—he had been a professional hunter of lions and grizzlies for— He could not just say, off-hand—since he had come to the Arizona mountains as a boy. He could not begin to guess the number of lion and grizzly scalps the cattlemen had paid him bounty on during all those years. Of course he had retired long ago—following that tireless pack of hounds had proved too difficult to an old man whose rheumatism yearly grew worse. But those timorous things still remembered him as their protector—perhaps they would even dimly understand why he no longer hunted. Why not? He understood them. No one but an old hunter could understand animals—why, some people even insisted that they could not think! Old Tom's eyes crinkled humorously. How little most people knew about wild animals!

Of course old Tom could not have retired, rheumatism or no rheumatism, but that the irrigation company had paid him ten thousand for his homestead down at the edge of the valley. They had built a dam on it. Some people said he could have got many times that price, but he always believed in his heart that he had made a good

deal. The interest on it brought him five hundred a year —more than he could possibly spend—and without doing a tap of work for it! And he didn't want that land any more anyway, what with all the fencing and farming going on down there. This little log cabin far back in the mountains suited him much better.

It suited old Red, too—and that was a very important matter. Old Red was not just an ordinary hound; he was the best bear- and lion-hound that had ever lived. Of this old Tom felt no doubt—and, truth to tell, he could find many to agree with him. What a splendid pack old Red had once led! At one time, there had been as many as thirty-seven hounds, every one of them a powerful beast with ears dangling almost to the ground. Old-fashioned Southern hounds they were, of the purest strain, for Tom Jackson had brought the stock with him across the plains from Kentucky. Great hounds, with the long-drawn, clear voices of their kind, and noses that could follow a trail days old when conditions were right. And Red had been the greatest of these—the pack-leader.

Old Tom stood up and limped stiffly through the door. He had got that limp when he was a boy—that time his buffalo gun had missed fire just as the grizzly charged. Somehow, that limp seemed to make him look even smaller than he was, and he was small at best—small, and gray-bearded, and wrinkled. He seated himself on a boulder under a pine, and the three old hounds lying near by raised sleepy heads to welcome him. That was all remained of his once great pack, those aged, graying three—and old Red, more gray and aged than the others.

Red was probably hunting rabbits somewhere. Old Tom had never quite broken him of rabbit-hunting—had never tried very hard, in fact, for Red never noticed them when out with his pack. No—here came Red now, around the corner of the cabin. The old man's eyes lighted, for Red was the pride and joy of his heart.

Old Red came stalking deliberately, scanning every inch of the sandy ground with age-dimmed eyes. He paused a moment to growl at the other three hounds, and his master's eyes twinkled. Of course old Red wasn't angry at the others—he merely wanted to remind them that he was still boss around the camp. What if his legs did take on a queer, painful stiffness in damp weather? Poor old Red—he too had rheumatism, and old Tom often rubbed him with his own liniment, the liniment the Hopi snake-doctor had given him.

Red paused to wave his tail a moment, and gaze up into his master's face with that affection of which only a dog is capable. Then he continued his search until he found just exactly what he wanted—a little level spot free from sandburrs. Here he threw himself to the ground with a low grunt.

The little patch of warm sand was very comfortable. Old Red's eyelids drooped slowly, blinked open once, then drooped again. The little log cabin and the pines around it faded out. Before him stretched Devil's Cañon, with traces of snow whitening the ledges of the south wall. The din of a great lion-hound pack echoed from the cliffs around him, and above all rose his own deep-chested bay. Before him, backed against the red rock, was a mighty gray bulk whose little piglike eyes glittered redly and wickedly. How slow and clumsy that great beast looked—but how fast and catlike were his movements! There were three dead hounds, and another one dying.

Old Red made a queer little sound in his sleep, half bark and half whimper. His feet worked jerkily, as though he were running.

Now the grizzly roared, almost drowning the voice of the great pack. But the mighty boom of Red, strong in the pride of youth, rose even above the bear's savage roar.

The bear charged, and two more hounds were crushed with two slaps of the long claws. Young Red himself had barely managed to escape; he always just escaped, and no more, for his agility made him take chances no other hound would have taken. Of course he was always in the thick of the fight—was he not leader?

Now the shrieking pack was closing in again, and once more the bear was backing toward the rock—he had failed to break through that furious circle. They would hold him—they *must* hold him!—until the master got there with his rifle.

A faint shout came from up near the rim. He was coming! He was crying encouragement to them! Soon a shot would ring out, and the huge bear would sag to the ground.

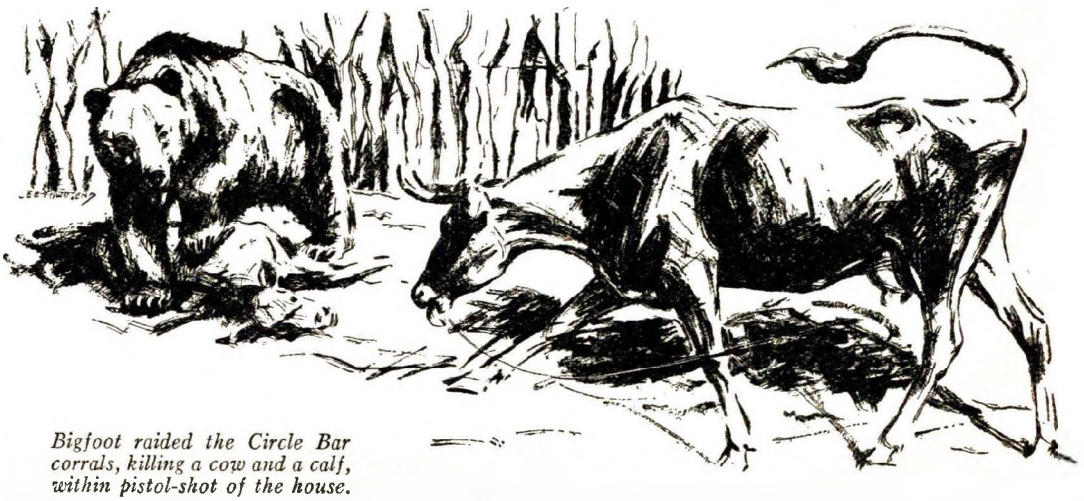
But the grizzly too had heard the voice, and was charging again in terrible ferocity. He knew that he must escape immediately or pay the penalty for his cattle-slaughter.

Young Red threw a deep-chested bay in the air, and charged straight to meet that awful gray thing—

RED was on his feet, blinking stupidly. He could not understand it! A moment before, he had been leading his pack in a charge upon a cornered grizzly. Now he was beside the cabin, his great pack dwindled to three aged hounds, himself more aged than they! He could not understand it, but his old head drew proudly high, and a glow came into his age-dulled eyes. Was he not still Red, the great lion- and bear-hound?

He stood uncertainly. He did not feel like sleeping any more. Perhaps he could find a rabbit-trail over there in the brush. But he turned away as though ashamed of the thought. *Rabbits*—after that mighty gray thing!

And then old Red paused dead still and stared. Was he dreaming once more? Surely he must be! He blinked, and trotted forward slowly, afraid of waking up—trotted



Bigfoot raided the Circle Bar corrals, killing a cow and a calf, within pistol-shot of the house.

forward and sniffed the wrinkled old hand that stretched down to pat his head. What did it mean?

For old Tom Jackson had on his worn chaps and spurs, and his big six-shooter dangled on his thigh. Around his neck was slung an old and brittle steer-horn. And there stood Rocky—bony old Rocky—with a shabby saddle on his back and the stock of a long rifle showing above his neck. Why—why, Tom was ready for the hunt!—standing at his horse's neck, just as he had stood there years before, when he and his pack were famous through the mountains of Arizona.

And that long, worn six-shooter—that could mean but one thing. They were going to hunt the grizzly—a hunt where a sticking rifle almost always meant death or terrible mangling for the hunter. In the lion-hunt, he had always dispensed with the six-shooter's weight.

A strange, fierce wave of joy swept over old Red—how long since he had last felt that wild thrill? His throat seemed to be swelling, and then a great, long-drawn bay surged forth. Perhaps there was a slight break in that voice, toward the end, but it was still strong. His master reached down and patted his head again.

"Yes, Red, ol' feller, we're goin' after him—our last hunt."

Tom's own voice was none too steady; there was a little catch of uncertainty in it. He shouldn't have consented to hunt the aged remainder of his pack with young Jerry Maddux' lion-hounds! But the sneering, cocksure Jerry had stung his pride to the quick. What pride is like the hunter's—pride that has come down undimmed since man first seized his stoneheaded club and followed his half-wild dog through the jungle?

What was it Jerry had said? Old Red had never been worth six bits at his best—that old Tom had been a good-enough hunter when the mountains were full of bears, and one could walk out and shoot one like a deer. "Ol'-timer," he had jeered sarcastically, "I'd shore like to see how long you'd last hunting grizzlies nowadays, when they're scarce an' know how to take care of themselves. Three days, is *my* guess!"

Why, the young pup! Tom had been a famous hunter long before Jerry Maddux was born! He and his pack of new-fangled, short-eared hounds—if one wanted to call those spotted things hounds! Why, they barked and wailed like the cross-breed curs they were!

IN the heat of the moment, he had challenged Jerry to throw their packs together and hunt old Bigfoot, and so find out which pack was the better. Pack! Four old hounds with the gray covering their faces! Why hadn't he asked him to hunt a lion? Then the age-sharpened noses of his four might win over the fleetness and youth of Jerry's twenty-three. But on a reeking bear-trail—

Well, there was one consolation—they would probably never overtake the bear, so there would be room for argument as to whose hounds had worked best. Every professional hunter in Arizona, and most of the sportsmen, had tried to bring Bigfoot to bay. Jerry Maddux had been hunting him off and on for five years. The hounds Bigfoot had killed would have made a formidable pack in themselves, but still he roamed the cañons, slaughtering cattle at his pleasure. Only once, eight years before, had he been "held up" long enough for the hunter to overtake his hounds. Men had found Charley Simmons down there in the cañon, horribly mangled, dead hounds scattered around his body. The trail of blood leading away had led to hopes that Bigfoot was mortally wounded—but three days later he had raided the Circle Bar corrals, killing a cow and a calf within pistol-shot of the house.

Two horsemen were riding up the gulch, followed by a horde of wiry, slender-limbed hounds—Walkers, for the most part, with some of the short-eared ones that of late had usurped the name of Red Bone in Arizona.

"Howdy, ol'-timer," greeted Jerry, swinging easily from his silver-mounted saddle. "Ready to show us how those ol' pot-lickers of yours work on a bear-trail?"

The old man flushed, and answered deliberately:

"Jerry, I'm jest a-goin' to take you out an' show you bear-hounds, so's you can tell people you saw some work once."

"Yeah!" Jerry sneered. "Better call off ol' Red or he'll kill some of my dogs, shore!" He winked knowingly to his companion, who pretended not to see. Old Jeff Whittaker liked Tom Jackson, and didn't like Jerry Maddux. In fact, no one liked Jerry Maddux any too well—he was too cocksure, too fond of sneering.

Old Red had started forward slowly, stiff-legged, hair erect, to meet the invaders of his camp. His blunted, yellowing teeth were bared. He'd show them something about coming around *his* camp, he would! But his master spoke quietly:

"Git back in the house, Red!"

OLD Red hesitated, and then turned slowly to stalk through the low doorway. His hair bristled more than ever, and indignation rumbled in his throat. He made a very fierce old figure standing there, just inside the threshold, bristling and growling—so fierce that no one but his master suspected that down in Red's heart was a little sneaking germ of thankfulness for the order. When he had started forward so bravely, he had had more than a suspicion that he was due for a hearty trouncing. That command had saved his face—and also his skin. Now he could sit in the doorway, and look terribly fierce, and growl rumblingly at those short-eared creatures; he could pretend, even to himself, that but for his master he would have sent them flying yelping down the gulch.

A young hound started toward the door, but a blood-curdling growl from Red made him turn off, pretending that he had not been going there in the first place. Better and better! Old Red was keeping up the dignity of the camp in fine style! He was so proud of himself that he almost started out after a big hound who came too close to suit him—almost, but not quite! With hounds, as with men, discretion comes with years—discretion, and a knowledge of stiffening muscles.

Now all three men were mounted, and old Tom was shaking his chaps, settling himself in the saddle. He swung his gun-belt to a more comfortable angle, and partly withdrew his long rifle to see that it slipped free in the scabbard. Jerry Maddux lifted his horn to his lips, and at its sound his pack gathered baying around.

And then old Tom raised his own horn—that old, brittle horn. Clear and bell-like the long note rolled out over the cañons. Old Red's voice cracked completely as he flung himself forward. The hunt! The hunt! Once more he was to take the trail! Above the wailing of the short-eared pack rose four long-drawn bays, powerful even now compared with the others' tongues. Red's mate was there, old Queen—and Mose, and Boone. Old Boone was limping slightly—one of his hind legs seemed stiff. Perhaps he too was getting rheumatism.

"Let's go-o-o, boys!"

Up the gulch they swung, the spotted, short-eared hounds sweeping ahead in fan shape, tails high in the air, noses quivering. Behind them trotted the four old veterans, looking aged, feeble, compared to those dashing youngsters. So Jerry's pack was to have the honor of first finding the trail.

A mile they went—almost two miles. Red had dropped

The hunter drew his long bowie knife, well knowing its futility. He might die, but he would at least face his mighty enemy to the last.

back until he was hardly six feet ahead of his master's horse, and the other three were just ahead of him. Spotted hounds covered the country ahead carefully, loping back and forth with swinging noses.

No one but old Tom noticed when Red stopped suddenly and threw his head high in the air. And then off to the right he went, up a gentle slope, nose still held high and stiff, trotting with a peculiar stiff-legged step. He broke into a clumsy lope. The hair on the back of his neck was beginning to rise. What was that old familiar odor that stole down to him from the mesa?

Old Tom's eyes kindled, but he was afraid to hope. He rode steadily ahead with the others, not daring to glance back. If it was a trail, old Red would soon give the signal—when he had made sure.

And then a great, deep-chested bay came from behind, clear as it had been years before. Long-drawn, resonant, it swept down from the little mesa. For the moment, Red's youth had returned again. He was on the trail!

Old Tom Jackson swung his horse around.

"There's yore bear-trail, Jerry," he remarked quietly. "Looks like yore short-ears missed it, somehow."

"Yeah! Jack-rabbit trail, I reckon, ol'-timer!" came the skeptical grunt.

But before they had come within a hundred yards of Red, they saw the bloody heap lying there—a fine Hereford bull whose side bore Jeff Whittaker's Circle Bar brand.

"Danged if it aint the bear!" gasped Jerry.

And now Jerry's hounds came swooping in. A moment of frantic milling, making sure of the scent, and the shriek of a great pack filled the air. Hounds were tearing madly back and forth, bumping into each other, noses plowing the dry earth of the mesa. Long tails thrashed wildly, and foam formed in open mouths.

And then they were away. Across the open mesa raced Jerry's hounds, running fleetly, tonguing in their high, excited voices. Perhaps they carried their noses a trifle too high, but they ran without doubt or indecision. Jerry, before following his pack, paused long enough to sneer wickedly:

"What you think o' yore bear-hounds now, ol'-timer?"

For still the four aged ones pottered around the carcass of the bull, sniffing, smelling, baying brokenly. Their master shook his gray head.

"Jerry, I always did say fast hounds were no good. Go ahead—we'll catch up."

Across the mesa after the tonguing pack Jerry dashed, throwing a last sneering laugh back over his shoulder, and beside him rode old Whittaker, the cattleman. Old Tom Jackson sat his horse silently, a frown of uneasiness coming to his face. His hounds *were* getting pretty old, at that—pretty old, and stiff, and slow. It looked as though Jerry Maddux might have the laugh on him after all—or the sneer, rather, for Jerry seldom really laughed.

Then Tom grunted with relief as old Red swung after the others. Fifty yards he went, and stopped uncertainly. And then back to the carcass he came, to potter some more, sniff some more, waste more time in long-drawn baying that got him nowhere.

"Let's go, boys!"

TOM started off, but they would not follow him. He turned back and rode, shouting, among them—they would not heed. The old man's gray beard sank on his chest.

"Pore ol' brutes, I reckon yore day is done—an' mine, too. Let's go home."

The voice of Jerry's swift pack was dying in the pines beyond the open mesa. So old Tom was beaten, he and his hounds. And by Jerry and his short-ears! Still the four old hounds pottered and bayed around the dead bull.

And then they were swinging off on the trail—not rapidly, flashily, like Jerry's, but with a strange, inexorable steadiness and surety. But they were going straight across a bed of sandstone—in the opposite direction to where Jerry's pack had gone! The old man stared, unbelieving, and then a look of great relief, of fierce joy, lit up his wrinkled, bearded face as he realized the truth.

"Jerry took the back-trail!" he gasped. "Now, there's a short-eared hound an' his hurry for you every time!"

He went almost a mile, trailing very slowly but very surely, before Jerry and his pack overtook. The hounds looked sheepish, and there was a dull flush of anger on the young man's face as he spoke.

"Reckon we must have took the back-trail; I never yet saw a hound wouldn't make a mistake sometime."

The old man's voice was gentle—too gentle!

"I know, Jerry—that's why I wanted to show you real bear-hounds workin' once. Jest so's you'd be able to tell people you'd seen 'em."

Along the rim of a second barren mesa they trailed, sometimes one pack taking the lead, sometimes another. Then they swung down again into the pines. Here, on the damp ground, the scent was heavy and easy to follow. Away sped Jerry's big pack, wailing frantically, excitedly, on the reeking scent. Farther and farther behind dropped the bearded, gray little man and four old hounds who paused to smell almost every track. But now the old man was confident.

They saw the bloody heap lying there, a fine Hereford bull. "Danged if it aint the bear!" gasped Jerry.

"Trail him up, boys!" he encouraged. "Don't mind them high-headed things—they'll overrun an' we'll catch up."

Two miles more, and the uncertain baying far ahead told him the story. He had been right—Jerry's pack had over-run, and were circling wildly, wondering how far back they had left the trail, where it had turned off.

"Hurry, boys, hurry! Let's find the right trail before they get back!"

But hurry the four old veterans would not. Almost foot by foot they went, slowly as fate, and looking almost as inevitable. Then Jerry's horn rang out, calling in his pack. The old man left his pottering four, and climbed a little knoll to look. So that was it! Jerry was taking his hounds and cutting across, guessing at where the trail had gone. Old Tom grumbled into his gray beard as he rode back down the hill:

"It aint fair! He should let 'em work it out if they're able! It aint fair!"

He knew bears, did old Tom Jackson, and he knew that Jerry had guessed right. Again the din rose ahead of him, this time going straight toward the rim of Black Cañon. Old Tom felt a great impulse to stop his own hounds, to lope ahead and put them back on the trail just far enough behind so that Jerry would not see what he had done. But his wrinkled face reddened dully at the thought of it.

"No, sir—my hounds is long-ears! I'll let 'em work it out for themselves, win or lose!"

Again the sounds were dying in the distance. Now they were gone entirely. Still old Tom and his aged pack pottered along, almost foot by foot. They came to the tracks of the big pack, and the deep hoofprints of running horses. Why did not old Red just follow those other hounds? Why did he not hurry? But Red was trailing a bear, and not hounds. Like his master, he had little confidence in Jerry's pack—in any short-eared pack. They came to the rim of Black Cañon, and old Tom stopped his horse to listen.

He was too late—he and his poor old hounds! From farther up the cañon came the tumult of fighting hounds, and the infuriated roar of a bear at bay. Old Red raised his head to listen once, and again went back to his trail. What the other pack did was none of his business. Yard by yard he went, scarcely missing one padded track with his heavy nose. Every few steps, he paused to bay. Old Queen, his mate, was at his heels, and the others helped whenever they could. Slowly and clumsily, they loped along, sniffing, baying, snuffling.

Old Tom Jackson forgot his own hounds as he listened to the sounds of battle half a mile away. For battle it was—he could tell that. The howl of a crippled hound came to him, and again the bellowing roar of old Bigfoot. Any moment, now, a shot would ring out, and the fight would end.

And poor old Red . . . . by following the twistings of the trail, it would be at least a mile and a half to the kill. The bear would be skinned before he got there. Poor, slow old Red— He had been a great bear-hound in his day!

And now the voice of the bear rose and rose, insane fury in every snarling burst. A hound wailed in death-agony.

Then another hound howled—but this time it was in fear, not pain. Old Tom could see it—the maddened brute charging right and left, straight, chisel claws slashing out with awful force.

Another howl of fear—and another! The pack was scattering. Would it rally and charge again? Would those short-eared hounds do their duty as bear dogs? Why was not Jerry there with his rifle?

And then came a sudden silence. Old Tom listened, holding his breath. No—there was no shot—no baying tongue. Nothing but the long-drawn voice of old Red and his little pack a few yards away broke the stillness of the cañon.

"He whipped 'em off!"

There was fierce joy in the old hunter's voice. There were short-eared hounds for you! Quitters—it was born in 'em!

Slowly, surely, old Red and his three companions followed the trail. They swung back slightly from the cañon, and then in to the rim again. Before them stood two saddled horses, and spotted, short-eared hounds were crawling out over the rim with hanging tails and nervous, backward glances.

Jeff Whittaker, the old cattleman, was standing there with a queer, sarcastic look on his face. But old Tom felt a twinge of disappointment. After all, was not Jerry a hunter like himself? This loss of the bear, after having had him cornered, would be a bitter blow to the young fellow. One hunter can feel sympathy for the pride of another.

"Couldn't they hold him till Jerry got down there?" he asked.

The cattleman's lips tightened. He did not trouble to lower his voice very much, although Jerry was crawling out over the rim a few yards off.

"They'd have had to hold him a long time! Looked to me a good deal like Jerry was in a great hurry not to get there."

"You—don't mean—" gasped old Tom.

"Yeah—I mean just that! Looked to me like Jerry was twice as scared of Bigfoot as his dogs were—an' that's saying a lot."

It was unbelievable—a bear-hunter who feared to face a grizzly! Even old Bigfoot! Old Tom felt almost dazed. So *this* was what bear-hunters were coming to nowadays! He did not like Jerry, but he had never thought him a coward.

Again the cattleman spoke:

"Better stop your hounds, Tom, before they get into the cañon."

Slowly, surely, old Red and his little pack were swinging down toward a break in the rim, baying, sniffing, baying.

"Stop 'em! What for?"

"See here, Tom—I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but you an' your hounds are gettin' too old to do anything with a bear like Bigfoot. Let him go."

The old man swung grimly from his worn saddle, and pulled off his chaps and spurs.

"Jeff, mebbe we are old—but we're not old enough to be bluffed out by any bear. We'll quit when we're whipped, an' no sooner."

He pulled his long rifle from the scabbard, and started walking stubbornly toward the break, following his ancient hounds.

"Wait, Tom!" called the cattleman. "I'm goin' down there with you."

The old hunter turned.

"I'd rather you wouldn't, Jeff. I— Well, mebbe I'm jest kinda queer about it."

And then the battered old sombrero disappeared below the rim.

Jeff Whittaker turned to the younger hunter, and said in a cold tone:

"Jerry, you can take your hounds an' go back to town. I don't need you to hunt my range any more."

"I—huh? No pack can hold that bear, I tell you!"

"Mebbe not, Jerry, but you just go ahead to town. I'm stayin' here a while—I might be able to help the old-timer in case he gets himself in trouble."

Over bare, jagged ledges and through dense, junglelike growths of locust and young spruce, went the four old hounds. They wound down snakelike beds of side cañons, and scrambled up among precipitous ledges. They found the torn ground where Jerry's pack had held the bear, and saw three hounds dead and one dying. Old Tom paused to shoot the latter. Evidently Jerry Maddux had never got there, or he would have put it out of its misery.

Now the four old voices were cracking badly. Old paws were soft and unused to the ledges—little spots of blood appeared where they stepped. Still they pottered on, sniffing, snuffling, baying in broken tones. And behind followed their master, panting, for he too had grown soft in his retirement. Sweat streamed down his gray beard, and the salt of it stung his eyes. But grimly, slowly, like his little pack ahead, he pushed on.

Down into the bed of the main cañon they went, and then back up again halfway to the rim. An hour passed —two hours. Still they trailed steadily, if slowly. They came to a little pool of water in a rocky side-cañon, and stopped a moment to drink and partly regain their breath. Old Tom glanced at the big wet splotches leading out over the warm rocks.

"Boys, he's slowin' up—gittin' ready to fight. I knowed he wouldn't run far from us, after lickin' that big pack back there."

On through the clawing brush they went. The old man's clothes hung in ribbons on his back, for he did not take time to pick a way. There was blood on his arms from the thorns.

But the old hounds were gradually drawing ever farther and farther away from him, try though he did to keep up with them. He was tired, very tired, and he was old and feeble.

But he must go faster! Four poor old beasts could not hold that mighty grizzly more than a minute or two at best. Perhaps they would all be killed before he got there —perhaps old Red would be killed! He staggered ahead, trying to strike a dog-trot around a level bench. But his knees were trying to buckle under him. How tired he was—almost blind from exertion!

Up, up they went, toward the rim again. Why did not that bear go down—it would be so much easier to follow! Up, up, scrambling over ledges that bruised his skin, slipping on steep slopes of spruce humus. He was not quite so tired now—that is, he could not feel the weariness so much—he was too numb. How pleasant it would be to lie down there and die! He was too old to live, anyway—too old and feeble. He stumbled, fell, and cut his hand on a jagged stone. But he was not aware of either fall or cut as he again staggered forward.

A low, menacing growl carried down through the still air. Four old voices rose in a broken chorus, accepting the challenge.

"Hold him, boys! I'm comin'!"

Old Tom did not know that his shout could scarcely have been heard twenty feet away.

Another low growl of warning came. Tom was plunging blindly upward. He must get there—he must arrive before his hounds were all killed—at least before old Red was killed! That—that was a howl of agony—a death-howl! Was it old Red?

The old man crashed from the brush onto a wide, bare ledge.

Backed against the mass of gray rock stood a huge gray beast, the sun glinting on long claws and evil teeth. Old Mose was panting out his life a few feet away, but the

three others formed a feeble circle. They must hold him—they were bear-dogs to their last breath!

A sudden, scuffling charge. Poor old Boone was tossed into the brush with entrails hanging out. But Red was closing in, stanchly supported by Queen, his mate. They were the last of the once great pack. Old Queen seemed to stagger weakly, but the voice of Red rang out as though he were again a youngster leading his horde.

Once more the bear charged. Straight over Red swung that great armed paw. But a shot rang out, and a belch of black-powder smoke hung in the still air. For an instant the great bear staggered back; then he was lunging forward again, a stream of blood coursing down his shaggy chest. Madness was in his little weak eyes, and a terrible roar in his throat. What more awful than the death-fight of a wounded grizzly?

Straight toward that hovering smoke came the great brute, but he saw the hated two-legged creature beside it and swerved in his course. Again the rifle rang out—and again. But still the grizzly came on in his last blind agony of rage.

Now the rifle was empty, and the old hunter reached for his six-shooter. It was gone—dragged out by the brush through which he had crawled! He drew his long bowie knife, well knowing its futility. He might die, but he would at least die like a bear-hunter of the old days, facing his mighty enemy to the last.

Now the bear was over him, one terrible paw raised to strike.

Something dark leaped through the air; then old Red was fast to the shaggy throat, hanging on as grimly as a bulldog. The blunted yellow teeth of old Queen were sunk in the upraised paw. The bear did not heed them—he knew his real enemy. Down he came, an awful gray bulk, his free paw swinging. . . . Darkness closed over the old man. . . . .

Old Tom awoke, slowly, a strange thumping in his head. What had happened? What was that weight on his foot? And then he saw the great carcass beside him. Oh, yes—he had killed another grizzly.

Old Red was licking his face, and Queen was whining uneasily a yard or two away. He jerked his foot free, and reached forth a shaking hand.

"I'm all right, girl! I'm all right, Red—not hurt a bit!"

Some one was coming smashing down through the brush, shouting—that was Jeff Whittaker. He burst into sight, pale as a ghost in spite of his exertion. He held a cocked carbine in his hand.

"Hey, Tom! Where are you?"

"I'm here, Jeff. I'm all right—jest got the wind knocked out o' me when he fell on me."

The cattleman rushed forward. Then he saw the huge shaggy gray carcass with the slowly spreading pool of blood beside it.

"You—you got him!" he gasped, unable to believe his eyes.

He stared from the gray-haired little hunter to the aged hounds, and an involuntary oath of admiration burst from his lips.

"By God! You and old Red—*still* the best hunters in the mountains!"

The old man drew a graying muzzle toward him. Of course he was very tired—he would have to rest a while before skinning the great bear and climbing out of the cañon.

But a warm glow was in his heart, and there was a gentle, happy little smile on his face as he turned it up toward the cattleman.

"Oh, we aint so bad—Red an' me!"

The Mountain Mauler

This gripping story of a battler from Virginia, who won because he couldn't realize when he was beaten, is from the pen of a writer new to these pages.

CLELL CHARDLEY didn't stop to think. He lifted his great body out of his chair and moved across the chop suey joint to the table where the three men had just grabbed the little golden-haired singer. If he had stopped to think, he would have done the same. In the Virginia mountains, where he was from, it was an iron-clad code to protect women.

Clell didn't understand this city life. It was the first time since he lived here that he come to visit this chop suey joint, and it was the first time in his life that he had seen a pretty girl dressed as smartly as she. She was singing so sweetly in a voice that rang with a haunting deep-throated tone. It was the kind of singing he dreamed about when he used to sit on his doorstep in the mountains and look out into the night that lay in silent coolness over the hills that were purple-black in the moonlight.

And these three men had been bothering her ever since she started. Clell didn't realize that in this kind of place the entertainers expected this of men; it was one of the hazards of their work. But if he had known it he would have been incapable of understanding it. Women were to be loved and protected, not pawed.

As he drew near the table, Clell saw that the three men were harder-looking than he had noticed from across the room. They were large and powerfully built, with brutish scarred faces, and odd-looking ears like pouches of old leather. The one grasping the arm of the girl was younger; his black hair was slicked back, and he wore flashy clothes that were the envy of Clell.

The girl was trying to smile, to keep singing as though nothing was happening. The younger man, with his fierce, good-looking face, pulled her sharply toward him. She lost her balance, broke off singing and a frightened look came into her face.

Clell lunged forward. His enormous hand descended heavily on a wrist which felt like a bough of the oak trees he used to chop.

"Let her go," he said.

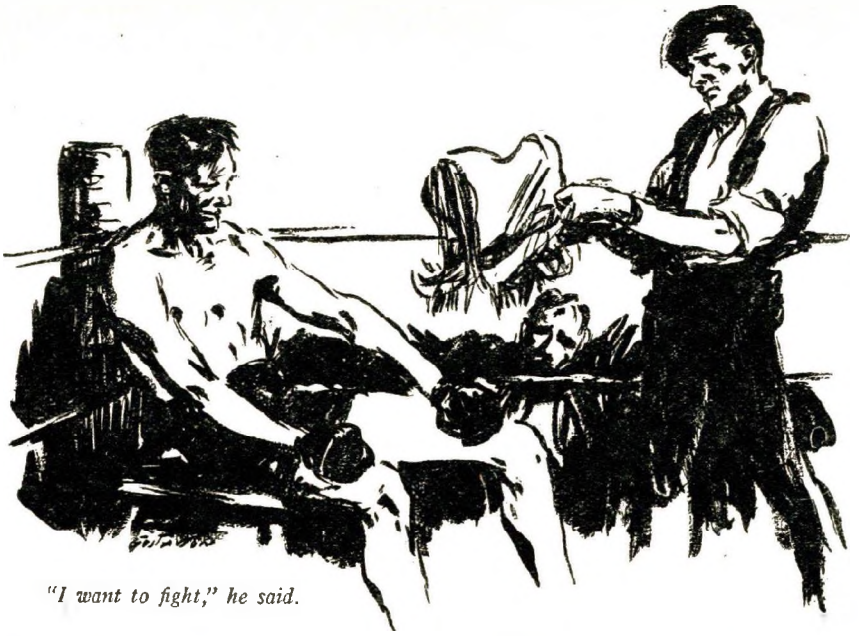
The fellow's arm jerked back, but the grip of the mountain boy was like a vise. The fellow turned black eyes upward, his lips curved in a thin slit. It was the face of a killer.

"What the hell?" he said when he saw the great bulk looming over him.

"Blow, moose," snarled one of the other men. "You'll get yourself in hot grease."

"Will you let her alone?" Clell said.

The fellow whose arm he was holding leaped suddenly to his feet. The other two jumped up too. One of them caught his free arm and the other one grabbed Clell's arm.



"I want to fight," he said.

By
CLIFFORD DOWDEY

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

Clell flung his arm outward and the man fell backward across the room, careened into another table and crashed to the floor. Dishes clattered and some woman gave a scared yelp.

Four waiters sprang up around Clell and the two men. The man holding the young fellow's arm leaned across and said menacingly:

"This is not your play, mutt. Now blow or we'll smoke you."

The young fellow jerked his arm quickly; it was like trying to jerk free of an iron ring in a wall.

"Let me get at this boob!" the young fellow shouted.

The manager joined the waiters and they all started yelling at once:

"Get out, please! We'll call the police!"

"You'd better come along, Steve," the older man said. "We don't want no mix-up just account of this moose."

"You come outside, guy," snarled the young fellow called Steve.

"I'm coming." Clell let go the arm and walked beside the three men, the third having picked himself up. The waiters and a group of men followed. Clell looked around for the pretty little singer, but she had disappeared.

When they got down on Broad Street, the young fellow whirled on Clell.

"Now come on with me to the nearest alley, and I'll smear you."

"Sure. I'm coming."

"Let it drop, Steve. You can't get nowhere messing it up with this mug."

"For Gawd's sake," said the man who had fallen into the table, "forget it. You can't take chances the night before the fight."

"I'm not taking any chances. And I'm handling this. Come on, guy."

"I'm coming," Clell said.

Clell heard the following crowd murmuring: "That's Steve Larkin, the West Side Wildcat. He's fighting Pat O'Malley tomorrow night at the Coliseum."

"They shouldn't allow this. He'll murder the big guy."

"I don't know—look at his size."

"But nobody has a chance against a trained fighter."

All this meant little to Clell. This man had violated his code and the man wanted to fight him. Clell never looked for a fight, but if a man attacked him, Clell did not ask questions. Steve Larkin was a big fighter. He weighed in at a hundred ninety, and he was six foot one, with the quick grace of the tiger. Clell could see by his movements that he had speed and swift coördination. Clell knew nothing about fighting. But as tall as Steve Larkin was, Clell was taller. But Clell was very little heavier, perhaps three or four pounds. He was straight like the pines in the mountains that bent with the wind but never snapped.

The compact bunch turned into an alley and moved away from the street to the end of the reflected light from the street. Steve stripped off his coat and vest.

"All right, moose," he snapped. "Take it."

Clell felt a fist flick off his cheek and as he thrust out his fists, three terrific blows shot into his stomach. They landed dully and Clell felt something like a tremor pass through his frame. Instinctively he dropped back, saving himself from a lightning overhand right that skimmed off his chin. He saw Larkin weaving toward him and did the only thing he knew; he shot both fists straight out from his body. They were like rods shot out from a machine in their direction and tremendous force and the way one followed the other without hesitation.

Larkin dashed in like a shadow and slipped out. He danced around Clell, darting in and out. His left hand flashed vicious jabs that glanced off his face, sometimes landing with a solid crack, and sometimes missing him. Clell was bewildered by this attack. He turned slowly to meet the shifting Steve, continuously throwing forward those pistonlike blows that never landed.

Then Larkin shifted suddenly. Clell turned as quickly as he could to meet him. But Larkin was darting back to his original position, back and in. *Crack!* An uppercut knocked Clell's head back. He tried to dodge the blow that he knew instinctively would follow. He tried to ward it off by thrusting out both arms. But even as he moved, a brutal overhand right crashed against his jaw. It was a blinding shock. His body trembled from the impact. He felt the ground heaving. Blindly he moved backward to avoid another blow. He was staggering backward but he didn't know it. A quick left grazed the skin of his jaw but he didn't know that either.

Through a haze he saw Larkin crouching in and Clell knew the boxer was looking for an opening. The ground was settling now, his head was clearing. He gathered himself and sprang forward, throwing his fist with all his speed at that grim sinister face.

He struck something hard with one hand, the other missed. He had struck Larkin's shoulder, stopping his forward advance. But Larkin shifted quickly around, feinted with his left, and shot in another overhand right.

Clell tried to turn quickly enough. His fist worked futilely in front of him. He saw the blow coming and tried to duck. The blow smashed on his skull. Lights shot before his eyes, then blackness in a spinning world.

Clell had felt like this before. Once when Jed Humber had hit him over the head with a fence rail; once when a tree fell on him in a mountain storm; once when the new colt had kicked him in the stomach. Clell knew he had to hang on. He wondered why Larkin wasn't following him, hitting again. He wondered if he was out and didn't know it.

Then he was conscious of his arms shooting monotonously out in front of him. He was conscious of the cobblestones under his feet. He was conscious of being unsteady and he wanted to lie down. Then he saw Steve Larkin standing stock still, staring at his own hand.

One of the men rushed up to the fighter. "What's the matter?"

"My fingers—" Clell heard Steve grit the words out. "They ache."

The other man grabbed Larkin's wrist. "My God! They're broken!"

There was a tense silence. Then the first man looked at Clell and said: "And the moose is still on his feet."

The second man walked over to him. He was tense with rage: "Well, see what you did, you mutt! We ought to wipe you out."

"Get away," Clell said. His mind was clearing slowly now. He didn't like this face that was beginning to leer threateningly. "Get away, afore I throw you out of my sight."

Then the first man came over. "You better look after your kid, Grafero. I think he needs a doctor." Then he looked at Clell. "Boy," he said, "what are you made of, anyway? Did you even know that he hit you about twenty times in your belly?"

"I felt the first three," Clell said.

"Well, Steve was trying to save his hands. You know, it's dangerous for a fighter to hit without gloves. I guess he got tired of pounding in that corrugated iron of your belly, so he took a couple of cracks at your jaw. Either of them punches was enough to knock a bull out. And you standing here, shooting out your fist."

Clell could sense that the man was not unfriendly. It was a mountaineer's way to keep silent if he had nothing to say. If he wasn't sure of what the other person wanted, he waited. Clell looked at him steadily, and waited to hear him out.

Clell stared at the blue eyes. "What's it to you?"

The other man came back. "Come on, Blimey, go with us to a hospital; Steve's fingers are smashed all right."

"Wait a minute," Blimey said. "With busted fingers he won't be able to fight Pat O'Malley tomorrow night."

Grafero grunted.

"If he fights in another month he'll be lucky, and him sure of knocking Pat O'Malley for a row of something or other."

"Can't cry over spilt milk, Grafero. I need a pug to fight O'Malley and I think I've found him. The moose here."

Grafero snarled like a wounded animal. "Take him away before I smoke him."

"Come along with me, fellow," Blimey said. "I want to talk to you."

Clell followed Blimey out of the alley. The crowd who had watched the fight were helping Grafero, who was Larkin's manager, with Larkin. Blimey walked with Clell down several blocks to the Coliseum. Outside Clell saw the colored posters announcing: "Ten-Round Heavyweight Bout." Steve Larkin, 'The West Side Wildcat,' of New York City's Hell Kitchen, vs. Pat O'Malley, 'Georgia's Giant Cracker.'

Clell was puzzled as they walked through the locker rooms into a square office, with bare walls plastered with pictures of prize-fighters and a desk littered with newspapers.

"Sit down," Blimey said. Blimey looked older in the hard light of the electric bulb. Clell saw that his large body was padded with some fat, and there was bloated skin under his jaw-line and on his neck. Under his eyes were puffs. He was a mean-looking individual. But he had a rather ingratiating grin. Clell didn't think of it as ingratiating; he thought of it as friendly. Because in the mountains no one ever tried to be friendly unless they liked a person. Clell sat down, wondering what had made Blimey friendly.

"What's your name?" Blimey said.

Clell stared at the blue eyes with the cunning gleam. "What's it to you?"

Blimey grinned. He lit a cigarette and moved about the room. Then he sat on the desk. He knew he had made the wrong approach. Now he was coaxing and he made his blue eyes innocent. He said: "Son, if you had more experience in the city you would know my name is Blimey Duff. I'm a fight promoter—right now. Before that, I was a manager, and I would be still except I got so many palookas I couldn't make a living. Before that I was a fighter myself, but I liked the booze too well. And I know a natural when I see one and I think you're a natural."

He waited for Clell to speak, but Clell thought of nothing to say, so he remained silent.

"By a natural, I mean you're a born fighter. I don't think you're a champion. But if you want to make some money, I can get you bouts—handle you right, and I think I can bring you along so you'll get some money. What'd you say?"

"I came to the city to make money. Up home in the mountains, times are hard. Things have changed. My family can't make money like they used to could. I got to send them some or they'll have to sell their house. Then they don't know what they'll do. Sure, I want to make money anyway I can—what's honest."

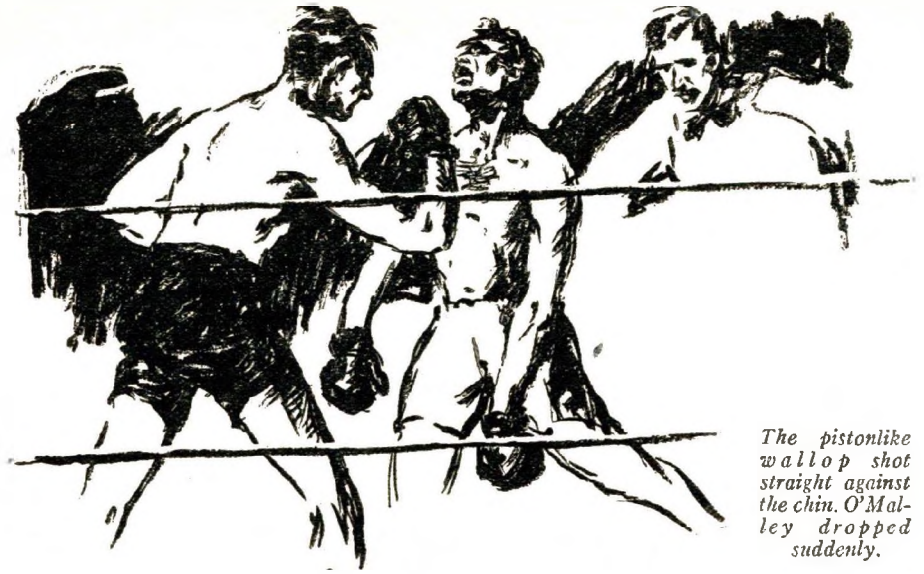
"What are you doing now?"

"I'm foreman on a railroad gang. Bunch of wops. Takes six of them to budge a tie. I ruther move it myself than watch them."

"Strong boy, aint you?"

"I reckon I am."

"Well, strong boy, I'm going to put you in a fight tomorrow night with Pat O'Malley. This Steve Larkin is a good boy. He's on a barnstorming tour and when he



The pistonlike wallop shot straight against the chin. O'Malley dropped suddenly.

finishes—if he finishes the way he started—he'll be a contender for the championship. He woulda killed this O'Malley. So O'Malley aint gonna be so hard for you. I tell you, you come down here in the morning and I'll show you how to handle yourself in the ring and—"

"I got to work tomorrow."

"You can't work before a fight."

"I worked before the one with Larkin."

Blimey grinned. "All right, come here right after the job. I got to fix it with the newspapers."

Next morning one of Clell's wops brought him the newspaper.

"Lookit, boss. Dat you?"

Clell read: "Clell Chardley, the Mountain Mauler, of this city, will replace Steve Larkin against Pat O'Malley, because of a little personal trouble last night between Mr. Larkin and Mr. Chardley which has laid the West-Side Wildcat on the sidelines for a month." There followed an account which Clell regarded dubiously, as most of it was as fresh news to him as it was to any reader.

He asked Blimey about it when he reported to the Coliseum. Blimey said: "That's what we call ballyhoo. That's the way we excite the suckers so they'll pay dough to watch you fight. Now you fight like I tell you against this O'Malley. You won't win, but you won't make a sap of yourself."

Blimey got a trainer and a fifth-rate local middleweight who was a hanger-on to show Clell the fundamentals. First they taped his hands and put on the gloves, so he would get the feel of them. They taped his ankles and put him in togs. Then they took him in a ring. For an hour they rehearsed him in the ordinary rules. They showed him the belt line, they explained clinches. They showed him how to keep his left hand extended and to shoot in forward in a jab. They showed him how to hold back his right for protection and when to hit hard. They drummed into him the principle of never drawing back his arm to hit, but to hit with his arm out from his body.

Then Blimey instructed him. He said:

"An untrained fighter can't hope to hold his own against a trained fighter. But this O'Malley is a clumsy mutt, and all you got to do is try to hold him off."

Then they gave Clell a hot and cold shower, a vigorous rubdown, and made him lie down for half an hour to relax. But Clell wasn't nervous. The mountain people grow used to fighting. As a youngster he had held a shotgun beside his grandfather, while his clan fought off the Humbers. A fight in a ring was just a fight to the "Mountain Mauler."

When Clell was pushed through the ropes, he was surprised to see Steve Larkin standing in his corner with his second. Steve had on the flashy clothes that were the envy of Clell, and his right hand was wrapped in a bandage. He nodded for Clell to come to him. His eyes were hard, but not hostile. He said:

"Listen, guy, you'll make me look more of a mug if O'Malley smears you. I don't give a hoot about you, but I want O'Malley to look sour. So I'm gonna tell you how to fight this guy. Keep both of your hands in front of your face. Stand straight with your head back. That'll make him have to work on your body. Keep cool and don't get mad."

Then Clell saw her. She wore a hat now, a cute little black thing high on her head and over her right temple he saw the golden hair he remembered from the chop suey joint. She smiled, and he wondered if she had come to see him fight.

Then the bell clanged loudly. He remembered this was his cue to begin. His second jumped out of the ring, with a hastily whispered: "Take it easy."

Then he saw Pat O'Malley rushing forward. He was a tremendous man, as tall as Clell and easily twenty pounds heavier, with wide hulking shoulders. His face was unshaven and he scowled murderously as he bored in. Clell remembered to stand up straight. His left hand jabbed out. Then a shower of blows rained on him. He tried to ward them off with his right arm. He tried to push O'Malley away with jabs. But they struck his arms, his shoulders, his chest, his head, his face. One struck on his nose. He felt the ropes cutting the back of his legs. He heard the crowd booing. He saw the calculated look of ferocity in O'Malley's eye as he measured him.

Then Clell struck out with his right. It went straight from the shoulder, like a bullet. O'Malley ducked as he shot in a left to the heart and brought his right over to finish Clell. But he ducked a fraction too slow. The powerful right struck him on the temple, right over the eye. He staggered back, momentarily dazed. Clell followed, thrusting out those terrific blows, right, left, right, left, toward O'Malley's protected face. One of them slammed against O'Malley's wrist, knocking his fist away from his face. And the following pistonlike wallop shot through the slight opening straight against the chin. O'Malley dropped suddenly to the floor.

Clell stood dazed. He saw the man in white ducks raising and lowering his hand and making motions with his mouth. Clell heard nothing he said, for the mighty roaring of the crowd in his ears. Then he saw O'Malley's two seconds run into the ring and drag the prostrate body off, and the referee was holding his hand aloft.

Blimey Duff leaped into the ring:

"You've won by a knockout in the first round. Boy, I'll make you a sensation!"

In the next year Clell Chardley, the "Mountain Mauler," fought twenty-five fights in cities from the east coast to the west, and from Minneapolis to New Orleans. He won ten fights by knockouts. He lost fifteen by points.

Against a big slugger, Clell was at his best. Blimey would tell him: "This mug doesn't know any more than you do. Go in and beat him to death."

Against fast and clever boxers Clell was baffled. Whenever they started weaving and bobbing as Steve Larkin did that night in the alley Clell got stiff and awkward. That weaving seemed to bewitch him. Before those fights, Blimey Duff said:

"You can't beat this boy. He's too smart for you. If you try to finish him, he'll only make you look like a monkey. You just try to keep him off and stick. You're getting paid anyway." So after polishing off some dangerous hitter in the second or fourth round, Clell would go in with some mediocre fighter who had speed and a shifting attack and look like a palooka.

When he came on to New York from Chicago he met Sylvia Rand again. She was singing in a night-club now.

Clell discovered her accidentally. He glanced in passing at the posters of the Trianon Club and his gaze was riveted to one picture. Under it he read: "Sylvia Rand, Broadway's New Sensational Torch Singer." Clell didn't know what a torch singer was, and he had never heard the name Sylvia Rand before. But he had never forgotten that face and that lovely figure.

THAT night he had a ringside seat at the Trianon Club. Evening clothes were optional, but Clell was almost the only man who took advantage of the option. He sat erect in his blue serge suit, with his dark hair loose above his solemn face.

Clell felt a strange tightening inside himself when he saw her. She wore a long black dress, and her bare arms and shoulders were more beautiful than any dream. Her hair was golden and there was a golden tint to her skin.

Then she sang, deep in her throat, husky with feeling, a passionate wail of "My Man Has Gone Away and Left Me With My Blues." Clell never moved. He sat as rigid as an Indian. But his eyes were on fire. She would never remember him. And if she did, he couldn't afford her. He had heard tales of diamond bracelets and limousines. He sent his money home, so his family could improve the mountain plantation. The family didn't need any more; but he didn't have any left. He could make a lot though. True, he had lost the last two fights. The second drawer hadn't been too good. But let Blimey slate him against a couple of sluggers—

She was walking toward him. She would pass close. Would she possibly recognize him? She was right at his table. She stopped at his table, smiling, and said:

"Hello, big boy."

Clell was shocked, he felt his heart thumping. This wasn't happening; it wasn't real. But he said: "Hello."

"Don't you remember me? The singer you rescued in the chop suey joint down in Virginia. I always wanted to thank you."

"That's all right." He was very embarrassed, but it was not a mountaineer's way to show his feeling.

"Mind if I sit down?" she said.

And Clell, knowing nothing of customs which compelled a gentleman to stand, continued to look at her and said, "No, I don't mind."

Now her eyes were masked and she wore a gay smile.

"I saw your last fight," she remarked.

"You saw me lose," he said gravely.

"Yes. You didn't seem to have any more on the ball than when you fought Pat O'Malley. Doesn't Blimey teach you anything?"

"He teaches me how to hit."

"Didn't he teach you how to get at fast boys like that one?"

"No. He thinks they're too smart for me. I'm just a mauler."

"What makes you think so?"

"Blimey told me so, and Blimey knows."

"Yes, Blimey knows," she said in a meaning way. Then she looked at him peculiarly and said: "I've heard rumors about you."

This surprised Clell and he didn't know what to say, so he kept quiet. Sylvia looked as though she wanted to tell him something. Then she looked past him, her eyes widened, she gave an uncertain smile, and said:

"Here's an old friend of yours."

Clell looked up when the shadow fell across the table. In immaculate evening clothes, with black hair shining, stood Steve Larkin. Larkin grinned contemptuously.

"Hello, palooka."

Clell stared at him but didn't answer. Steve sneered:

"'The Mountain Mauler,' eh? 'The Mountaineer Mouse,' it should be." He laughed.

Clell said: "When I want to talk to you, I'll speak first."

"Yeah? Well, look here, mug—"

Sylvia stood up. "Come on, Steve," she said. She took his arm and turned to Clell: "See you again, big boy, and don't believe everything you hear."

Clell pondered over that a long time. The next day he saw Blimey. He said: "I want a fight with Steve Larkin."

"Don't make me laugh. Do you know he's won eleven straight fights, six on knockouts, and he's being groomed to be a contender for the championship? What chance would you have? Didn't you fight him in the alley once? Did you land a blow?"

"I ought to be better now."

"You tell me! But are you better? I'll answer—you are not. You'll always be a palooka. You aint got the coördination that makes a great fighter. You're making money, aint you? What you kicking about?"

"I want to fight Steve Larkin."

"How you figure you'd get a gate? You dropped your last two fights."

"You got me fights with men you told me I couldn't lick. Get me a couple with the kind I can."

"Do you think you'd stand a chance of beating Steve?"

"I'm willing to take a chance."

Blimey looked at Clell and a crafty light came in his eyes. "Well, I'll see what I can do."

A MONTH later Clell fought Obonzyk, a giant Russian. The papers kidded them unmercifully, calling it the battle between the Russian Bear and the Mountain Moose. Two nights before the fight, Clell went in to see Sylvia.

"Hello, stranger," she said. "I hear you're going to win tomorrow night."

"You hear I'm going to win?"

"Sure. News travels fast on Broadway. Blimey told you you could lick him, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"And don't you always do what Blimey tells you?"

"He ought to know best."

"Sure. Blimey knows a lot." She gave him the same meaning smile.

Clell was puzzled but he didn't show it. He said: "I brought you two tickets. Will you come to see me fight?"

She looked at him oddly. "Thanks, big boy, I'd like to."

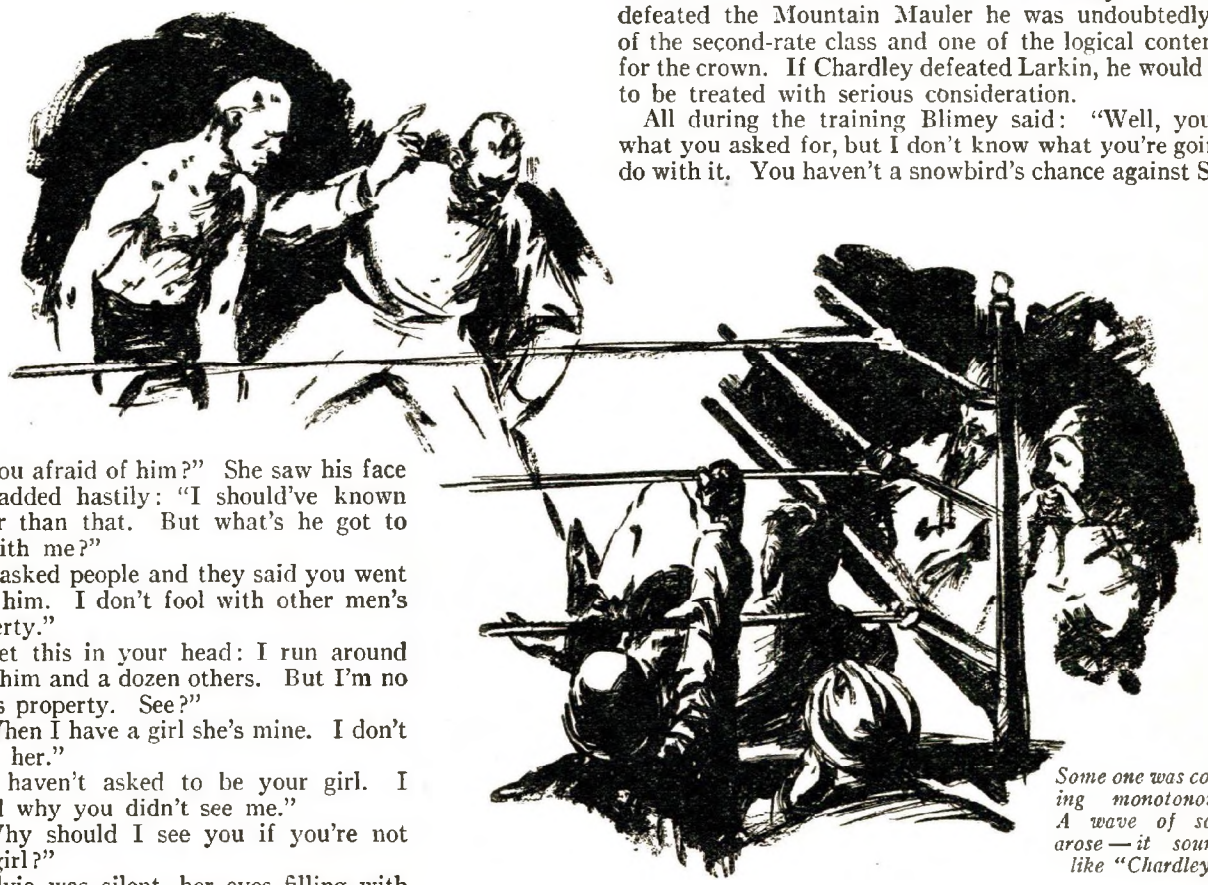
The small crowd that attended the fight was treated to one of the greatest battles of the modern ring, so quoted the papers. Clell Chardley, the Mountain Mauler, may not have had any more science than a moose, they said, but he had a great heart, and the terrific fight was worth a dozen of fancy boxing. Chardley deserved his hard-won victory, when one of his savage blows knocked out the big Russian in the ninth.

The fight six weeks later with Joe Jewarski was attended

by a much larger crowd, because New York papers had awakened to the glamour of the tall straight mountaineer who fought like a Titan of old. Again Clell dropped in the Trianon Club with two tickets for Sylvia. She said:

"Sure, I like to see you fight, big boy; but why don't you ever come to see me?"

"Because of Steve Larkin," Clell said.



"You afraid of him?" She saw his face and added hastily: "I should've known better than that. But what's he got to do with me?"

"I asked people and they said you went with him. I don't fool with other men's property."

"Get this in your head: I run around with him and a dozen others. But I'm no man's property. See?"

"When I have a girl she's mine. I don't share her."

"I haven't asked to be your girl. I asked why you didn't see me."

"Why should I see you if you're not my girl?"

Sylvia was silent, her eyes filling with dreams. She said wistfully: "I understand you. I'm from down home—your country—myself."

"You don't act like it," he said.

"It's been a long time. But I remember it well."

"Why did you leave?"

"Why does anybody leave?"

"I left to make money."

"So did I. We were dirt poor, as only mountain people can be poor."

"Don't you ever want to go back?"

"Don't I? Sometimes I think I can't stand it if I don't get away from all this—back where it's quiet, where you see clear mornings, among real people, my own kind of people." She stood up suddenly, flashing her gay masked smile. "But why talk about the impossible?"

"Your kind of people are my kind," Clell said, slowly absorbing this new and wonderful thought.

"Yes, and that's why I'll be cheering for you tomorrow night."

Clell felt a new urge in him. He was eager to be at Joe Jewarski. Jewarski was not the ponderous giant that Obonzyk was. He was faster, a better boxer, and with the smooth coördination of a good fighter if not a great one. He outweighed Clell twelve pounds and was a hard hitter. But Blimey had told Clell before the fight:

"This mug's as dumb as you are. He aint got none of that weaving style that baffles you. Go in and kill him."

Jewarski outboxed a charging Clell for six rounds. Five of the rounds were Jewarski's and one was a draw. In the seventh Jewarski grew too sure of himself and got in the way of one of Clell's drives. Clell was on him like a tiger and Jewarski covered up in vain. He was beaten to the floor, where he struggled futilely to rise during the count.

Two days later the papers anounced the twelve-round classic between Larkin and Clell Chardley. If Larkin defeated the Mountain Mauler he was undoubtedly out of the second-rate class and one of the logical contenders for the crown. If Chardley defeated Larkin, he would have to be treated with serious consideration.

All during the training Blimey said: "Well, you got what you asked for, but I don't know what you're going to do with it. You haven't a snowbird's chance against Steve. You're still as dumb as you were a year ago. My advice is this: fight like you fight all the other guys with the *weaving* style. Just try to stick it through. You're getting plenty of dough out of it. Just keep from making a mug outa yourself. If you try to kill him, you'll lay yourself wide open and look foolish and then you'll never get no more fights."

Some one was counting monotonously. A wave of sound arose — it sounded like "Chardley!"

Clell was thinking this over as he went to the Trianon Club to give Sylvia two tickets. He hadn't seen her since before the Jewarski fight. If Blimey only hadn't said anything about *weaving*. Ever since he fought that night in the alley, when he came against this baffling style for the first time, Clell had felt helpless against that attack, as if he was fighting in a dream. And Blimey had told him he was helpless against it. It was so different from the way they fought in the mountains: toe to toe they slugged.

Sylvia said: "I don't know why you want me to see your fights. You never seem to want me for anything else."

"I want you for everything else," he said solemnly.

"Well, you don't go about it very hard."

"I'm waiting for you to get shut of the other fellows. I want for you to be my girl. If you want to be, you'll show me."

"That's a long speech for you, big boy, but it won't do much good. I'm not coming to your fight tomorrow night."

Clell felt his knee-muscles tremble. "Why?" he asked.

Sylvia looked down. "I don't want to see you lose."

"How do you know I'm going to lose?"

"Didn't Blimey tell you you were going to lose?"

"Yes."

"Well, when he tells you he tells everybody he has told you so they'll bet the other way. He bets the other way too."

Clell sat silent for a long time.

"Well, I guess I'll go now," Sylvia said, rising.

Clell took her arm and sat her down. "Wait a minute. Why does he do that?"

"Oh, because he's throwing the fight, you sap! He puts you against pretty good fighters, who aren't the cleverest guys in the ring, and tells you you can lick them. After you get a knockout behind you, he puts you in with another guy, not a bit better, who happens to be fast and fights in a boxer's way and convinces you you're going to lose. Bettors think if you knocked out a tough mug the fight before, you'll have it easy with somebody who's just a boxer. But you go in and stall around. The bettors were getting wise until Blimey staged these last two fights. Now they think you really can fight and they're putting money on you against Larkin. But Blimey's putting money on Larkin because he knows Larkin's style of fighting has got an Indian sign on you."

"It's like a hex," he said.

"A hex?" Sylvia smiled bitterly. "An old mountain word. Bewitched. Well, hex or not, it makes you act like a—a moose."

Clell sat rigid and his eyes were narrow.

"How do you know all this?"

"How does everybody know it? Blimey's made about a hundred grand off you. I—I've made a few thousand myself."

"You made money betting against me?"

SYLVIA faltered, then flared:

"If you're going to be such a dumb-bell about things, there's no reason *I* should be!"

"I am what you call a dumb-bell," he said.

"To believe Blimey Duff you are! Why, he hasn't given you any training at all. He saw right away how he could make a lot more money out of you without any trouble. He'd rather steal a nickel than make a dollar."

"How much will he make off me tonight?"

"Well, beside an even split of the purse, I guess Larkin is giving him ten grand for you to throw the fight, and he'll make another twenty or thirty on bets. And you're so dumb you've never even got a split."

Clell thought all this over. "You come to the fight tomorrow night, and you'll see me win."

"You can't win. That style of fighting's got a—a hex on you."

Clell went straight to Blimey Duff. When Blimey saw him he dropped back a couple of paces. Clell came on and Blimey made an instinctive movement toward his pocket. Clell's hand closed on his wrist in a paralyzing grip. He said:

"Back home I would kill you."

"I'll split with you," Blimey said. "I'll split with you."

Clell just stared at him. He was controlling himself. Then he said: "Git!"

Blimey hurried toward the door. Feeling himself safe from immediate danger, his guile returned, and he said:

"It's okay with me if you want to be a moose all your life. You're gonna lose the fight anyway. I'll have all the gravy myself."

Clell saw the cunning in Blimey Duff's eyes. Suddenly he guessed by Blimey's cunning grin that he meant to do something to make certain Larkin's victory. Clell said:

"Don't you tell any one that I know this—if you do I'll kill you. Never mind thinking about your pistol either. If you or any of your friends shoot me, the whole family of Chardleys and Clells would follow you to the end of the earth but what they killed you."

"Don't worry, Clell, I'm not going to tell nobody. I shouldn't have done this, only you couldn't win anyway, and—"

He was smiling his ingratiating smile, but Clell understood now that people in the city smiled when they didn't want to be friends, but only when they wanted to get something. He said:

"Don't talk. I hate a liar and I hate a cheat. You can have the money what you won on me, and you can have all you can win tonight. But if you say anything to my seconds so they don't treat me fair, I'll kill you—or my family will. Two of them have come all the way from Virginia to see this fight. They never travel without guns."

WHEN Blimey had gone with his protestations of fairness, Clell stood puzzled. He had told a lie. His cousins and his uncles were all grubbing in the mountains; they would not think of coming to New York. But he had used city ways to fight the city. In the ring against the West Side Wildcat he would have to use what of city ways of fighting he had learned in his twenty-seven fights.

Clell had never seen so many people at a fight of his. The Garden was banked with dark masses, and around the ringside were many more newspapermen than had ever come to his fights. Back of them he saw Sylvia.

Steve Larkin smiled at everybody. His grin had the theatrical quality of an actor's. His black hair shone in the strong white lights. He was smiling as he shook hands with Clell. "Well, moose," he said, "you lay down quietly and I won't weave you to death."

Clell said nothing. He thought of the hex. The Indian sign, Sylvia called it. He went back in his corner. The crowd was yelling: "Make a monkey of the Mountain Moose!" "Come on, you Mountain Mauler, let's see what you can do!"

The bell clanged, and Clell advanced slowly. He saw the killer's grimace on Larkin's face as he came weaving and shifting toward him. For one frozen second that style that had the hex on him stiffened his muscles into awkwardness. His body felt heavy, his eyesight dull. Then the sharp smack of leather on his face touched a deep spark. He had not felt like this since he fought Lem Parsons for fifty minutes in front of the county post office. He was pressed forward by an urge to wipe out an enemy.

His left jabbed, jabbed, jabbed, at that dancing, bobbing shadow. Under his left, around each side, and darting in and out, Larkin's snakelike thrusts came at him. Clell used his right hand for protection. Sometimes it warded off those blows. Sometimes his shoulders stopped them. Sometimes they glanced off his face. And sometimes they struck solid. Twice Larkin crossed him with his right, but neither landed solid. Then Larkin leaped in with a quick one-two. The right rocked Clell's head. Even as the blow touched Clell he sprang forward in turn. His right shot out, glancing off the eye of the bouncing Larkin, and his left and right followed again in quick succession.

Larkin swerved his head to let the left pass, blocked the right with his shoulder, and then as two more in quick succession shot straight for him, he eased in and tied up Clell in a clinch.

"Say, moose," he muttered in Clell's ear, "take it easy if you want to make any showing."

"I'm not in on any of your bets," Clell whispered. "I'm out to kill you."

The referee pried them apart. Larkin's lips drew back in an evil leer. He came bouncing in, and as his right

cracked against Clell's face he snarled: "All right, bozo, you called it, and now I'll finish you so you'll never fight."

Then the bell clanged. While Clell's seconds were working on him, he heard a whisper from one of the newspapermen: "They make it look pretty real for a fight that's in the bag."

"They talked it over once."

Clell did not look toward them. He stared at Larkin. So they all had framed him without his being in on it. He had had a taste of Larkin's finished style in that round, and the old hex had started bothering him. He must get in there and use all the ring knowledge he had picked up and last out until he got a real chance.

Then the second round was starting and Larkin came tearing in. From then on Clell remembered nothing. There was a continuous flurry of leather gloves. They seemed in his eyes, in his mouth, ringing in his ears, pounding, pounding on his body. He felt no single blow in his body, but there was a dull ache there and it seemed that from afar off a heavy pole was bumping against him. And always just beyond his reach he saw the leering face of Steve Larkin, weaving in and out.

Clell tried steadily, untiringly, to use all his ring knowledge. He was woefully inadequate. His jabs met an elbow or a shoulder or cut the air. His crosses skimmed across a moving head. When he brought his overhand right in, Larkin was never there. The Indian sign.

Automatically at the sound of the bell he raised himself again. It was the beginning of the seventh but Clell didn't know it. He knew nothing. Then the ring started heaving just as the alley had that night. The blood tasted bitter in his mouth and his stomach quivered as he swallowed some. His head jerked back on his shoulders. Through a mist he saw the killer look in Larkin's eyes as he stalked him, poising himself for a finishing blow.

SOMETHING snapped in Clell's brain. He forgot about the weaving style. The hex was gone. His body felt lighter. He forgot he was in a ring. His enemy was advancing to finish him. Desperately his right fist chopped down, a great pounding blow. Larkin swerved aside and bobbed in quickly from the right side. Clell tried to turn and brought his left down in another chopping motion.

Larkin's right fell short as he swiftly drew out of range, and darted in again from the other side. Clell knew he was coming. He was standing completely unprotected and he didn't know it. He shot out his right again, straight ahead. Larkin turned his body with his own right starting and caught the blow on his shoulder. The terrific force knocked him back and Clell moved forward, throwing out blow after blow. Larkin shifted backward, fishing for an opening.

Then the bell rang. Clell lay limp in his corner. The seconds rubbed him vigorously with alcohol, thrusting the strong smelling-salts under his nose, and wiping the blood off his mouth. The swimming in his head stopped. His vision cleared. When the bell clanged he moved forward with the tread of an animal.

Larkin danced about him, then shot in. Clell didn't notice his weavings. He just threw out his fists straight like pistons, in tremendous chopping blows. He didn't notice the thudding of Larkin's deadly gloves. He spat out some blood.

Twice he was staggering but he didn't know that. Twice Larkin measured him but he didn't know that. When the bell clanged his seconds had to run out and lead him to the corner. The referee asked them if they wanted to throw in the towel and they asked him.

"I want to fight," he said.

They bathed his eye with warm water and held ice on it to try and stop the flow of blood. They massaged his neck and head with ice cloths. His legs didn't need massaging. They would never give out. It was his fogged mind, punch drunk, that they were trying to stimulate.

He didn't hear the bell but they pushed him out. Larkin came in warily now. He was tired. Nobody knew it except himself, but he was very tired. In nine rounds Clell had not landed a single solid blow on his face. But he had landed about half a dozen through the region of his wind and the shiny-haired boxer felt every one. And he had been hammering, hammering, as he never fought in his life. He had stopped several of those savage chopping blows with his arms. His arms were tired from punching, and ached from the fists that had crashed on them.

He came in warily, but Clell didn't know it. He came on, throwing out his mighty blows that landed on shoulder and elbow, skimmed off the skin or careened through the air. Steve circled around him like a wolf. Suddenly he saw his chance. As Clell's right drew back from a glancing blow and the left shot downward, Larkin weaved in along the very path of the left. His own left curved across Clell's eyes and his right came over in a knockout overhand. It landed solid with a terrific crash on the unprotected chin.

Simultaneously, so that the cracks came as one, Clell's great down-chopping right descended on the chin of Steve Larkin. It was an automatic motion, for Clell was out on his feet. He had seen Larkin duck in as his right hand glanced across his face. So instead of thrusting straight out he had brought his fist downward in that savage punch of the mountaineer.

He felt his arm tingle as it landed solid. His left went out again and his right, but they landed against air. He did not feel Larkin weaving about him. He felt nothing at all but a great throbbing pain and the unsteady rocking of the floor. But the hex was gone. Some one was counting monotonously. Some one grabbed his right arm, and pulled it upward. In his ears a booming wave of voices arose, and it sounded like "Chardley!"

THEN he felt something which he recognized as the ministering hands of his seconds. They were saying something which sounded like: "You won the fight." And they were leading him away. The smelling-salts stung in his brain and the room stopped whirling. He felt very sick and coughed up some blood. An acute pain shot through his side. Warm water bathed his eyes and they cleared.

In front of him stood Sylvia.

"Don't cry," he said.

"My poor big boy! Look!" She turned him around.

He saw the seconds of Steve Larkin dragging his inert body over the ropes. Before Clell could speak, an officious man brushed her aside.

"Take him to the hospital," he said. "He has three ribs broken."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Sylvia thrust him aside. "He's going to my house."

"Then you will be my girl?" Clell asked. "Even if you did win money on me?"

"I never won any money on you until tonight," she said. "And we'll take all that back where we belong—back among our own kind."

Everything became blurred again to Clell, but he didn't mind. It was a happy sleep. He dreamed of fighting fifty minutes in front of the county post office with Lem Parsons, and of arising after Jed Humber hit him with a stick, and of a weaving shadow in an alley, and a great crowd of people yelling, "Kill him!" and of a frame house high up in the mountains, and of all the solemn Chardleys and Clells to whom he would say: "This is my girl."

The Day of Doom

Many years' service as a police reporter in many different cities has given Mr. Anderton that inside knowledge of racketeers and their ways which he has used so effectively in this tremendously exciting novelette.

LITTLE Gus Foresti laid down the morning paper, which he had been reading at the breakfast table. There was a greedy glitter in his black eyes. . . . Foresti was undisputed ruler of the city's gangland. His rule had been undisputed for more than two months—since Black Joe Moran had died on the sidewalk with thirty machine-gun slugs in his gross body.

The bumping-off of Black Joe Moran had been just another of those atrocities which have become common in our complicated and graft-riddled modern system of government. Moran, only remaining rival of Little Gus for supremacy in the city's underworld, had died by Foresti's order. Everybody knew that—but nobody could or would prove it. At the time of Moran's death, Foresti had been dining with a city official, far from the scene of the assassination. He had a perfect alibi.

All Foresti's rough stuff was done by tools. Little Gus posed as a gentleman. He was always immaculately groomed. He aped the manners of the well-bred people with whom he had been able to come in contact since Prohibition had lifted him to the status of a millionaire. He would have been handsome in a sleek, dark style but for something sinister in his black eyes and a cruelty about his lips. His slender build and medium height gave him his sobriquet.

Foresti had perused his morning paper in the dining-room of his mansion in one of the city's best residence districts. That mansion had cost its original owner nearly a million dollars, but it had been a gift to Foresti. And it had not been given to him because its former owner loved the dapper little racketeer!

There were two other persons at the breakfast-table—Lola Pollard and Dago Mike Costello. Lola Pollard had been Foresti's companion for more than a year—since he had taken her out of the chorus of a road show. Dago Mike was Foresti's right-hand man and chief of the crew of killers kept constantly ready to serve the gangster chieftain.

"Mike," said Foresti as he laid down his newspaper, "I just read something in the paper that gives me a hunch we have overlooked a big bet."

"Yeah?" inquired Dago Mike, flicking out the match with which he had lighted a short thick cigar. Costello was a burly individual of the purely criminal type. He affected loud garments and wore flashy jewelry.

"The paper says," nodded Foresti, "that this town uses about thirty thousand gallons of milk a day. We should be getting something out of that. If we collected a cent on each gallon, it would run three grand a day. We could use that, couldn't we?"

"Yeah," grunted Dago Mike. "That's a little more than we're gettin' from the cleaners and dyers."

"Eleven o'clock," said Foresti, glancing at his watch. "Tell Tommy to bring the car. We'll go downtown and do a little checking up. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

When the men had left the room, Lola Pollard reached over and picked up the paper which Foresti had left beside his plate. She had just heard it decreed that the milk racket was to be added to the large family of rackets already pouring a fortune every day into the coffers of Foresti and the legion of crooks and killers over which he ruled. Lola smiled, and walked across the room to throw her beautiful body onto a lounge. She considered Foresti the smartest man in the city—and herself a clever woman to have landed in the spot she now occupied and hoped to hold. She turned to the fashion page, lighted a cigarette and settled herself comfortably among the pillows. . . .

A certain speak-easy on the fringe of the business district was Foresti's headquarters. The front door of the place led into a large and ornate bar. A door at the rear of the barroom led to a back room, equally ornate, where there were tables and a dance-floor. There was a "Ladies' Entrance" from the side street to this back room. Opening off the back room was a door marked "Private." That door led to a huge and luxuriously furnished room which was Foresti's "office."

At noon Foresti sat in the office in conference with Dago Mike and another. The third man was Sam Easter—officially known as S. R. Easter, president of the Owl Commercial Protective Association. In reality he was chief of Foresti's collectors. The precious trio were in conference for more than an hour.

"This Liston guy is the bellwether," declared Foresti. "That's plain. He's our meat. The paper says that this company of his delivers more than twice as much milk to this burg as its largest competitor does. Go get Liston, Sam. I'll wait here for your report."

IT was nearing three o'clock in the afternoon when Sam Easter, driving a huge cream-colored roadster, arrived in the little town of Millard, about forty miles from the city.

After making inquiry, Easter parked his auto before a building which housed the offices and plant of the Triple A Baby Milk company. He inquired for Mr. Richard Liston and was shown into the shipping-room, where a bronzed young giant was superintending the icing of milk for a city hospital.

"I'm Dick Liston," nodded the big youngster as he looked down at his well-dressed caller. "What can I do for you?"

"I noticed a story in the morning paper which said that your company delivers ten thousand gallons of milk to the city every day," said Easter, after introducing himself and handing the other a business card.

"We do," agreed Liston.

"And you are the man who runs the business."

"I built it up," answered Liston, "if that is what you mean. Of course, my own farm don't produce all the milk. Besides the output of my herd, I handle the milk from

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

hundreds of other farms. They are all run under my direction, and—"

"What I wanted to know," interrupted Easter, "is whether you have had any trouble about your deliveries?"

"No," answered Liston, a bit puzzled. "We have a smoothly working system. Experienced drivers—well placed depots. Say, what's on your mind?" He looked at Easter with dawning suspicion.

"Quite a few dairy companies," answered the caller, "have been having trouble. Trucks held up and milk stolen. Drivers beaten up by thugs and robbed of the money they carried. Our association protects you from such things for a small weekly or monthly fee. We—"

"Say," barked Liston, giving the card in his hand another quick glance, "I've heard of you birds. You do the collecting for that crook, Foresti. You are shaking down the truck-growers and hucksters, and the Lord knows who else. So far, you have been getting away with it. But you try it on us milk producers, and you are going to get the seat of your pants in a sling. Now get out of here!"

"But, Mr. Liston," argued Easter, "just a minute. I—"

Dick Liston's eyes narrowed and his face hardened. He took a quick, short step, and his big right fist came flashing up from his waist. The fist connected with Sam Easter's jaw and cut off short what the crook had intended to say. The blow turned things black for Easter, and his body rolled limp on the floor of the shipping-room. Young Liston stooped and grasped the gangster by the collar of his coat and the slack of his trousers. The half-dozen workers in the room paused to watch, grinning.

Sam Easter regained his senses a few moments later, to find himself lying in front of his roadster in the deep dust of Millard's main street. He felt his bruised jaw and struggled to his feet. He hesitated a brief moment, looking with murder in his eyes toward the closed front door of the Triple A plant. Then he brushed some of the dust from his garments and climbed into the car. He sent the big vehicle roaring away toward the city.

An hour and a half later Easter was reporting what had happened at Millard to Little Gus Foresti in the gang chieftain's office. Dago Mike Costello was a silent member of the conference.

"So," sneered Foresti, "the hick cow-juicer got tough. We'll soon cure him of that. You, Easter, skip over to the Hotel Rich and arrange to have a banquet tonight for all of your boys. It will begin at ten o'clock and last until one o'clock in the morning. That will give the association an alibi. Ten of this Liston's milk-trucks leave Millard every night at midnight. Mike, you get a couple of car loads of muscle and a couple more to carry the rods and hand-organs. Have them ready to leave town at ten o'clock. I'll give you final instructions then."

JUST a few minutes before midnight, a train of ten trucks loaded with milk rolled away from the Triple A plant in Millard. The trucks swung out onto the highway and headed toward the city. When they had covered perhaps three miles of their journey, two cars passed them. Then they found the road blocked by two other cars halted across the road.

Gangsters from the cars at front and rear of the train swarmed about the halted trucks. The drivers found themselves covered with businesslike weapons and ordered to sit quiet. Other thugs went to work, swiftly dragging the cases of bottled milk from the trucks and hurling them into the road. When all the trucks were unloaded, the leader of the raiding party gave a command and the sputter of machine-guns began to make bedlam of the quiet night. The hot lead from the weapons raked the piles of milk cases for a couple of minutes. There were few bottles left

unbroken when the gangsters' cars raced away into the night.

The drivers of the trucks loaded up the riddled milk cases and turned back toward Millard. Thousands of the city's householders were to look in vain for the bottle of milk at their threshold the next morning. In most of those homes there would be a child, or several children, to whom the loss of that milk would be a tragedy. The Triple A Baby Milk company specialized in supplying milk for children. The product of the company was kept of uniform quality at no little trouble and expense. So well had Triple A milk become known that doctors prescribed it for babies and undernourished children, and recommended it for all growing youngsters. It was used almost exclusively by hospitals, orphanages and day nurseries.

The hardship being worked on babies and the sick meant nothing to Foresti. He wanted three thousand dollars a day from the milk business—and he meant to have it.

THE gang chieftain locked his office and went to the Hotel Rich as soon as he had received the report that his bruisers and gunmen had finished their "business" with the milk trucks. He dropped in on the banquet where Sam Easter and his crew were gathered to establish their alibi in the matter.

"You can see that bird Liston again in the morning, Sam," said Foresti, drawing Easter aside. "He'll probably be feeling a lot more like talking business with you. You can break up this brawl now."

The following morning, work was going on as usual at the Triple A plant, except that two men were posted at windows doing nothing but watching the streets by which the building could be approached. Dick Liston was superintending the work, as usual.

Men did not work *for* Liston. They worked *with* him. That was why he had been so successful in building up the Triple A organization. He was a friendly, lovable chap with a knack for understanding and "getting along" with people. Nevertheless, Dick Liston had plenty of iron in his make-up. This morning his usually smiling face was stern. The twinkle which usually lurked in his gray eyes was absent.

It was nearing eleven o'clock when the men on guard at the front window turned quickly toward where Liston stood.

"Here they come, Dick," they cried. "Three of 'em."

"All right," snapped Dick. "Get set."

The two men who had been acting as lookouts stepped from view behind a rack of cases piled beside the front entrance. The rest of the workers went calmly on with their tasks.

Then the front door was flung open, and Sam Easter strode into the room. He was followed by two wintry-eyed men who walked with their right hands in the pockets of their coats. Sam had brought those killers along to prevent another collision between his jaw and Dick Liston's punishing fist.

"Hello," said Easter, halting a few feet from where Liston stood waiting. "Just to show you that I'm not holding a grudge, I've called again to see if you've changed your mind about employing the services of our association."

The two gunmen had halted a couple of yards behind Easter, in a position to cover the movements of all the men their bleak eyes had noted in a swift search of the shipping room. For a moment Dick Liston stood in silence. His gray eyes bored into Easter's threatening ones, and a grim smile twitched at the corners of his lips. Then he spoke, but it was not to answer Easter.

"All right, boys," said Dick, lifting his voice a trifle.

"Hands up!" said two voices in chorus.

Easter and his two guards whirled toward the commanding voice. They found themselves covered by two rifles thrust over the rack of milk cases by the door. The men behind the rifles wore the look of needing but a faint excuse to shoot. The trio of crooks elevated their hands. Easter's face was livid.

"What does this mean?" demanded the president of the Owl Commercial Protective Association.

"Call Bill Avery," said Liston to one of the workers, ignoring Easter's question. The man Dick had spoken to hurried from the place by the back door.

"What does—" began Easter again.

"You are about to get a surprise, Mr. Easter," snapped Dick Liston. "You thought you would find me scared to death by that dirty trick of last night. Well, I'm not. Now keep still, you and the two skunks you brought with you. You'll learn what's what in a few minutes."

"You wanted me, Dick?" came a voice from the rear door.

"Yes, Bill," answered Liston. "Here are three of the birds responsible for what happened to our milk-trucks last night."

"What are you talking about?" snarled Easter. "I was in the city last night at a banquet for the association employees. So were these other men. I—"

"You probably were," nodded Dick Liston. "Did you notice I said *responsible* for what happened. I didn't say you took an active part. This is Bill Avery, our town marshal." Liston indicated the newcomer. "You crooks are out of your bailiwick—and I've got a hunch you are going to learn that the town of Millard and the city are two different places."

DICK LISTON had had a long talk with the marshal early that morning. The two had laid a plan at that time. Bill Avery now went ahead with that plan.

"What are you fellows doing here, and who are you?" demanded the marshal.

Easter gave his stock explanation. Bill Avery listened in silence until the gangster had finished.

"You tried to get Liston to subscribe to this association of yours yesterday?" inquired Avery.

"Yes. And—"

"And he wouldn't," interrupted the officer. "So last night a gang of your city thugs held up ten of the Triple A trucks and broke up the cases and bottles."

"I—the association had nothing to do with that."

"Mebby not," grunted Avery. "Just keep your hands up. I'll see what you've got in your pockets."

The search netted three automatics which the marshal handed to Dick Liston, with instructions to take care of them.

"Fellers carrying things like that in their pockets are suspicious characters in this town," the marshal informed the hoodlums.

"We have permits to carry them," growled Sam Easter.

"Why?"

"Because we collect and carry large sums of money almost every day."

"So?" grunted Avery. "Well, your city permits are no good out here. Like Mr. Liston told you, this is a different place. It may be a hick town, but the hicks who live in it know how to take care of the slick crooks that come from the city to pull rough stuff. We'll just take you over to the lock-up while we check up and decide what to do with you."

Protests and argument availed the trio nothing. The marshal, with the aid of Dick Liston and the men with the rifles, herded them down the street to a solid little

concrete building with a single steel-barred window and heavy steel door.

Sam Easter and two of Little Gus Foresti's crack killers were in a hick-town hoosegow. In the dim light that filtered through the grimy window they eyed each other in silence while realization forced itself upon them. In reply to a demand by Easter that a lawyer in the city be called for them, Avery had calmly informed them that the law allowed him twenty-four hours in which to investigate them. He would let them know at noon on the following day whether or not they needed a lawyer. It had been quite apparent that there was no use to argue.

"And now what?" inquired Bill Avery as he and Dick Liston returned downstreet toward the Triple A Milk building.

"It seems to be Foresti's next move," grinned Dick. "We'll go ahead as usual until he makes it. But we'll keep our eyes open."

When four o'clock came and Sam Easter had not reported back to the office, Little Gus Foresti began to wonder. By five o'clock he began to worry. He called one of the girl "entertainers" from the back room and had her telephone to the milk company's plant at Millard.

"This town," said Foresti, "uses thirty thousand gallons of milk a day. If we collected a cent on each gallon—"

Directed by Foresti, the girl announced herself as Mr. Easter's secretary and inquired if Mr. Easter had been at the Triple A plant. She was trying to locate Easter with an important message, the girl explained.

"Yes," snapped Dick Liston. "Easter and two other crooks were here. They are still here—in the town jail. There is room for quite a few more in there with them. You can tell Mr. Foresti that."

The girl turned from the telephone and repeated what Liston had said.

"Hang up!" snarled Foresti. His face was as black as a thunder-cloud. "Go out to the bar and tell Mike to come in here."

The girl departed, and Dago Mike Costello arrived a few minutes later.

"Everything going smooth?" asked Mike.

"Smooth!" hissed Foresti. "Hell! Listen!"

Costello listened while his chief told him of the fate that had befallen Sam Easter and the two gunmen.

"The damned hicks have asked for it," concluded Foresti. "They'll get it! You get busy. Have all the bullet-proof cars got ready—and a chopper for each car. Have Boom Snider get a pineapple ready with enough soup in it to blow the hinges off hell. Put two men with rods and one with a hand-organ in each car, and have Sniff Haynes in the front car with the pineapple. Coke Sniff up good. Have everything ready to leave town at nine o'clock. Get busy. Stop at my house at nine. I'll tell you the rest then."

When Dick Liston hung up the receiver after giving his message for Foresti over the telephone, he went down the street and found Bill Avery. The marshal and the young dairyman were warm friends. Avery was half a dozen years older than Dick, but they had served in the same outfit in France, Avery as sergeant and Liston as a corporal.

They were both the type that never runs from a fight—but on the contrary, will run toward one on occasion.

"Well, Bill," said Liston, "the city crooks know where their boy friends are. Now let's get set for them."

"You think they'll come out and try to bust open the jail?" asked Avery.

"Why not?" retorted Liston. "Foresti has bulldozed and terrorized the city so long, and done it so easily, that he'll be mad as blazes to think three of his gang have been slapped into the coop in a dinky burg like Millard. Let's get ready for them. They may not come, but I feel pretty sure that they will—and it wont do any harm for us to be ready."

"That's right," agreed Avery.

The two men crossed the street and climbed the stairs to where the telephone office was located above a grocery store on the corner. When they descended to the street a quarter of an hour later, each climbed into an automobile. They drove out of town in different directions.

The summer darkness was falling when Bill Avery drove back into town and went directly to the Triple A plant. Dick Liston, who had returned half an hour sooner, was waiting.

"'Lo, Bill," greeted Liston. "All set?"

"Yep."

"Good," nodded Dick. "You go ahead and plant your men around the jail in the places we talked about. I've got to carry on here at the plant. The milk must go to the city. But I'll bring the boys and be with you as soon as anything starts. Cut loose with the fire whistle the minute they approach the jail. We'll be listening for it."

"Right," agreed the marshal. "I'll grab me a bite to eat and then plant the boys. We'll sure give them crooks a surprise—if they come."

"We will," nodded Dick Liston.

Seven big cars rolled out of the city in procession shortly after nine o'clock that night. In the front car Dago Mike Costello rode beside the driver. In the back seat was a burly gangster with a sub-machine-gun lying across his lap. Beside the machine-gunner sat a scrawny chap who held two-foot length of two-inch-pipe. That pipe was packed with TNT. From one of its capped ends there protruded about five inches of fuse.

"Why so much fuse on that torpedo?" inquired Dago Mike.

"Boom Snider cut it," answered the scrawny man who held the bomb. He was a "hop-head" known as Sniff Haynes. He was bright-eyed now with a stiff dose of cocaine. "Boom said we wanted to be at least two hundred yards away when this goes off."

"Yeah," grunted Dago Mike. "Well, you get back in this wagon quick after you heave it into that joint. We'll be going."

"Aint we even goin' to try to get Sam and the boys out of the coop?" asked the man with the machine-gun.

"Nope," answered Dago Mike. "The big shot says leave 'em there until he sends out a mouthpiece tomorrow to spring 'em. Says they can't be blamed for anything that happens while they are locked up—and it serves 'em right for letting a hick constable nab 'em."

"S'pose the yaps in this tank burg will put up a scrap?" asked the driver.

"We'll just take you over to the lock-up while we check up and decide what to do with you."

"They may cut loose with a few shotguns or throw a few pitchforks at us," answered Costello. "All you got to worry about is rolling this bus. All seven of these boilers are bullet-proof. The hicks won't hurt us any with their popguns. If they get funny, we'll depopulate the wide place in the road that they call a town. There are seven choppers beside the gats in this procession."

THE seven cars rolled on through the night. It was cloudy, and the summer darkness was thick and black. When the gangsters were within two miles of Millard they passed a brilliantly lighted farmhouse. A score of persons were on the lawn and veranda.

"The rubes are having a party," remarked the thug with the machine-gun.

"Yeah," snickered the driver. "See the hayracks and wagons parked there in the driveway? These hicks sure travel fast."

A few minutes later the caravan of gangster autos roared into Millard. They were keeping close together, following the car in which Dago Mike rode. All had received minute instructions before leaving the city.

"Straight down the main stem," growled Costello to the driver. "The milk dump is the second building on the right after we cross the railroad tracks. Stop in front of it. Be ready to roll as soon as Sniff has heaved the pineapple. The boys behind us will take care of any rubes that show fight."

Down the dusty and dimly lighted main street raced the cars. They passed the small park, in one corner of which stood the town jail, and sped on. Twenty men were ambushed in dark and sheltered places waiting for an attack on the jail. But there was to be no such attack.

Another moment, and the leading car of the train skidded to a stop in front of the Triple A plant. The door of the auto swung open, and Sniff Haynes emerged, gripping his deadly missile in his left hand. The other autos had halted behind their leader.

"Put it as far through that window as you can," Dago Mike called to the hop-head. "And make it snappy."

A match flared and was held to the fuse of the bomb. As the fuse began to sputter, Sniff Haynes shifted the missile to his right hand and hurled it with all his might through a lighted window beside the front door of the plant.

As the flying bomb shattered the glass and disappeared into the building, the night was split by the howl of the town's fire siren. Bill Avery had realized that it was not the jail the gangsters meant to attack. Sniff Haynes turned and dived into the car.

"Step on it!" barked Dago Mike. "Follow this road straight south. It hits pavement three miles from here—the Jacksonville Pike."

With a scream of gears the car shot away. The others followed closely.

"Hell," said the man with the machine-gun. "The big shot must be gettin' goofy. Sending seven cars and a flock of choppers on a soft job like this."

Dick Liston, counting the cases from a bottling machine, whirled at the sound of shattering glass from a front window of the plant. A heavy object struck the

floor and rolled toward him. It was the bomb which Sniff Haynes had hurled. The wail of the fire siren came to Liston's ears. His eyes were fixed on that iron tube rolling toward his feet. A thin wisp of smoke was curling from the short fuse which protruded from one end.

Dick Liston realized that he and the dozen other men in that room were standing on the brink of eternity. Then he whipped into action. With one long stride, he reached the bomb and scooped it from the floor. He whirled. The back door was open. Leaping toward that open portal, the young dairyman hurled the deadly thing out into the darkness. Racing on, he flung himself against the heavy back door and slammed it shut—just as a terrific explosion rocked the building. The bomb had exploded in a vacant lot which lay behind the plant.

The siren was still howling. Then the front door was flung open, and Bill Avery dashed in.

"Anybody hurt?" yelled the marshal.

"Guess not," answered Dick Liston, picking himself up from where the shock of the explosion had flung him to the floor.

"They didn't stop at the jail," snapped Avery. "They've gone out the south road. Seven cars of 'em."

"Let's go," cried Liston. "Come on, boys."

UP in the central office above the grocery store, Alma Warren, Millard's night "hello girl," had heard the howl of the fire siren. She ran to an open window. A glance showed her the gangster cars racing away from in front of the Triple A plant. Then the explosion of the bomb shattered the night. Alma Warren raced back to her switchboard. She plugged in and rang frantically.

Two miles south of town a dozen men and as many women were gathered in a farmhouse. It was just such a gathering as the gangsters had passed on their way into town.

The telephone clamored shrilly, and a big man in overalls answered it.

"Hello—Farleys?" came Alma Warren's excited voice.

"Yes."

"They took the south road," said Alma.

"All right," answered the big man, snapping up the receiver. Then to the others in the room:

"They're coming this way. You women get into the cellar with the kids."

The men grabbed rifles and other weapons standing conveniently about and rushed into the night. Several carried flashlights. In less time than it takes to tell it, the road in front of the house was blocked from fence to fence with two grain-wagons, a hayrack and a manure-spreader which the men pushed from where they had been parked in the driveway ready for the emergency. Then the men hurried to places of ambush with their weapons ready. Even as they did so, the lights of the speeding gangster cars appeared a mile to the north. Then the seven cars thundered down upon the barricade. The first came to a stop with screaming brakes, less than ten yards from the vehicles which barred the road. The second bumped into the first before the driver could get it stopped. Tires sliding in the dust of the unpaved road, the other cars came to a halt.

"Let 'em have it!" cried a voice in the darkness.

The night echoed with a volley from the concealed farmers. Bullets from their weapons rattled against the halted cars, cracking the glass and denting metal, but doing no harm to the surprised gangsters. A second volley was belched from the guns of the farmers.

Then the gangsters recovered from their surprise. Machine-gun muzzles were thrust through slits above the slightly lowered windows of the vandal cars—and their staccato chorus was added to the bedlam. Their hissing streams of lead swept the area about the halted cars.

The farmers had expected this. They crouched in the shelter of their barricades and waited for the hail of lead to cease. Now the headlights of many more cars appeared in the north. Dick Liston, Marshal Avery and scores of other citizens of Millard, armed to the teeth, were coming in the fastest cars owned by Millard folk.

The gangsters realized their danger, but it was too late. They could not pass the barricades before them—and the oncoming cars had the road blocked behind them. Their own formation prevented them from greeting the other cars with machine-gun fire. Any man who attempted to step from the bullet-proof cars was at the mercy of the entrenched farmers.

The pursuing cars had now halted, a hundred yards behind their quarry. The thick darkness about the gangster autos was alive with armed men. The hoodlums were completely surrounded. The machine-guns ceased their song.

"We have you, you skunks!" called the voice of Bill Avery from out the darkness. "Will you surrender, or shall we toss some dynamite under you?"

Behind the trapped cars three of the captors' autos had been placed side by side in such a manner that their headlights bathed the gangster vehicles in their glow.

"Well," came Bill Avery's voice again. "What about it?"

"Don't shoot!" answered Dago Mike Costello. "We'll come out."

"Get out on the east side of your cars," ordered the marshal. "And stand in line with your hands in the air."

Shortly after midnight the Millard jail held twenty-five gangsters, twenty-two taken from the captured autos, and Sam Easter and the two gunmen who had been arrested with him. The little jail was packed. There had been no casualties in the battle. The bullet-proof cars had saved the gangsters. The darkness, and the fact that they had expected machine-gun fire, had saved the farmers.

In the littered office of the Triple A plant, Dick Liston sat at his desk, telephone in hand. Marshal Bill Avery sat beside him. Liston was calling Little Gus Foresti at his home. He had obtained the blind number from Dago Mike by promising to let Foresti know of his henchmen's plight—added to some display of force. Two score armed men were guarding the jail. Seven of Foresti's bullet-proof cars and Sam Easter's roadster were in a garage with chains padlocked about their wheels. The captured weapons were in the basement of the same garage.

IN the city, Foresti was entertaining a dozen guests at his house while he waited for Dago Mike to report. Among the guests were an assistant district attorney and a police captain. When the phone rang, Foresti answered it himself.

"Hello—Foresti?" inquired Dick Liston.

"Yes."

"Well, this is Dick Liston—speaking from Millard. Thanks for the bunch of rats you sent out. They are safe in our jail with the other three. Send some more. You rats may be safe as long as you stay in the city where you have the people scared, but there aint anybody out here afraid of you. We'll grab you as fast as you come out of your holes. We may be hicks—but we're rough on rats. There are eight autos out here, too. They are marked up a little by bullets. We're holding them for the owner to claim."

"Yeah?" snarled Foresti. "I'll be seeing you." He snapped up the receiver and went to get rid of his visitors.

Foresti was boiling with rage. His pride was cut to the quick. He could hardly believe that his crew of killers with their arsenal of death-dealing weapons had been ar-

rested by hick authorities. Yet there had been something in Dick Liston's voice that carried conviction.

"Now," said Dick Liston to Bill Avery as he turned away from the telephone, "the next thing is to take care of our prisoners. Foresti will have a sharp lawyer out here early to get them out of jail. They mustn't be where he can do anything for them."

"All right," grinned the marshal. "You seem to be thinking a couple of jumps ahead of these crooks all the way. I'm with you. What will we do?"

"You come with me and unlock the door of the jail," answered Liston. "Then you go away and stay where you can't see what happens. All you need to tell the lawyer who comes out in the morning is that a mob came and took the prisoners. Say just that—and stick to it."

"I got you," chuckled Avery.

Two o'clock in the morning found the captive gangsters safely locked in an unused icehouse on the farm of Robert Shuck, four miles from Millard. Four men were left to guard the place and attend the prisoners' needs. The rest of the farmers went home to bed.

Just before ten o'clock the next morning Foresti's lawyer arrived in Millard. He was a man known throughout the nation, a famous criminal lawyer. He was armed with writs and other papers enough to have obtained the release of Daniel from the lion's den or Jonah from the belly of the whale.

But he found nobody to release.

"A mob came in the night and made me open the jail," Bill Avery told the lawyer. "They loaded the prisoners into a lot of cars and drove away with them."

That was the marshal's story—and he stuck to it. Bluster, threats, persuasion gained the lawyer nothing. He drove back to town, a baffled and much disgusted man.

"And that seems to be all there is to it," the lawyer told Foresti in concluding his report. "You were as dumb as hell when you sent that mob out into the sticks. The city is your ground. City folks are trained to fear and obey you. Those hicks are something else. They still believe in the laws of the country."

"Damn the hicks—and what they believe in!" snarled Foresti. "They have a lesson coming—and they'll get it. I'll call you as soon as I find out what happened to Mike and the other boys."

"All right, Gus," agreed the attorney. "It's your affair. But I'm telling you again: You'd better quit chasing these farmers in their own fields."

JUST after noon Little Gus Foresti was in conference with a score of other gangsters in his office. All the qualities which made this dapper little man able to rule one of the most gigantic and most ruthless criminal rings the world had ever known were now on the surface. Cold, brittle hatred for all things that opposed him gleamed in his black eyes. There was that about him which told every thug and killer who faced him that it meant suicide to refuse to carry out any order issued by this dynamic little man. They listened to his words with that silent respect shown to their teacher by kindergarten children.

The affair of the preceding night had cost Foresti dearly. He was out twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of cars. More than a score of his most valuable henchmen had been taken away. He had lost an expensive lot of machine-guns. And he had not yet collected a single penny from the milk racket which he had thought would be such an easy graft.

"Now get this straight, all of you," growled the racketeer chief to his men. "Cover the spots I told you to. Don't go out into the country—but see that no milk trucks come into the city."

The men in the gathering dispersed after signifying that they understood what was expected of them. Foresti sat long at his desk, thinking deeply and bitterly. His mind was now filled with but one thought. He must triumph over the yokels who had defied him. It was a matter of principle, of pride.

THAT night sixty-seven milk trucks were halted by machine-gun fire on the outskirts of the city. Eight of the drivers were killed. The others were beaten up. The milk was emptied and the bottles smashed.

At dawn more than two hundred men were gathered in the huge shipping-room of the Triple A plant at Millard. They had been summoned by telephone as soon as news of what had happened to the drivers and their milk trucks had reached Dick Liston.

Standing on a milk case, Liston called the roll from a list in his hand. Then he addressed the gathering.

"Men," said Dick, "you all know what has happened during the night. We are here to decide what we are going to do about it. I have a suggestion to make. We in this gathering have it in our power to stop more than ninety per cent of the milk deliveries to the consumers of the city. I move that we stop it. The city needs milk much worse than we need the money for it. Here is how I think we can win this scrap—without risking the death of any more of our men. We—"

Dick Liston talked for twenty minutes while the gathered men listened carefully. Then a vote was taken. The dairymen were unanimous in their indorsement of Dick's plan.

At eight o'clock Dick Liston was on his way to the city in his light coupé. At half-past nine he began a round of calls that had, by noon, included the office of every newspaper in the city. Then he went back to Millard and went to bed.

The evening papers carried a statement, signed by Richard Liston, as spokesman for the milk producers who supplied the city, that there would be no more milk delivered to the city until the menace to the life and property of the dairymen and their employees had been removed.

The final paragraph of the statement read:

> We producers will not deliver milk at the risk of our lives. And we will not pay tribute to Little Gus Foresti and his crew. We put it up to you city people. Shall our milk be fed to your babies, or to our pigs and chickens? We have coped with the gangsters who came into our territory—and will continue to do so. You city folk follow our example, and it will not be long before your milk will be at your door in the morning, as usual.

A wave of indignation swept over the city. The crowded millions read the warning of the dairymen and became wroth. They hardly believed that it could be true. But morning convinced them. There was no milk.

Babies and growing children cried about it—and the indignation of parents increased. Some drove out into the country and got milk. Most went without, or bought canned milk from the grocery. Two days exhausted the canned milk. Then the milk famine was felt in earnest. The people of the city were on the warpath. They had submitted to extortion, paid tribute to gangland from almost every business and profession, but this was different. Their babies were being denied the fluid which meant life and health. For the first time since gang rule had been established, the public showed signs of becoming a united force opposed to the rule of organized crime.

Police, the mayor, anybody and everybody with the least claim to authority was besieged by telephone and by mail. The people of the city wanted milk. They must have milk.

On the evening after the third day of the milk famine, the editor of the city's leading paper and the mayor of the city drove out to Millard and called upon Dick Liston at his dairy farm on the outskirts of the town.

"We absolutely must have milk in the city," the callers told Liston.

"Throw Foresti and his gangsters into jail," answered Liston. "Then we producers will deliver the milk."

"We have no charge upon which to arrest Foresti," answered the mayor. "He is foxy. He has an alibi for everything."

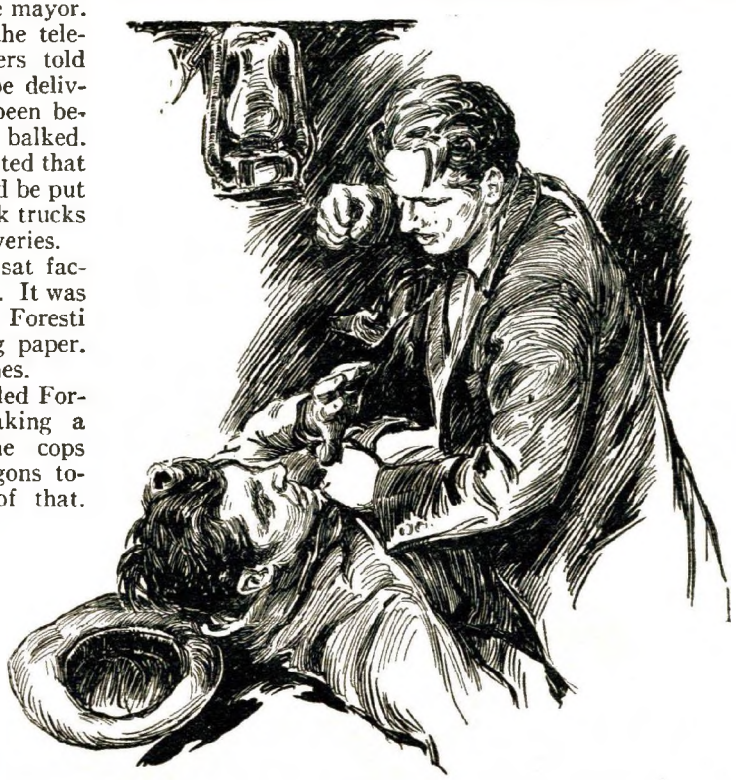
"All right," nodded Dick Liston, after a few moments of thought. "Provide an armed police escort for every milk truck, and we'll send in the milk as usual tonight."

"It's a bargain," cried the mayor.

The editor reached for the telephone. The evening papers told the city that milk would be delivered that night as it had been before the producers had balked. The stories in the papers stated that the entire police force would be put on the task of escorting milk trucks while they made their deliveries.

In his office, Little Gus sat facing a score of his henchmen. It was nine o'clock. In his hand Foresti held a copy of an evening paper. His face was set in grim lines.

"Listen, you birds," snarled Foresti. "The mayor is making a grand-stand play. All the cops will be guarding milk wagons tonight. We'll cure them of that. Steve Brand, Lark Horner, Gyp Mason, Gimpy Dobson—listen! Each of you pick a gang and get ready to work. The cops will all be at the edge of town at one o'clock tonight, waiting to guard milk trucks. I've had my tip-off on that. You will all do your tricks at exactly ten minutes after one. Steve, you will take the First National bank. Lark, you take the Guardian Trust. Gyp, take the Merchants Reserve. Gimpy, take the Stockmen's Security. Blow those joints wide open and clean them out. There won't be any cops to stop you, and you can burn down the watchmen. That will teach the mayor to keep his cops in town instead of sending them out to guard milk wagons."



He had obtained the blind number from Dago Mike by promises—added to some display of force.

The men nodded understanding and departed to carry out Foresti's orders.

During the night milk was delivered to the entire city—but four of the city's largest banks were robbed by yeggs who literally wrecked the buildings with the charges which opened the vaults. Nine men were killed by the fleeing robbers. In addition to the bank robberies, dozens of smaller business places were broken into and robbed by yeggs who had seized the opportunity to do a little independent work while the police were busy elsewhere. Foresti had taken nearly a million dollars in cash from the banks. He could use that to finance a war that would literally crush the dairymen into submission.

The next day's papers announced that the mayor had withdrawn the order placing milk trucks under police guard. Beside the mayor's statement was a notice from the milk producers to the effect that no milk would be delivered that night. The notice was signed by Dick Liston. Its final paragraph read:

> If the city prefers to keep its gangsters and do without its milkmen, very well. If it wants milk, it had better get rid of its gangsters.

That night at the dinner table, Lola Pollard spoke to Foresti, who had consumed his food in a grim silence unusual to him.

"Listen, Gus," said Lola. "You'd better drop this milk thing. I don't think you can get away with it."

"Who in hell asked you to think?" demanded Foresti. "You aint got anything to think with. I'm collecting from the steel workers, aint I? I'm getting mine from the truck drivers, aint I? I'm dragging my per cent out of the boilermakers, aint I? Am I going to be whipped by a bunch of he milkmaids? I'll collect off those birds or this town will forget what milk looks like."

As Foresti rose and stormed from the room, Lola looked after him with half-closed eyes. Lola had a baby. Foresti was unaware of the child's existence. The baby had been born before Lola went into the chorus where Foresti had found her. He did not know that part of the money which he gave Lola went to pay for its keep at an expensive home on the edge of the city. Lola went as often as possible to spend an hour or two with her little son. It happened that the child was anemic and needed a steady diet of rich milk of uniform quality. The child was now ailing, and the nurses at the home had informed Lola that the illness was due to the change in food which had been enforced by the milk famine.

Ten minutes after Foresti's car had purred away toward the office, Lola backed her own roadster out of the garage and drove away. At the edge of the city she inquired the way to Millard. She was going after the milk her baby needed. Lola Pollard was a gangster's moll—but she was a woman and a mother.

IT was just after eleven o'clock when Lola Pollard reached the home where her baby was kept. She had brought a gallon of milk, purchased from a farmer near Millard. The farmer had assured her that the milk was the same quality as he furnished regularly to the Triple A company.

Lola was greeted with the news that her little son was ill—he was under the care of a doctor and running a high fever. His system, Lola was told, had been upset by the change in diet. She was allowed to spend a few minutes

at the baby's bedside. There was a brooding look in her eyes as she drove home in the expensive car which had been paid for by Foresti. . . .

A gangster who had been sent into the country on a spying errand was waiting for the racketeer chief that evening when Foresti reached the office. The fellow's name was Alvin Lester, and he had been picked because he looked more like a clerk or a bookkeeper than a mobster. He had been in the neighborhood of Millard all that afternoon—ostensibly looking for milk for his family of children.

"Well?" growled Foresti when he and the spy were in the office.

Lester reported. Foresti listened attentively. When Lester had gone, other spies reported. They too had been out searching for a trace of their vanished fellow-gangsters, but they all reported failure.

Their reports lashed Foresti to new fury. He called his killers and muscle-men out in force. They were sent out into the edges of the city with orders to do dire things to any man who attempted to deliver milk. Then Foresti locked himself in his office and sat for hours brooding darkly—and drinking from a quart bottle of fiery liquor on his desk. He had been defied, laughed at, by a yokel! The thought gnawed at his vanity until the lord of gangland was mad with rage. . . .

The rats were cornered. The farmers saw no reason for sacrificing lives.

In the huge old icehouse, hidden in a grove on the farm of Robert Shuck, the twenty-five captive gangsters lay sprawled on the dry sawdust. Dawn was creeping through the slats of the ventilators in the peak of the roof for the third time since they had been prisoners in the big, solid building. Some of the crooks were sleeping, but most of them were awake. They were fed up on sleep.

A door at one end of the building opened, and a man in overalls set a ten-gallon milk-can inside. A dish-pan filled with tin cups followed the can.

"Breakfast, you crooks," called the man in overalls. "Come and get it."

The door closed and a padlock clicked. In the dim light five men rose and went to where the can stood. The others did not stir. They knew what that can contained. New milk! For three days they had existed on new milk. They were fed but twice a day—at milking time. An inquiry the evening before had gained them the information that there was to be no change in their diet while they remained in the icehouse.

"How long will that be?" Sam Easter had asked.

"All depends," answered the overalled "waiter." "You'll be here living on new milk until we need the milk to deliver in the city."

And that was that. This morning but five men drank from the can. Hunger might force a few more of them to it by evening. They lay and cursed their fate impotently.

Another morning had come to the city—and no milk. Fathers left home for work in shops, offices, factories and other places while babies cried for milk. Again the mayor, police and other authorities were being besieged by demands that something be done.

Noon came. An airplane circling high above the city was shedding a deluge of slips of paper—a message from the milk producers to the people of the city. Thousands of those red slips of paper settled to rest all over the city.

They read:

> We have accounted for every crook and gunman who has ventured into the country so far in the attempt to make us pay tribute to Little Gus Foresti and his gang of criminals. We will take care of any others who come. If you city folk cannot exterminate them, drive them out into the open and leave them to us. Your police can tell you who they are. Find them and drive them out into our territory.
>
> We want to deliver milk to you, but there can be no delivery until Foresti and his gang have been disposed of. *We will not pay tribute.*
>
> It is up to you people. Kill your own rats or drive them out where we can do it for you.
>
> THE MILK PRODUCERS.

Before long every adult in the city had read one of those messages. Swiftly they accomplished what Dick Liston had planned for them to accomplish. They knit the city folk together with a common purpose, and resulted in calls in the afternoon papers for eight mass meetings in various parts of the city. Doom was gathering for gangland.

IN his headquarters Little Gus Foresti had gathered half a hundred of the most dependable of his followers. Less than an hour had passed since one of those messages from the sky had been brought to the gang leader.

"Listen, you birds!" growled Foresti. "We've got to duck this burg, and lay low for awhile. But as we leave, we'll show these hick cow-nurses something. We'll come back when this has blown over, and they'll behave next time we talk to them. We've got to move fast. Go out right now and grab cars. Pick good ones that will travel. You can ditch them when you have to and take to the railroad. Now listen sharp."

The gangsters listened while Foresti named men who were to take charge of stolen cars. He gave instructions as to routes to be taken and other such details.

"Put at least one machine-gun in each car; two will be better. Take plenty of ammunition," the gang czar concluded. "Drive like hell and pour lead into every herd of cattle you pass. The damned hicks can't get milk out of dead cows. Take a few shots at every house you pass, just for good luck. You can let up when you are fifty miles

from town. Better ditch the hot cars and choppers as soon as you can and grab trains. Slip into some other burg and hole up for a while. All of you keep in touch with me at my place in Canada. We can ease back here in a couple of months and build up again. And you can bet the rubes will pay for the time we have lost."

Foresti then drew a large bag of cash from beneath his desk and handed a fat roll of bills to each gangster.

"Nurse this jack along," he said curtly. "Make it last until we can get back here and collect some more. Now you fellows I named get your men together and get busy. Grab fast cars. Load them up and all of you leave the city limits at exactly four o'clock. Don't any of you start a minute early—or late. There will be plenty of hell popping in short order after you cut loose on the first few bunches of cattle. Work fast and get the job over with. You can have hell shot out of the whole damned country for fifty miles around this burg before the hicks wake up. Be sure to kill every cow you see."

At just a few minutes after four o'clock a dairyman named Frank Pascal was at work with one of his hired men in the feed-house at the end of the dairy barn. The two men were grinding corn. In the big corral which lay between the barn and the highway, thirty-seven milch cows stood about the feed-rack or lay at rest, chewing their cuds.

Down the road from the direction of the city came a big blue sedan, making at least sixty-five miles an hour. As the speeding car approached the Pascal dairy, it slowed down. A machine-gun was thrust from the window, and the spiteful song of the weapon burst upon the air. There were snorts and bellows of fright and pain from the cows in the lot as the hissing stream of lead from the machine-gun swept the herd.

In the feed-house Frank Pascal stiffened as the sputter of the gun smote his ears. He stopped the feed-grinder and leaped to the door. His helper was at his heels. His eyes, seeking the road, saw the now slowly moving blue car. From its window the wicked gun was still spewing death into the herd of frightened cattle. A cry of rage came from the lips of the dairyman.

The next moment the cry of rage changed to a gurgle. The gangsters in the car had seen Pascal emerge from the feed-house. The nozzle of the gun swung in his direction, and Pascal pitched to the ground, gasping out his life.

The hired man, seeing his employer fall, shrank back into the shelter of the building. The engine of the blue car roared, and the car shot away, leaving behind a dead dairyman and five thousand dollars' worth of milch cows ready to be skinned.

In the house, fifty yards from the big dairy farm, a youth had been sitting for hours, listening to the radio program coming from WBJX. At the sound of the machine-gun he had leaped from his chair and rushed to a window. He saw the blue car, saw the cattle falling before its fire and saw his employer pitch to earth before the feed-house door. He turned and strode to a telephone on one wall of the room.

DICK LISTON sat in the outer office at the radio station WBJX, owned and operated by the *Banner*. Beside the young dairyman sat the publisher of the *Banner*.

"You really think that Foresti's gangsters will stage an attack on the dairymen in force?" asked the publisher.

"I do." Liston nodded grimly. "I have goaded him into it. Such a man as Foresti has proven himself to be can react in no other way. I have my trap all laid. The dairymen are all watching, and all of them have a man planted beside the radio, listening to this station. We will be warned by telephone the moment the first demonstration is made by the gangsters. The result will be a ghastly surprise for Foresti and his rats."

"And do you think this attack will come soon?"

"Not later than tonight," asserted Liston. "Perhaps sooner. That message from the plane, the call for mass meetings and all will force Foresti into action."

Then the telephone which stood on the table between them rang. The publisher had given orders that that phone was to ring for but one reason. He snatched the instrument and answered. Liston was on his feet, tense.

"You were right," cried the publisher as he snapped up the receiver. "They've started it!"

SIDE by side the two men leaped toward the broadcasting room. At a signal from the publisher an operator cut off the program then going onto the air. Dick Liston leaped to a microphone which the operator had cut in. The young dairyman had his speech memorized.

"We wish to announce," said Liston into the microphone, "that the citizens are to hold mass meetings tonight to discuss the milk famine. All interested are invited to attend."

Dick turned from the "mike," and the operator switched the program back onto the air. But Liston's words had carried a hidden meaning to hundreds of men who sat at radios in farmhouses far flung about the city.

Within two minutes after Liston's message had ridden the ether to the ears of the listening men beside farm radio sets, hundreds of blockades had been flung across the roads in a circle about the city. The blockades consisted of wagons, tractors and all manner of heavy farm machinery, dragged quickly into position and locked together with log chains to prevent its removal by the gangsters it was meant to halt.

Traffic outside that barricade needed no worrying about. It could not get into the danger zone. All innocent travelers were hailed in off the highways at the next house they passed after the warning came over the radio. Women and children scuttled into cellars and caves. The men armed themselves and rushed to places of safety from which they could defend their homes.

None of the gangster cars got six miles from the city until confronted by one of the barricades. The stolen cars were not bullet-proof and a hail of lead from the ambushed farmers raked every one of them as soon as the ambushed farmers were sure it contained gangsters. In some cases the gangster car stood its ground and offered battle, raking the farmsteads with streams of machine-gun lead. Others turned tail and tried another road, after a defiant burst from their heavy weapons. But in every case they were finally forced to turn and seek another avenue of flight.

Dick Liston had shown real generalship in placing those first barricades. He had worked out their location carefully with the aid of road maps of the territory. They completely blocked flight by car from the city—and they did something else.

As each gangster car turned back to seek a new road, it found that a second line of similar obstructions had been placed between them and the city. The rats couldn't get back to their holes. They were able to move only in a lane between those two lines of barricades—and both ends of that lane were being moved up. Within an hour after they had left town, the forty-two cars of gangsters were hemmed in a two-mile square. More than a thousand armed farmers held the rim of that ever-narrowing circle. It resembled a gigantic wolf-hunt—but the wolves were of the human variety.

Realizing their plight, the gangsters went into a huddle. They formed a hollow square of the stolen cars and entrenched themselves therein. They expected no mercy from the men who were closing in on them. They had

killed two or three hundred cattle and one man during their mad dash from the city, besides riddling houses and other buildings with the slugs from the machine-guns. They would fight to the death and take as many of the farmers with them into the great beyond as they could.

But the rim of the circle halted out of machine-gun range. The rats were cornered. The farmers saw no reason for sacrificing lives. Thus matters stood when Dick Liston and the publisher of the *Banner* arrived from the city. They drove in the van of a huge force of police cars and others bearing newspaper men. It was half-past five o'clock. There would still be two hours of daylight. The farmers and the police conferred.

"They have no food and no water," an officer remarked. "All we need to do is keep them surrounded and wait them out."

"They can drink the water from the radiators and hold out quite a while," answered Dick Liston. "Why not let a plane fly over them,—several planes if necessary,—and dump a batch of tear bombs on them? There is hardly a breeze. Then a bunch of us could put on masks and go in and get them."

"That's an idea," declared the officer in charge of the police detail. "Lead me to a telephone. We'll have to work fast."

An hour later, nearly two hundred gasping gangsters were on their way to cells. . . .

"You—killed—my —baby!" Four slugs tore into the slender body of the racketeer.

Little Gus Foresti had reached his big mansion at half-past three o'clock, to find it deserted except for the servants. None of the servants knew where Lola Pollard had gone. Foresti ordered Lola's maid to pack her mistress' things at once. He gave the other servants two months' wages in advance and told them to look after the place until Lola and he returned from a trip upon which they were starting at once. The bags were packed and Foresti paced up and down in impatience. Why didn't the woman come? He wanted to be on his way.

An hour later Lola drove her car into the drive. She entered the house and confronted Foresti.

Lola's eyes were stony. Her face was white and drawn with suffering. She had just come from the home where she had looked upon the lifeless form of the baby son in whom all her affections, all her life, centered. The ravages of fever had snuffed the feeble candle that was the child's life. As she faced the gangster, the vision of that quiet little body was still before her eyes. Her hand came from beneath her wrap, and Foresti found himself looking into the muzzle of a leveled automatic.

"You ——" screamed Lola. Her eyes were suddenly ablaze with mortal hate. The very fury of her profanity caused Foresti's face to pale. He stepped backward before the menace of that leveled gun. Lola followed him with a lithe, catlike tread.

"My baby!" she moaned. "My baby—is dead. You killed him, you—" Her fingers suddenly tightened about the trigger of the automatic. Flame spurted from the muzzle of the weapon.

Foresti uttered a choking cry and clutched at his middle. He stumbled backward over a traveling-bag. "Don't, Lola!" he screamed. "Don't!"

Lola stood over him, the smoking gun in her hand.

"You—killed—my—baby." The words came slowly from her lips—but they were spaced by reports from the gun in her hand. Four more leaden slugs tore into the slender body of the racketeer.

AS Foresti retreated from the screaming blonde fury, his hand had crept to his arm-pit. With desperate determination he dragged out the gun from its shoulder holster, raised the weapon, and his dying fingers squeezed the trigger. Three times the weapon spoke before the finger on the trigger refused to tighten again. Two of the bullets plowed into the woman's breast. The third shattered her right ankle. She reeled and fell across the body of her erstwhile lord and master.

It was in that position that police found the bodies when they had been called by a terrified servant. The news flashed over the radio and reached the farmers just as the capture of the gangsters had been completed. A cheer went up as the tidings swept the gathering.

Shortly after dark, at the door of the icehouse on Bob Shuck's farm, Dick Liston stood beside the publisher of the *Banner* and watched the captive gangsters file out in custody of police from the city. There would be plenty of charges on which to put those hoodlums away in stir.

The officer in charge of the arresting party paused beside Dick Liston. "Sorry to take your house guests away like this, Mr. Liston!" he chuckled.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"Moscow Gets a Jolt" again reveals Mr. New's extraordinary inside knowledge of European politics—and again offers you a most engrossing story.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

BY his accent, Karl Pfeiffer was a Brandenburger. From his knowledge of electric wiring and telephone installation, one inferred that he had spent some time at the School of Electricity in Stettin. He had come from there to the telephone department of Berlin with excellent recommendation, and had given entire satisfaction for several months. One morning in November—while testing the line running to a good-sized mansion on Thiergartenstrasse—he had asked the butler who answered his ring if he noticed a little click, occasionally, while speaking. The butler said he did—as if the connection were switched on and off for just a second. Pfeiffer said a "trouble-man" would be around sometime that afternoon to overhaul the house-connections. Then he reported in the usual way to his superior in the department, who perfunctorily ordered him to go around himself and very carefully overhaul the installation, as the house was the residence of the Herr Excellenz, General von Muhlendorff, Head of the Department of Chemical Research in the Government, and it was most necessary that his three wires should be always in perfect operating condition. So in the rain and murk of a Berlin afternoon, when nobody but servants were in the house, Karl Pfeiffer drove his department repair-car half across the city to the big house opposite the Thiergarten and went in with a big sole-leather kit-bag slung across his back—the official name on his car vouching for him in addition to his own identification-card.

He went at his job with slow German thoroughness—tracing the wires from each of the three telephones through the walls and into the cellar pipe-connection to the street conduit outside. In a manhole two blocks away, there were tagged ends of two wires coming out of a pipe leading back to a house which had been temporarily leased for three months by an American—in Berlin to establish a business connection for his firm in Chicago—and Pfeiffer's testing in the cellar indicated (to him alone), that one of the General's wires could be cut in to run through the loop of those loose wire-ends in the manhole. He then took one of the transmitters and its receiver apart, in the General's private study, and substituted another cord containing four core-wires instead of the usual pair—two of them very small. Back of the wall-plug and plaster, he ran a connection from the two small ones to a wooden box eight inches square by four deep, which he concealed behind the grating of a ventilating duct just under the window-sill. This box contained an extremely sensitive microphone-transmitter amplified with one tube, the filament of which was coated with barium. With the four-wire connection, even a murmur in any part of the room could be distinctly heard through the microphone by a person in the house two blocks away when the weight of the receiver was holding down the forks of the switch. When the receiver was off—held to a person's ear—the dictaphone was automatically cut out, but of course any conversation over either of the other two phones could be distinctly heard when this one was switched off and the dictaphone in. Unless the ventilator-grating happened to be taken off for some sort of repair-work, the dictaphone might remain concealed behind it for years—the chance for discovery was scarcely one in a million. In the cellar-pipe through which the three metallic circuits ran out to the street conduit, there was no necessity for running an extra wire at all. Pfeiffer simply connected one wire from his dictaphone to one leg of the metallic circuit from telephone Number One and the other to one leg of the circuit from telephone Number Three. In the manhole two blocks away, taps were taken off those two wires and led into the leased house opposite. After this the repair-man duly filled out his official blank with data of the work done—reporting that the suspicious clicks had been caused by a loose splice in the cellar, and that all three lines were now working perfectly. Getting the butler to sign this for him, he then drove back in the repair-car to the telephone department. An expert who might subsequently overhaul the phones and discover the dictaphone connection wouldn't have a thing on Pfeiffer because it would have taken an unusually close inspection of both plug and outlet from which the four-wire cord came to reveal four contacts instead of the usual and obvious two. Ninety-nine repairmen out of a hundred would have turned in exactly the report that he did.

His working hours were from nine to five. When he left the department in the afternoon, he went across town again to the leased house on Thiergartenstrasse, where he had a temporary job as house-manager until the expiration of the American's lease, which paid him as much as his department wages—this being the second of such jobs which he'd been lucky enough to get for his spare hours since he had come to Berlin. As the American who leased the house had gone to Dresden for a week, Pfeiffer ate the dinner prepared for him by the cook-housemaid he had hired for his employer. Then he went up to inspect his clothing to see if any pressing or mending was needed, checked over with the cook the marketing for next day, and sat down in the study at the rear of the parlor floor to go through the evening paper and listen in on the wireless set—one of the qualifications leading to his getting the job being his knowledge of electricity and radio-repairing. This covered his usual procedure night

after night when the American wasn't using the wireless himself.

Early one evening, a week later, the bell rang. A police officer came in with two plain-clothes detectives attached to that city district. As he walked through the parlor to meet them, Pfeiffer's heels clicked together—he came rigidly to attention.

"Hmph! . . . Evidently you're not the Herr Appleby who leases this house?"

"*Nein, Herr Officier.* For him, I come at six in the evening and manage the house—employ the cook and man-of-all-work—purchase supplies—overhaul his clothes—keep his wireless in working condition, tax paid when due. From nine in the morning until five, I am employed in the department of telephones—here are my official card and number."

"How long have you been in the department? And where before that?"

"Four months, *mein Herr.* Before that, with the Phoenix Electrical Construction Company in Stettin, where my sister and her family are living. Before the Herr Appleby employed me for spare hours, I typed notes in the evening for the Herr Professor von Steinberg of the University."

"And this Herr Appleby—where does he come from? What line of business is he in?"

"Electric construction and appliances—in Chicago—one of the partners in his house. He is spending a few months over here to establish trade connections and an agency either in Hamburg or Berlin—already they have considerable trade with us. One of his friends suggested that he would save money and be in more comfortable position to entertain business acquaintances if he leased a house for the duration of his stay over here instead of paying high prices at the Adlon. He had been here a month when he discharged an incompetent butler-manager and employed me—partly because I thoroughly understood American wireless sets and how to repair them. I believe his lease will expire in a few days, but probably he will renew. He told me it would take another two months to establish an agency if he can find a competent man to handle it."

"Is he known at the American Embassy?"

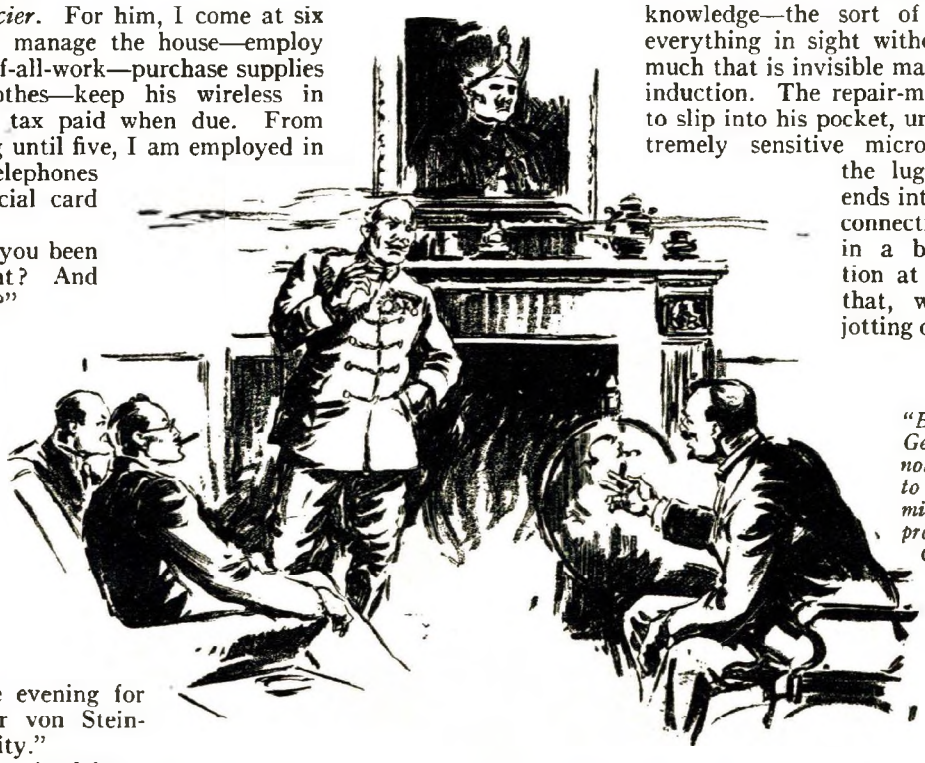
"Quite well, *mein Herr*—the American *Charge d'Affaires* dined here the other night."

"You say his wireless set is of American make? Any outside connections?"

"Yes—we have a long antenna running down to a tree at the rear of the garden. For anything within a thousand-mile range an inside loop is quite sufficient—but to get New York and Asiatic stations requires two hundred feet of outside wire at least, and a ground of several iron pipes driven down into the earth of the garden."

"I think we'll go up with you and look at that roof antenna. Bring a flashlight."

The police were thorough in their examination of the aërial, both on the roof and where it was connected to a sash-cord guyed out from a garden tree. They examined every side of the house for other wires—every room in it—but found none save those of the telephone and wireless set. It was Pfeiffer's suggestion that they come down into the cellar and see where the telephone-connection went out through the one-inch pipe into the street conduit. And when they examined the wireless—tracing the ground and aërial connections, he saw that one of the detectives had at least a smattering of electrical knowledge—the sort of man who sees everything in sight without figuring how much that is invisible may be obtained by induction. The repair-man had managed to slip into his pocket, unobserved, an extremely sensitive microphone—plugging the lugs from its wire ends into his head-frame connection while tuning in a broadcasting station at their orders—so that, while they were jotting down memoranda in their note-books in the next room, he distinctly caught all of their murmured talk.



"But, my dear General—I would not expose myself to ridicule by submitting such a proposition to our Government!"

"Was this a tip from Wilhelmstrasse, Groben?" one asked.

"Oh, not at all! In that case, we'd have had the house under observation some weeks before they knew anything about it. The Excellenz, Herr General von Muhlendorff, is the sort who takes no chances—that's all. One infers that they work out some amazing discoveries in his department—discoveries which mean overwhelming advantage for the Reich in case of hostilities, and are frequently discussed in his house up the street. As it happens, this dwelling is the only one for several blocks in which the lessee and occupants aren't thoroughly known to us. As there is to be a rather important conference at his own residence late this evening, he simply wanted us to check up on this one and be absolutely sure we knew everything there is to know about it. Of course we had all the principal data in advance—have had it ever since the Herr Graf went to South America, and leased it through his agent to this American—and our investigation here agrees absolutely on every point. This man Pfeiffer has a most excellent record in his department. Sturm, here, says the telephone and wireless connections are quite in order. We know Appleby went to Dresden last week—the hotel he registered at—the people in his trade whom he's called upon. So I think we'll give this house a clean bill—put that report on the records. Eh?"

When they went out, after drinking a bottle of wine which the caretaker offered them, Pfeiffer slowly took a handkerchief from his pocket and ran a corner of it around

inside his spotless celluloid collar. Under a commonplace exterior he was, inside, the cool, well-poised type which faces emergencies and copes with them as they come up—but when the police came in it certainly had looked as though he must have made a slip somewhere—a slip which they were tracing down like so many bloodhounds. Had they found one shadow of anything suspicious about him or his dual occupation, they never would have let up until they'd traced his antecedents to a time before Stettin—and lost them. After which, Pfeiffer would have been competently hanged. As they went out, however, he drew a long breath of relief. A miss was as good as a mile. Incidentally, his pocket microphone had caught exactly the information he would have given good money to get. There was to be an important conference in General von Muhlendorff's house that night—probably after the theaters were out. Not knowing how long he would dare risk trying to get anything of the sort, it was a case of listening in through every evening when his employer wasn't using the wireless set or plugging in an auxiliary telephone-receiver, concealed in his own room, at other times. In this way, he had picked up from one of the telephone circuits he had tapped bits of information which were valuable in themselves; but that sort of connection was too risky to leave—liable to be discovered at any time—and he had a hunch that something vastly bigger than anything he'd heard was brewing somewhere.

The connecting wire from the wireless set ran from its table to a porcelain switch—hollow underneath—on the window-casing, where anyone could see that it threw in or out the "lead-in" from the roof-aërial. What they *couldn't* see was a couple of holes bored through the window-casing directly under the porcelain base of the two-point, jack-knife switch—or the wires through those holes which ran from where they were soldered to the screw-ends underneath, down behind the plaster, to the telephone-connection behind the baseboard outlet. With that aërial-switch open, and the ground-switch open, the connection was an unbroken metallic circuit between the detector-tube of the wireless set and the microphone behind the ventilating grating in the General's study.

Frau Schwartz the cook was Prussian born and bred—which means that she knew the absurdity of expecting from Prussian men favors or the consideration usual in other countries. When Pfeiffer called her into the study and permitted her to hear good music or a vaudeville act over the wireless, she was immensely pleased. But it never would have occurred to the woman to stop of her own accord in passing the parlor door as if she would like to hear the wireless. And she never wondered what it might be which interested Pfeiffer so much for hours, as he listened with the head-frame over his ears and an entirely expressionless face.

IT was past eleven when he heard the General and three other men enter the study. Evidently they had been sitting on the Adlon roof, chatting, drinking, listening to the music, until a sprinkle of rain suddenly housed them in with the wonderful glass walls and roof sliding noiselessly in place like some amazing transformation-scene. The Soviet Commissioner Tourgavitch appeared to have joined them there before they came down and got into the General's car to go to his house. The other two were officials from one of the Reich Departments. Up to that point, seemingly, everything had been upon the most genial and friendly footing between the four. But after a glass or two of wine, Tourgavitch asked:

"You had something of rather unusual importance to discuss with me I think, Herr General?"

"Well—yes. We might have gone into it some months ago—but wished to be sure of our ground before doing so. During the next few years, Tourgavitch, some of our leading industrialists will find a need for large quantities of barium—silicates—thorium—and recently applied metals which exist in extensive deposits, as we have ascertained, ninety or a hundred miles from Nijni Novgorod, an entirely undeveloped section. What we propose is to use half Russian labor and half German—under the exclusive supervision of German engineers and superintendents—sending out there probably a couple of thousand of our men, all told. We are to have the entire output of whatever mines we develop—ore and matrix to be reduced at the mines and shipped in partly commercial form to be refined and finished here—"

"I can't imagine the Council of Commissars permitting you to take everything in your own hands in any such way as that! But if the price were an inducement—well, it might be put before them—"

"H-m-m—the idea we had in mind was to consider the value of the commodities obtained as a sort of preliminary indemnity-payment which we would credit to you as such."

"WHAT indemnity?" demanded Tourgavitch. "We owe Germany nothing of that sort!"

"Oh—everybody who participated in the war owes indemnity! We are being bled white trying to pay the sums forced from us. But for Russia's interference at the beginning of the war—drawing a good two million of our men from the Western front—we would have taken Paris inside of a month and swept everything clean to the Atlantic! Do you imagine we are likely to forget that—or that because you've been left to repudiate everything you pleased up to this time, you're going to escape reparation altogether? No, no, Tourgavitch! The time has come for you Muscovites to bear your share of the burden. It seems to me we are offering you a way to pay a portion of it which cannot be burdensome in any manner. You admit two or three thousand skilled Germans—safeguard them—furnish whatever additional labor they require and transportation of the commodities from the mines into Germany. If we seem to be getting a reasonable amount of value in that way, we'll let the arrangement run along for a while."

"But, my dear Herr General—consider, if you please! I would not expose myself to ridicule by submitting such a proposition to our Government! We refuse—absolutely!"

"Hmph! Tonight, you do. But—say we give you until the first of the month to reconsider! Eh? Come, now—that's fair. You've heard our proposition—a very easy one for you. Submit it to Moscow—think it over until the first. Then give us safe-conduct for our engineers and operatives. Meanwhile we go ahead getting together the requisite machinery for development—eh?"

"And, if we still refuse—on the first? You declare war? Yes?"

"Oh, that would be unnecessary. The world is trying to eliminate war as a means of imposing one's will upon others—it is much too wasteful. I'll not say that we wouldn't use pressure to induce a reconsidering of your refusal—but there are various sorts of pressure, you know. . . . Well—you have our proposition—and something over two weeks in which to consider it. My suggestion is that you put through a Moscow call from your headquarters at once—so they can be thinking it over. Then confirm with more detail by air-mail. Eh? —Going? Well—drop in for a friendly chat any time, Tourgavitch. . . . Oh, tut—tut—cursing's rather discourteous, you know!"

It seemed to Pfeiffer—listening intently, two blocks away—that the receivers were glued fast to his ears. He scarce-

ly could believe what he heard. It amounted to a declaration of war—and yet he was positive that Germany had no intention of going to war with any nation at present—she was not in position to. He heard the three remaining men in the General's study striking matches to light fresh cigars—listening until certain that the Soviet Commissioner actually had left the house and driven away in his car. Then Ganz asked:

"Are you positive, General, that your plane can be depended upon, without a slip? We're familiar, of course, with the way lethal gas is handled—but this invisible, destructive electric ray you've mentioned sounds as if the least overlooking of some minor precaution might make it destroy the plane from which it was being projected before hitting anything on the ground. How do you guard against that?"

"I think I can explain it so that even you laymen will understand—that is, explain its action. Just why and how it does what it does is a far more intricate matter—you'd have to have a very thorough knowledge of radio-engineering and higher mathematics to get that. In the first place, the only substance we've yet found impervious to the ray is glass. Consequently the plane is entirely coated, inside and out, with three layers of liquid glass, which soaks in and hardens. Next—think back over the flashes of lightning you've seen in the sky. Very seldom you'll see a fork of lightning streak from one heavy black cloud to another—but almost invariably from a higher cloud to a lower one—the lower one much heavier, with condensing moisture. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the forks streak from rain-clouds to the earth—which means that the clouds are increasingly negative until they discharge like a jump-spark across a condenser, and the earth is positive, drawing the fork of lightning down into it or to some wet tree that leads it down. Well, our disintegrating ray works in the same way. As it is shot out from the electrode of our generator, the plane and the generator are both negative—insulated with glass. And the earth—or any object below, between the plane and the earth—is positive. Wherever the ray touches it simply disintegrates—that's all. At an elevation of two miles—twice as high as we'd fly when actually using the ray—we've made pits in the ground ten feet deep. If we pointed the electrode up instead of down the ray might reverse; that we don't know—we've never risked it. But I doubt if it would touch a plane a few thousand feet above us."

"SUPPOSE their scout-planes do get above you—subject you to a hail of machine-gun fire?" asked one man.

"That is scarcely a risk—for the simple reason that another of the developments we've worked out in the laboratories gives a big tri-motored plane a good three times more lifting power in the air—makes its ceiling under full load actually higher than any scout-plane we've yet seen. We've tested it out with our own altitude-planes—gone a bit higher each time. And the only load, remember, is the weight of the generator (slightly over a ton)—the crew of four—and cruising-fuel for six thousand miles. Even the fuel, through another laboratory development, is thirty per cent lighter than any other known. To put it more plainly, these ray-planes of ours—almost duplicates in general appearance of the eight-passenger Lufthansas—are built to carry a commercial-service load of seven tons. Yet, completely equipped for using our ray on a six-thousand-mile non-stop flight, their working load is but four and a half tons. You easily can see how that lifts their ceiling in service operation."

"How about speed?"

"We've averaged two hundred miles under cruising load. There are faster planes, of course—but they can't get above us. Once we get above them—that settles it. As for anything below us—well, you must make a flight with us some day, and see what happens."

"From what you said to Tourgavitch, one infers that you have in mind some particular spot upon which to stage a demonstration before the first of the month?"

"*Ja.* The big flying-field where the aërial maneuvers are held—about twenty miles from Moscow. On the twenty-sixth, there are to be the biggest exhibitions of aëronautical tactics yet attempted by the flying corps of the Red Army—probably seventy per cent of all the planes they have in commission. Well, we think favorably of making the occasion a memorable one in a noticeably different manner. You understand, of course, Ganz—and you, Feldner—that not even the slightest hint of what has been discussed in this room can be permitted to leak out, in any direction whatsoever. If either of you, for example, were even to hint of anything connected with our ray-planes to a living soul, he had better blow his brains out before we do it with a firing-squad. We're not under the old iron régime in these days of the Republic, to be sure, but there are still some millions of Prussians holding fast to the old ideas of military discipline in putting the Reich where it dominates the world—you and I among them!"

FARTHER down Thiergartenstrasse, Pfeiffer removed the head-frame from his ears as he heard the General's two companions going out to their cars. He knew Von Muhlendorff's house must have been surrounded during the entire evening by a detail from his Intelligence Department to insure against the possibility of any outsider either getting into the house or listening at any of the windows—and grinned to himself at a remark overheard in Paris that it shouldn't be so difficult for a cool, resourceful man to get upon the roof of that same house and work his way down to some place of concealment inside. He had advised the other man not to attempt it—and told him why. . . . .

Pfeiffer wearily rubbed one hand over his stubbly face—as he considered what he had heard. A gleam in his deep-set eyes was startling unlike the dull expression of the phlegmatic repair-man. For several months he had been devoting an infinite amount of patience to details so trivial that most men in his chosen profession would have considered them negligible—just on a vague hunch that something overwhelmingly big was brewing somewhere in Germany. And his hunch had been justified. With what he now knew locked in his brain, the immediate problem was to get that brain out of Germany intact, and as far as Downing Street. He had the gift of projecting his mental vision into the mind of an adversary and estimating what he would do in any given circumstance. Sizing up Von Muhlenberg for the forceful executive the man really was, he figured that after the sort of discussion which had taken place in the study that night, the General would want a line on every man or woman who unexpectedly left Berlin next day for one reason or another, and would make a point of having both the police and his own Intelligence Department send in such a report, on the theory that any agent or another Government who, by hook or by crook, had managed to secure even a small portion of such information would consider it so big, and his own position in the city after learning it so deadly dangerous, that he would use any possible means of getting out before daylight if possible. But the figures on every calendar Pfeiffer saw burned into his mind. Two short weeks—ten days, in fact, to the 26th—represented the limit of his time for getting safely out of Germany and into London.

Pfeiffer went about his duties at the department, next day, in his usual phlegmatic way—returned to the Ameri-

The controls were taken out of the startled pilot's hands, and the tall man took his place.

can's house at the usual time and ate his dinner. Then he put in a telephone-call from the study to his sister in Stettin—giving his department-card number in order to have the usual employee's rebate credited to him on the long-distance charge. After an hour and a half, his supposed sister answered from Stettin, saying that her sick husband had seemed to improve during the week but had had a relapse that morning. They talked for eight minutes—the conversation naturally being overheard by the telephone censor and its substance entered upon his report. Next morning, Pfeiffer was handed a telegram at the Department when he went to work. His brother-in-law had taken a turn for the worse—had been asking for Karl—some business on his mind which he wanted his wife's brother to look after in case he died. The repairman showed the telegram to his superior, mentioning the phone-conversation of the night before. The official told him to come back in an hour—meanwhile checking up on him through the censor's department. So that was that—every inquiry turned up records as straight as a plumb-line. The man was given permission for leave of absence and his identification-papers were duly visèd. Even then, he didn't omit the detail of returning to the American's house for his rattan suitcase, and arranging with Frau Schwartz to have her cousin take over Pfeiffer's duties as house-manager. He took a second-class carriage in the train to Stettin—where he arrived that afternoon.

That night, two men and a woman who bore not the slightest resemblance to Pfeiffer, his sister or her husband walked chatting along the streets at two in the morning—apparently making a night of it, for they joked a couple of the police good-naturedly and rather thickly wanted to know where they could go for a good long ride in a taxi—somewhere out of the city—get the cobwebs out of their heads. One of the men, hiccoughing, drew a wad of reichsnotes out of his trousers pocket—said he didn't care if the meter ran up twenty marks on them—he could pay it. The officer called a taxi, and they awkwardly piled in, the three on the rear seat. After five or six miles, they said they were getting sleepy, cooped up in the cab, and had decided to walk. The driver said they were pretty far from town—but they were obstinate and argumentative, though they paid him what the clock said, with a liberal tip for himself. When he had disappeared, every trace of overindulgence abruptly left them. The ex-Pfeiffer motioned toward the overcast sky in the west:

"There's the Hamburg plane coming down, now. The one leaving for Berlin will be ready, fueled, with the pilot and mechanic getting their departure-cards checked in the office. That night-plane carries mail and four passengers. If there isn't more than one in the waiting-room, we take tickets for Berlin and wait until we get up. If there are two or three, we'll have to watch our chance and get the bus into the air when there's nobody aboard—but that's a last resort, and pretty risky."

When they reached the flying-field, as it happened, there were no other passengers for the Berlin plane, although a few sleepy men sat waiting for planes to other points at a later hour. Watching his chance when nobody happened to be near the plane for three or four minutes, the taller of the two men sneaked five extra tins of petrol into the passenger-space. Fifteen minutes later, the plane went up—with two pilots, one of whom acted as a sort of passenger conductor—and a mechanic.

Two of these men felt slight pricking sensations in their legs, as they moved about the fuselage, as though they had a loose pin somewhere in their clothes—but paid no attention to it. Ten minutes later, they couldn't keep their eyes open. The one who sat by the pilot at the controls lurched down in his seat, dead to the world. As the pilot glanced at him in a startled way, he felt the cold muzzle of an automatic against the back of his own neck, and the controls were taken out of his hands. He was hauled back into the fuselage, and the tall man took his seat—banked the plane in a wide but very gradual sweep—and headed a little west of north. The second pilot was hauled back also and the woman took his place. By this time the other one also was unconscious from a jab of the hypodermic—and all three of the original crew were laid along the cabin floor out of the way, their hands tied behind them.

It was at once evident that the air-pirates were exceptional aviators. They had unhurriedly chosen exactly the right moment to put two of the crew out of business and then seize the controls before the plane had any chance to get out of hand or dive. None of the original crew had been in position to offer resistance that would have endangered the plane—and the whole affair was over so quickly that the last of them was unconscious before he noticed which way the bus was heading. Everything had been perfectly normal when the plane went up at the flying-field. When it was two or three hours late at Tempelhofer Field in Berlin, a phone-call was put through to Stettin. As the plane had left there on time, it was supposed that it must be down somewhere between the two cities, and a couple of planes were sent out to look for it.

Meanwhile, the stolen ship was crossing the west end

of the Baltic. At six in the morning, after a three-hour flight, she passed at an eighteen-thousand-foot altitude over Göteborg in Sweden—an even three hundred air-miles from Stettin.

The ex-Pfeiffer was conserving his gas—figuring, now, that he had enough to make Oslo in Norway. As she recognized the general contour of the city below them, the woman glanced at him.

"Fancy we can risk the North Sea, Fred?"

"Cutting it pretty fine! We can make the four hundred and seventy to Oslo, easily—and there's a Wilson boat this afternoon for Hull if we manage to get aboard of her. Norway'll not stop us on any demand from Berlin if you're sure the passports aren't likely to be questioned. There's an English Princess on that throne—we can demand an interview with her if necess'ry. If we head southwest directly, it'll be a bit over five hundred air-miles to Hull—fancy we'd be out of petrol before we made it. Startin' due west from Stettin, we could have made Croydon—but at constant risk of bein' sent down by German planes. When that young doctor calls this morning an' we're gone, he'll report to the police—he was a bit skeptical, anyway—an' by night at the latest they're likely to connect us with the missing bus, although we don't answer the description in the least. Where I'm lookin' for the biggest risk is when that boat gets to Hull. They'll have had time to phone some of their lot in London—have one or two men in each of the East Coast ports. Still, we'll not be travelin' together, d'ye see. My word! . . . What a relief to get the blasted German untwisted from my tongue—that muffler off my neck—those steel-rimmed spectacles off my nose! Four weary months of it—fancy!"

"I say, Fred! The passports will have to be viséd by a British consul before they'll sell us passage on that boat, you know—which takes time, when every minute is a risk. What's your suggestion on that point?"

"I've been mulling that over. We'll have our work cut out in landin' somewhere an' gettin' clear of the bus before we're spotted an' connected with it. Fancy I know of a place—little clearing in a patch of woods, five miles out of the city. None too much room for comin' down, but against this wind I fancy I can manage it—though she may turn over. When we come out of the woods on one of the main roads, we can say we were out for a walk—got farther than we fancied—get some car to give us a lift back. They're very courteous in Norway. In the city, we drift along down to the Wilson Line pier—get aboard the boat to see a party of friends off—wangle a private interview with the Master, who's quite sure to be English an' to have been in the war. Well, d'ye see, like all British Captains, he'll have some of the F. O. signs and recognition-words. Once he knows what we are he'll make no bobbery about passports or any red tape whatever—just accept our passage-money an' tip off the Customs men at Hull to pass us through."

WHEN Starleigh brought the plane down in the little clearing he was forced to bank sharply, and the bus turned over as he had feared—but by hooking their feet under the chair-arms while they grasped an overhead rail in the cabin, they avoided being violently thrown about. Lashing the still unconscious crew of the plane to the seat-stanchions along the gangway, they prevented them from being hurt beyond a few bruises—and left them lying on the inside of the cabin-ceiling with no cords or lashings in evidence to support the story they afterward told when they recovered consciousness and limped out to the nearest farmhouse. Captain Starleigh's plan for getting across the North Sea on the Wilson Liner worked without a hitch—the Master being an R.N.R. man who handed their passage-money to the purser with a quiet hint that they were friends of the owners, and that he was to keep his mouth shut. At Hull the three, who apparently had met on board for the first time, went their several ways with borrowed suitcases—afterward expressed back to the Master. Anne Winton reached her family estate in Somerset without arousing suspicion anywhere. Lieutenant Bill Armiston was followed to his club in London and afterward to his flat in the West End, where his man greeted him imperturbably as if he had merely been out of town for the week-end instead of more than four months. The two Wilhelmstrasse men who had been following him made cautious inquiries in the neighborhood, but learned only that he was an officer in one of the crack regiments, temporarily detailed to a War Office department, and had been given leave for a fishing-trip in Norway.

CAPTAIN STARLEIGH didn't have such luck. As he stepped into a cab on the pier, he recognized among the group of people around the gangplank one of the cleverest, most cold-blooded men of the German Intelligence. Instead of trying to shrink back in the cab and avoid observation, the Captain leaned from the window to hail one of his fellow travelers—giving the Wilhelmstrasse man an excellent opportunity for sizing up his face and shoulders, which now were so entirely unlike those of Karl Pfeiffer that he knew any cabled or wirelessed description would not match his appearance in any way. Temporarily, this worked as well as he could have asked. The other man paid no further attention to him, but concentrated upon the few passengers straggling down the gangplank or unlocking their luggage for the Customs men.

Captain Starleigh knew, however, that Von Thun very shortly would begin a mental process of elimination and presently decide that the tall chap who drove away in the cab was the only one on board who by any possibility could be the one he was looking for, and would then methodically trace his movements—telephoning others to head him off. According to the Captain's calculations, he might depend upon possibly two or three hours before the other man, with all the assistance he needed, would be hot on his trail. Starleigh knew there was an experimental flying-field used by the R.F.C. ten or fifteen miles out of the city—and offered the chauffeur double fare if he made it in twenty minutes. At the field, he spotted an officer whose service-stripes indicated a good bit of observation flying along the firing-line during the war, and greeted him with two words used in a certain way.

"Quite sufficient, old chap—I twig!" said the officer. "What's up?"

"German Intelligence pretty close on my tail—fancy he doesn't love me for the things I've done. Dev'lish important that I get where I'm absolutely safe from that lot until after I've communicated with Downing Street. Couldn't get within ten miles of it just now, d'ye see. So I must somehow wangle a plane for a three-hour flight. Can do?"

"Fancy I'll have to—what? You wavin' an S.O.S. this way! How soon?"

"An hour ago—if that conveys anything!"

"Oh, I say! Close as that, eh? Very good! I'll have you in the air five minutes—mebbe seven. That bus over yon—already fueled. Pilot an' mechanic to ask no questions. Come along!"

Gaining altitude in a wide spiral, the pilot headed southwest in response to a nod from his passenger. Starleigh wrote the question on a piece of paper and held it before him: "Know the Trevor Estate in South Devon—Marquess of Lyonesse?" The pilot grinned, and nodded.

In less than three hours, he came down on the long

airplane-run which went back a quarter of a mile from the brow of the Scabbacombe Cliffs, two hundred feet above the Channel, terminating at a group of concrete hangars and buildings in the heart of a thickly wooded tract. Half a dozen men surrounded Starleigh as he climbed out of the plane and asked if the Marquess was in residence. One of them smilingly introduced himself as Harry Archer—chief electrician and master-mechanic.

"His Lordship is in town at this moment, sir. Pending instructions from him, we shall have to keep you here in the guest house—which I fancy you'll find quite comfortable. You see, nobody is permitted to bring a plane down upon the estate. If they do so, we detain them as pleasantly as possible until we can overhaul their credentials. We can put you in communication with the Marquess by telephone at once if you wish—he returned to Park Lane a few moments ago."

In less than five minutes, Starleigh heard George Trevor's easily recognizable voice—and he reported:

"A-37—F.O., Marquess. I have just got out of a hornets' nest—with some of the hornets pretty close on my tail. Knew this was about the one place they couldn't get at me before I have a chance to report. It's—well—the devil only knows how big a matter! Damn' serious if you ask me! Do you fancy a conference might be arranged with some man from Washington and another from the Quai d'Orsay, at once? They're vitally int'rested."

"Aye—just by chance, we're in luck as to that. One of the United States Senators—old friend of ours—is now here as my guest. Rabaud, of the Cabinet, is now at the French Embassy—I'll be in touch with him in a few minutes. Can fetch them both down in time for dinner at Trevor Hall. Where'd you wangle that plane?"

"From Captain Turner—Experimental Field near Hull. He guarantees the men—"

"Quite sufficient. Tell Harry Archer to entertain them down at the guest house until they feel like leaving—make them thoroughly comfortable. Then have him take the phone. He'll fetch you up to the Hall where a room and a man will be waiting for you."

AT the conference in the Marquess' private library after dinner, Captain Starleigh told in more or less detail what had happened on the sixteenth in Berlin. His audience of five, including Trevor, Senator Branton of Washington, Jules Rabaud of the French Cabinet, Lord Ivonmore of the British War Office, and Harry Archer, listened with absorbed attention—drawing long breaths as they realized the risks that Starleigh had run and the dogged intuition which had kept him in one highly dangerous position after another until his final discovery justified the whole of it. Lord Ivonmore asked, after some moments of silence:

"You fancy they really found out, Captain, that you'd overheard that discussion in Muhlendorff's study?"

"No—there's not one chance in a thousand of that. If nothing happens on the twenty-sixth and they make no demonstration of their disintegrating ray before the first, we'll know that they did find those wire connections and the dictaphone. But if their plans go through on schedule, we can be certain that whatever suspicions of me led to their ordering my elimination here, if their agents found me, were purely circumstantial. The telephone department will laugh at them for believing Karl Pfeiffer was anything but what he seemed. The other lodgers in that Stettin house will give descriptions of him, his sister an' sick brother-in-law, that vary so fundamentally from the plane-crew's recollection of the three who captured the bus that there will be strong doubt even in the minds of the police that they could have been the same persons. The young neighborhood medico will be positive that the brother-in-law was too sick a man for anything of the sort—that he must have suddenly become delirious, jumped out of bed and run toward the river—that they ran after him and all three were drowned—or something like that! The whole train of character I built up would favor that as about the only possible theory.

"If they've got such a ray and plane, they can exact tribute from every nation on earth."

"Now—what should concern every civilized Governm'nt in the world most seriously is whether the German scientists and engineers actually have got a ray and a plane which will do near enough what they're convinced it will, to issue any such ultimatum as they have to Moscow! If they have—well, the cold fact is that they can dominate an' exact tribute from every nation on earth until some defense is found against it—and that may take a good many years, because what Muhlendorff described is so far outside of anything other Governm'nts are now experimentin' upon that it would be a most diffic'lt matter even to start a line of investigation. Frankly—I'm a bit skeptical, myself, as to whatever they have will actually do in a show-down such as they're invitin'. There's but one way to check up on it so that we get exact data: Some of us must be pretty well up in the air before daylight over that flying-field in a plane which we know is too fast and with too high a ceiling for their plane to get us—and actually see—through our glasses—what happens!"

The Marquess quietly said:

"There'll be no diffic'lty as to that. The latest plane we've developed down here is an eight-passenger amphibian with four motors installed tandem in the wings. Cruising-radius with commercial load, seven thousand miles. Speed, with three-quarter load, two hundred an' fifty miles. Ceiling, with fuel an' passengers only, thirty-six thousand feet. With the model we're now testing out, we've made a non-stop flight from this estate to Buenos Aires. I don't know just what weight three coats of liquid glass would run to, but I'd imagine not more than an eighth of the commercial load. My inclination would be to go without any such protection and trust to the additional ceiling gained by eliminating that much extra weight. If I know anything about the methodical working of the Teutonic mind, they'll go out there with two of the planes—one of them just as high up as it can go in order to de-

stroy any attacking planes—the other, to do whatever they're figuring upon doing on the ground. We could fly from here to that field and back again without stopping—but if Muhlendorff's men take their time about the demonstration, we'll have to keep in the air over that field at a high altitude until they're through—which takes the petrol consumed in at least two hundred miles for every hour we stay there. My idea would be to make the Black Sea in one hop during the day—come down in some land-locked isolated bay where the water is smooth an' nobody will interfere with us—then, starting in the middle of the night, get up over that flying-field just about daybreak, and see what happens. There's room in the plane for the six of us if you chaps feel like coming along. Of course there'll be a bit of risk; Moscow cannot afford to let the outside world get so much as a rumor of what happens—the Germans can't permit it until some time after they have Russia thoroughly subjected and a nameless terror spreading through the outside countries. The whole proposition is more or less experimental with them until its force has secured the expected results."

Senator Branton had been smoking calmly—but doing some rather concentrated thinking.

"What's your private opinion about this, Trevor? Think they've really got a plane impervious to any sort of attack—or as destructive as they say?"

"Prob'ly have, else they'd never let themselves in not only for ridicule, but future defiance from Moscow. Remember the German confidence in machine-gun nests until they saw the first line of tanks approaching an' couldn't stop 'em? Well—these ray planes would seem to be somewhat like the tanks—only a damned sight more so. How far they may be invulnerable, the Germans themselves don't know—an' we, most unquestionably, have to find out! Every Governm'nt knows that each of the other ones is constantly workin' upon new weapons of offense and new methods of defense. In a general way, we know pretty well the lines along which they are working. You, for example, over at the Edgewood Arsenal, have got a gas of which you think rather highly—both lethal and destructive of matter. Eh? We don't know what it will do—but your army chiefs fancy you're about as far ahead as the rest of us. Not?"

"Until I heard of this ray-plane, we did. I won't say what we are figuring on in the electric line or lethal gas, either. But we're probably as far along as you are with your mystery planes, or Rabaud with his high-altitude bombers—both of which we've only heard of in a general way. This ray-plane of Muhlendorff's is something altogether new—and rather terrifying. Until some defense is worked out against it, Berlin would have the other nations pretty much at its mercy. Anyhow—you couldn't keep me out of the show if you tried. To hell with the risk!"

In these days of commercial aviation, we book seats in a plane rather nonchalantly. But when it comes to getting into a cabin-plane for forty hours in the air—with probably some other plane trying its damnedest to send us down to destruction—well—that's something else again.

They came down safely in a little bay on the coast of the Crimean Peninsula and remained there, unseen and undisturbed, until it was time to fly north for the neighborhood of Moscow. The Marquess, Archer and Starleigh were exceptional—indeed, rather phenomenal—aviators, familiar with much of the terrain in Europe and America. They flew to that rendezvous for aviation-maneuvers as straight as a migrating duck. Over the field whose twinkling lights shone like tiny stars far below them Archer cut off the motors while the Marquess let the big ship rise gently on a lifting wind—and Captain Starleigh clamped the head-phones of a twelve-valve receiving-set over his ears. By plugging a multiple microphone on to the first detector-valves, he caught sound instead of Hertzian impulses, highly amplified. In a few moments, he sang out:

"They're coming! . . . . Off there a little north of west. Two planes, as the Marquess figured! If those chaps on the ground are simply tuning for broadcasts in their wireless-sets, they can't hear the drone of the motors at all—with this wind blowing toward the Berliners, they won't hear anything until the planes are right on top of them! By what's coming through the mikes, they must be ninety or a hundred miles away."

It was getting lighter in the east. Thirty minutes later they could see the top rim of the sun from their elevation, though the ground was still dark. Through the "mikes" the drone of the oncoming planes had increased to a roar which made Starleigh cut down the volume-control materially. By this time, the sun's rays flashed red on the glass coating of the highest plane for a second or two; then it disappeared in a bank of slowly rising mist. As nearly as the Marquess could judge, it was a good four thousand feet below their level and, with the sun in the pilot's eyes, he hadn't sighted them at all. Archer started his motors again and they climbed three thousand feet higher, just to be on the safe side.

Men rushed out of the barracks and other shacks. As a cat would play with mice, the ray-plane followed them.

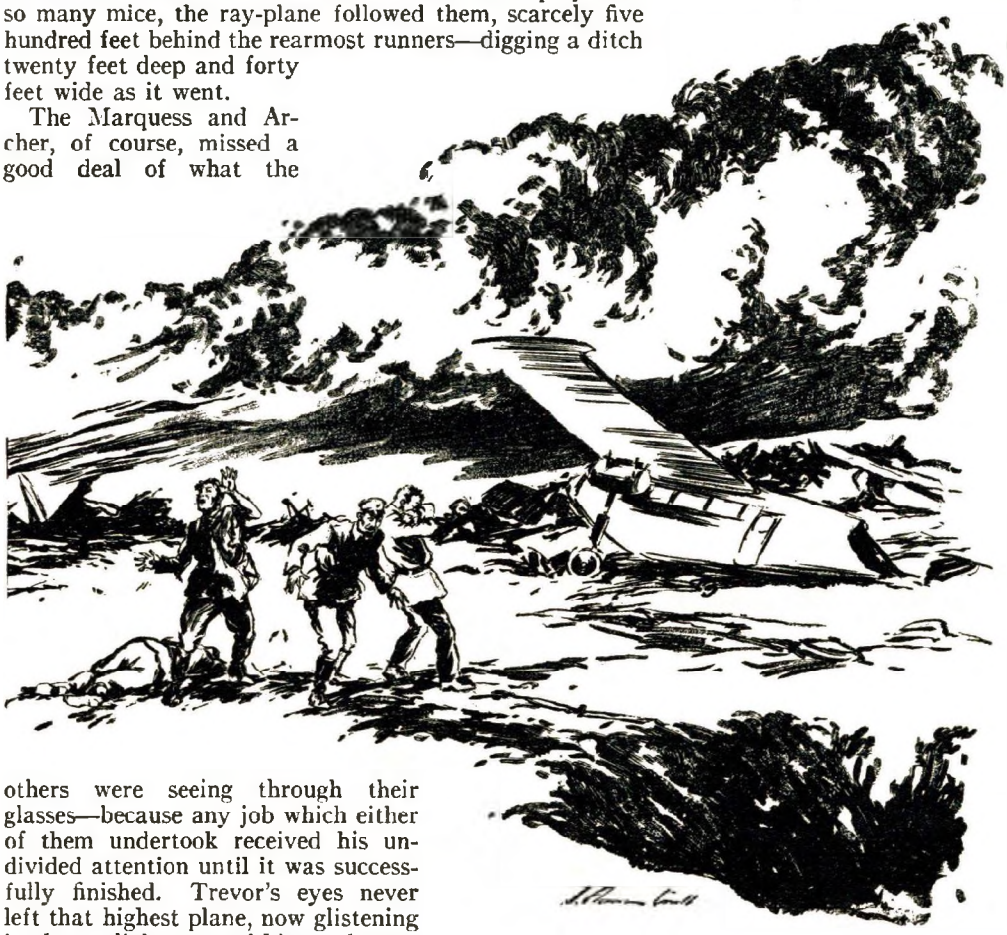
By keeping a little east of the field, Trevor was confident that the German planes couldn't see his ship at all at that elevation, with the sun in their eyes—and the beams were now picking out objects on the ground with red high-lights so that every plane, hangar and building was plainly visible through the prism-binoculars of the four observers. Flying in a wide curve so that it approached the field from the south and had the long row of parked planes extending straight ahead of it, the lower plane approached. Then—at not over two thousand feet—it swooped along up the line. There was a gasp from the observers:

"Oh, my word! Look at that, will you! For heaven's sake, *look!* From this angle you can see clean under that plane—an' there isn't a blasted thing apparently comin' or droppin' from it! Watch, now—*watch!*"

Where there had been glistening wings and fuselages in neat military formation—each parked in its appointed spot—there was now a creeping cloud of dust, earth, debris, struts, metal parts, canvas and wooden bracing—as if half-ton shells were exploding as the plane passed over them. As the destruction started at the lower end of the motionless line, half a dozen men rushed out of the

headquarters building, and climbed into some of the nearest planes, trying to get them into the air. Three planes were destroyed with the men in them before they left the ground. Two got up a thousand feet—and then literally disappeared in mid-air, in a cloud of small fragments and dust. By this time, men were pouring out of the headquarters buildings, the barracks and other shacks at the head of the field. Seeing the approaching destruction, they ran northward for dear life. And as a cat would play with so many mice, the ray-plane followed them, scarcely five hundred feet behind the rearmost runners—digging a ditch twenty feet deep and forty feet wide as it went.

The Marquess and Archer, of course, missed a good deal of what the others were seeing through their glasses—because any job which either of them undertook received his undivided attention until it was successfully finished. Trevor's eyes never left that highest plane, now glistening in the sunlight west of him and some four thousand feet below. According to what Fred Starleigh had overheard in Berlin, that bus would take no chances by directing the electrode of its ray above its own level. Eventually, they might work out a method of making it safe to do so—but they hadn't yet. So the amphibian was reasonably safe from danger as long as that other ship was below it. With the minds of its crew intent upon what was happening below. Trevor doubted that his ship had been seen at any time; and he firmly intended it should not be seen. . . . When the destroyers finished their work they gained altitude and disappeared in the west.



Again, Starleigh switched in the wireless-set with the microphones and listened until he said he was just about losing their drone, over a hundred miles away. Then he took the controls and the Marquess, with Harry Archer's assistance, set an aërial camera over an aperture in the floor of the cabin. Then they flew down to a scant thousand feet above the ground level—and proceeded to get negatives of what had been, two hours before, one of the best-equipped flying-fields in Europe. There was no vestige of a building left—nor anything resembling ruins of one—just mounds and craters of fine black dust. Where a level field had stretched for more than half a mile in each direction, there was now a checkerboard of ditches thirty feet deep and a hundred feet apart. As there was enough petrol in the tanks for a straight flight to Devon, the Marquess headed for home at top speed with Archer watching the motors, while the other four slept. Next day the negatives were developed—Rabaud being supplied with prints for the French Cabinet and the Senator with those for the Foreign Relations Committee in Washington. That night, the Radio Intelligence Bureau in Whitehall (a private enterprise owned by the Marquess and Earl Lammerford) picked up a code dispatch from Berlin to the men in power at Moscow. Translated, this read:

> We understand there is some talk in Moscow of using the site of the Kremlin for a golf-course or sports-field. If there is any sentiment in favor of this, we would be pleased to coöperate. Meanwhile we are awaiting the safe-conduct for our German engineers and operatives in the Nijni Novgorod area.
>
> MUHLENDORFF,
> *For the Reich.*

Senator Branton looked at Rabaud, who in turn looked at the Marquess and Lord Ivonmore.

"Well, gentlemen—what's the answer? I haven't any doubt that France and Britain could find out where those planes are being built and bomb the whole works into smithereens. But they'd simply build others in another place. As long as Berlin has the secret of that ray and ships which can use it, those fellows are a menace to every other nation on earth! What can be done about it?"

The Marquess's lips curved in a faint smile.

"Some of us are in the fortunate position, Tom, of having reached an age where worldly terrors of the next few years fail to impress or alarm us much—we'll be only memories in so short a time. But to those of you who are younger, we can emphasize these facts: In all the history of mankind, for every deadly weapon invented a reasonably sure defense has been found before it has been used a score of times. After that hectic flight in our amphibian—of which neither Berlin nor Moscow has the least suspicion as far as we know—we are at least two years in advance of where the Germans figured or intended us to be. French, American and British engineers and scientists are a match any day in the year for those of any or all other countries on the globe. We know tonight just what line of laboratory research to work upon. While Berlin imagines itself secure in its secret for some time to come, we'll be working to nullify and defeat it. What really is uppermost in my mind at this moment is our indebtedness to that phlegmatic, plodding 'Karl Pfeiffer'—with his worsted vest, his knitted muffler, close-cropped hair and steel-rimmed spectacles; also to his clever sister, and his stout-hearted brother-in-law!"

Devil's Salvage

A stirring story of wild adventure in the Caribbean, by the distinguished author of "Sea Scamps," "Pearl Island" and other noted books.

The Story So Far:

DANGEROUS business, gun-running! Yet it all started naturally enough: Clare Costello and her brother Jim had been left nearly penniless by the death of their father, save for a small seagoing motor-yacht. So they had gone into business with their yacht, the *Jacana*—chartering to scientific and exploring expeditions, carrying small express cargoes and the like.

On this trip, however, there were some heavy boxes aboard that Jim was reticent about. And he had left Clare in charge of the boat near the mouth of a Central American river, while he went upstream on business. Two days later, shortly before dawn a native runner brought Clare the startling message:

"If this boy reaches you in time, slip downriver and out to sea and make for Trinidad. Lopez and I were nabbed, are now in calaboose. Patrol-boat apt to start down at daylight. If they grab the schooner, good night! Do what you can from Trinidad to get me clear."

Even as Clare read the note, she saw the patrol-boat's searchlight seeking the *Jacana*. And her negro crew were ashore A.W.O.L. . . . Well, she could run that boat by herself: she put to sea just in time to escape the patrol-boat, and laid a course for Trinidad.

Soon after sunup, however, she all but ran down a dugout manned by seven wretched convicts escaped from Devil's Island. The dugout was swamped, and in spite of the danger, Clare took the men aboard the *Jacana*. The convict leader was the blond Russian giant called Ivan. Second in command was the Englishman Frank. The rest were simply—*les miserables;* yet they showed every respect to the lone girl Clare who had saved them.

Clare told her story to Ivan; he explained that the convicts could not risk Trinidad, but offered to provide money to effect Jim's release. This money was to come from a treasure buried on a small uninhabited island by a fellow-convict who had died, but had, in gratitude for a great favor, bequeathed his secret to Ivan.

The *Jacana* made the journey to that island without difficulty—but they found it inhabited by a gang of counterfeiters who at once opened fire upon them from their own larger motor cruiser. The *Jacana* rounded a promontory to temporary safety. And Ivan—certain that the more powerful vessel which had attacked and pursued them so ruthlessly would soon overtake and sink them—put Clare under Frank's escort ashore in a small boat.

The *Jacana* and her convict crew under Ivan escaped. But Clare and Frank were made prisoners by the brutal counterfeit chief Considine. Clare was given a room in Considine's own bungalow. While she was ministering to Frank, who was exhausted by privation and had been knocked down by Considine, the counterfeiter chief returned. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THERE had been no sound of his approach, and that alone had a sinister significance. Then as she whirled about angrily, Clare discovered that he was in a state of suppressed emotion of some sort.

He forestalled her angry challenge of his presence by saying in a curious muffled voice: "I can't sleep. I'm taken that way sometimes, and it's hell. Apt to go off my chump unless I can talk to somebody."

Clare answered haughtily: "Well, what's that got to do with me? I believe you told me that I was not going to be disturbed."

"That," said Considine, "was a protocol until you had decided to accept my offer."

"I have not had time to decide. I am tired and I can't think clearly. Please go and let me rest, for at least tonight."

He did not answer, nor did he move, but stood staring at her. Something in his expression, the predatory glare of his pale eyes, brought the blood burning to Clare's face. She glanced about her, not furtively or as if looking for some way of escape, but rather as if looking for a weapon of any sort with which she might defend herself.

In the same smothered voice Considine said: "You have had enough time to think. We must thresh this out here and now."

He stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. . . .

Clare had discovered the moment he spoke that there was something wrong with him besides his naturally venomous character. A flush of his high cheek-bones

By HENRY C. ROWLAND

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

burned out under his yellow tropic tan. His pupils were scarcely more than pin-points. Clare had noticed this trait when first startled by the sinister quality that was given his expression from the paleness of his eyes. Any eyes of light shade look pale when the black circumference of the pupils is contracted.

If the seagoing experience of the girl had been in the Orient, where the use of *papaver somnolens* is prevalent, she would have promptly recognized the symptoms of a narcotic. But in the present case it was even worse than that—a combination of alcohol with opium, dangerous not only to those encountered by the individual but to that ill-advised person as well.

There were other symptoms. Previously, Considine had been immaculately clad, as smart and freshly bathed as a naval officer on his quarter-deck. But now in a short lapse of time, he had undergone a curious befouling. Not only were his clothes creased and rumpled, but they showed spots and stains and there was a smear across his face. His hair was in disorder. He had thrown off his coat somewhere; in fact, he looked as if he had started to do work in the shop, then changed his mind and decided to pay Clare a visit. He wore a light silk shirt, loose white trousers and native shoes, such as are in general use along the Caribbean shores.

It had been all very well for Clare to assure herself that she was not afraid of him and at the moment it had been true. She had not been afraid of a rational Considine, no matter how arbitrary, cruel, even brutal he might choose to become. But Considine was now a different person—not only irresponsible but under a new sort of evil impulse. The devil in him had taken charge. He was a different and far more dangerous man than the vindictive bully who had struck down Frank. She could feel that this period of pause was not to summon resolution for an attack on her but a sort of gloating, the suspended anticipation of his victim. He was like a savage beast that pauses to glare at its prey before the lethal spring.

She realized also that her own physical strength might not avail her against this man when not supplemented by a moral strength as well. Considine was not at this moment subject to the inhibiting effect of this latter and more subtle force. In this moment of stasis there flared across her mind Jim's maxim for a moment of crisis. This was to the effect that when attack was certain one should not stay on the defensive, but go to meet it with a vigorous offensive.

But such a maneuver can be difficult—often impossible—from the enervation of dread which can paralyze even flight, as witness the rabbit and the stoat. It is doubtful if Clare in her growing horror could have employed it but for that strongest of stimuli: the defense of some other helpless one also exposed to danger.

For at this moment there came an inarticulate sound from the next room, a sort of whimper like that of a child in a troubled dream. Considine heard it and his head jerked up and turned a little with a movement curiously suggestive of a predatory bird.

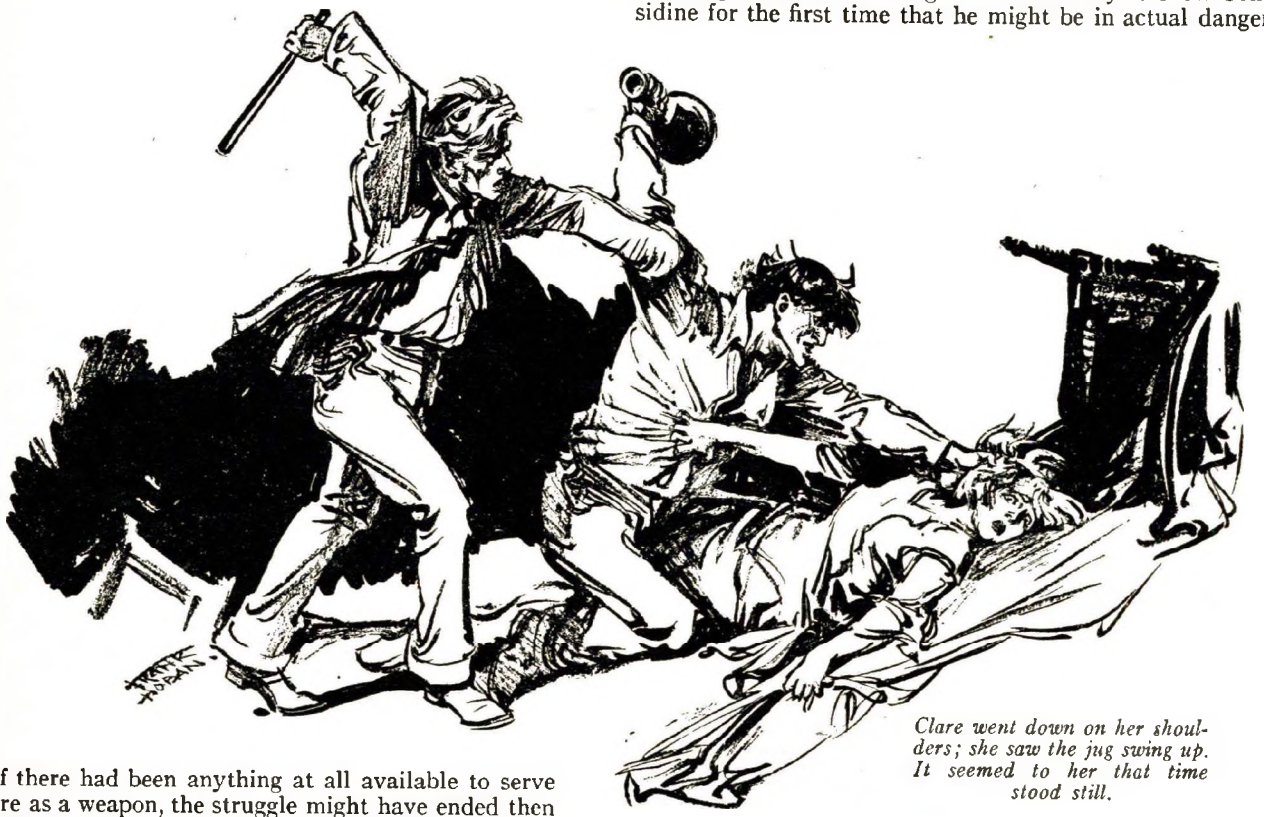
"What was that?"

There was a rustle from the other side of the plank wall—actually no more than a partition with free air space above. Then came the creaking of the wire springs.

Considine's head was still turned to listen. This diversion was precisely what Clare needed, not only because it distracted for a moment the paralysis she had felt under the flat glare of the pale pupil-less eyes, but even more because it transferred her mind from her own danger to that of another. It ignited in her something akin to the maternal sense of protection that even in the lower forms of animal life is present to the extent of sacrifice. Her high courage returned; it blazed up in her, under the stimulus of Frank's danger.

She waited no longer for the attack impending. Considine would have an added potentiality for violence if he should discover the helpless man in his own room. Before he could set himself to resist an attack that he could not possibly have anticipated, Clare flung herself upon him.

She was very strong with muscles hardened from pulling and hauling a wheel. Her hands though small were solid and compact. At odd moments Jim had taught her the rudiments of how to strike. Before Considine realized what was happening he found himself hurled back against the door, staggered by a storm of furious blows against his face and body.



Clare went down on her shoulders; she saw the jug swing up. It seemed to her that time stood still.

If there had been anything at all available to serve Clare as a weapon, the struggle might have ended then and there. But instinctively he clinched with her before her blows had been in any way effective. He did not try to strike. It may have seemed to him that there could be no need to strike. This furious girl probably appeared for a moment to be in a fear-inspired frenzy. Or it may have been that there lurks in all male creatures however brutal a tendency to inhibit destructive violence employed against the female of their kind, particularly when of beauty, and desired.

Whatever the reason Considine now found himself on the defensive where he had meant to project the reverse. Probably he did not believe that the fury could last very long and Clare's violence must have roused an even stronger urge in him. Perhaps it served to some extent to clear his head from a fog of opium and alcohol. He was, of course, stronger than Clare and more skilled in this sort of combat. But like many a man who has underrated the strength of a frantic and infuriated woman, he found himself suffering physical damage—superficial perhaps, but overwhelming while it lasted.

Clare did not employ the tactics of the ring and wrestling-mat; she fought literally with tooth and nail, not as would have been the case with many girls in her position who would have had only the idea of escape, but to destroy.

They reeled back against the door, Considine attempting to clasp and hold the striking clawing hands that tried to throttle him. He was astonished at the difficulty of breaking their grip and in his effort to do so Clare's teeth fastened in his forearm. Considine tried to trip her, hooking his leg round hers—but the attempt resulted, as bound to when it fails, in being tripped himself. They crashed to the floor, side by side. Clare writhed out of his clasp and flinging herself across him loosed her hands from his neck, seized his head on the other side, raised it slightly and brought it down with a crash on the planking.

If she could have executed this maneuver with a little more force it might have finished the struggle. But the stunning result was lacking. It served only to show Considine for the first time that he might be in actual danger from the fury of this maddened girl whose strength showed no signs of abating. That was indeed the secret of Clare's efficiency. The result was not as the man had expected, a mere flurry that must quickly exhaust itself and abate. Her strength was not merely of the athletic type, but that of one accustomed to continuous expenditure of force under conditions of the sort entailed in handling a vessel. So now as she struggled with Considine, he found the first violence of her efforts abated a little only to make them more purposeful and effective.

He was a strong man, seldom self-indulgent but not accustomed to much physical effort, and he found now to his dismay that he could not hold this girl long enough to protect himself from damage. His face was bleeding from scratches and abrasions. One of his eyes burned severely and his head was humming from the crash against the floor.

Real ferocity now possessed him and with the realization that here was no mere tantrum with which he had to deal, Considine changed his tactics to a definite offense.

As they writhed and twisted about on the floor each trying to secure the upper position, Considine managed to loose a blow that would have finished the affair if it had landed squarely instead of glancing. It no longer mattered to him if he maimed the girl or struck her senseless to the point of death.

Their floundering and writhing had brought them against the head of the bed. Considine's bleared eyes spied an earthen water-jug on the night-table and he

managed to haul himself up on the iron frame so as to grasp its neck in one hand while with the other he clutched Clare's thick hair and thrust her head back.

Her elbow slipped and she went down on her shoulders. She saw the jug swing up. Her strength, nearly gone by this time, was unequal to further violent effort; it seemed to Clare as she stared at the red earthen water-monkey poised in air that time stood still. She closed her eyes.

But the crushing blow did not fall. Clare had partially anticipated it so that she scarcely noticed the sound of other impact. She became conscious of a sudden increase in Considine's weight as his body sagged down, then pitched forward.

This contact roused Clare from her lethargy of defeat. The sudden loosing of this high tension just when she had been prepared to receive a crushing *coup-de-grace* struck through her with a loathing that acted as a stimulant. Her strength flared up in a final desperate effort and she writhed from under Considine. Then she looked up and saw Frank bending over her. He held in one hand a heavy ferule of ebony or some other dark heavy wood.

"Good for you!" Clare panted. "Have you killed him?"

"Don't know. Let's hope so. He had it coming." Frank's grip tightened on the ferule and he stared down at Considine. "Perhaps I had better make sure."

"No, don't do that."

"He will come around presently—and then what?"

The water-monkey had rolled away on its side unbroken. Clare picked it up and drank thirstily what water was left in it. She looked at Frank. For the first time there was a faint color in his sunken cheeks. "We ought to get out of here, Clare," Frank said, still staring down at Considine's limp body.

Clare stood for a moment panting from her last violent exertion. She became suddenly conscious of the smarting and aching of innumerable spots where her skin was scratched or scraped or the deeper tissues bruised. Her head throbbed and there was a warm salty taste in her mouth. She raised her hand to her lips and brought it away smeared with blood.

FRANK had knelt down beside Considine's body to feel the action of his heart, then said in a muffled voice: "The filthy beggar's still breathing."

Clare slipped on the towel robe she had thrown across the back of a chair.

"He ought not to be dangerous for a while," she said.

But Frank shook his head grimly.

"A venomous snake is dangerous even after he is dead. You might get your death by stepping on his bleached fang. Besides, Considine's not the only one. There's another—a brute named Mallock. Pierre tells me he's even worse."

"Is there no way for us to get away from this horrible island, Frank?"

"Not a chance. These birds keep a bright lookout night and day."

"What about our dory?"

"They've taken her off to the yacht. They keep a lookout always on her bridge and there's another stationed on the top of the mole."

Clare glanced down at Considine who was still unconscious and breathing like a man dead drunk or under an anæsthetic.

"What shall we do with him, Frank?"

"There's nothing much to do. He'll come around when he gets ready. Besides the wallop I gave him, he's full of dope. Let's put him on the bed in the other room."

They did this; then Clare went to her room to wash off her many scratches and abrasions and to bandage one or two of them. When she went back into the living-room, Frank was sitting in a wicker chair composedly smoking a cigarette to which he had helped himself. He looked as if he had dropped in casually to make an evening call.

"Well, where do we go from here?" he asked.

THERE seemed no answer to this. The ragged little rocky island offered no hiding-place. The only possible escape must be by boat.

"This looks like the worst jam yet," said Clare, "whether Considine weathers through or not."

Frank said indifferently: "Oh, he'll come around. The reptilia take a lot of killing! And that would be another reason to keep him from coming round if it wasn't for this other brute."

"Would you really do that, Frank?"

"Not for myself—but like a shot, for *you*."

She shook her head. "I don't think I could stand it even for you. Even though it's certain that he'll get you, Frank."

"Oh, well—" His voice was weary again. "What's the blooming odds? I've had my taste of freedom. And then too I've known you—and that's worth a whole lot. After all, my only ambition left was not to die in that sink of hell back there. Do you know, I had a curious feeling about that. It seemed to me that if I slipped out I'd never get clear of that scum in this world or the next."

"Don't talk about dying," Clare said. "You've not gone this far to let yourself get knocked out by Considine or any of his gang. There's always the chance that after this he may get better sense."

Frank shook his head. "Another man might, but not this bird. He's a hophead."

"What?"

"A dope addict—opium or one of its derivatives. I saw that the minute I looked at him. That's what makes his eyes so pale and reptilian, pupils contracted, down to pinpoints."

"He had been drinking tonight," Clare said.

"Well, that's even worse. Opium is bad enough, but alcohol combined with it is fatal."

This explanation made Considine's behavior more clear to Clare. He had probably left her that evening with no fixed intention of molesting her. His money avarice was at that moment predominant; he had seen the means of profit to himself through Clare's and Frank's landing on the island.

Considine had no doubt stated the truth in saying that such men as Jim and Frank could be of great value to him in the disposition of his product. He needed the paradoxical combination so indispensable to many lines of unlawful commerce; straight men to play a crooked game. Considine would appreciate the advantage of securing such operatives in his field force.

"When Considine left me tonight the chances are he meant to keep his agreement not to disturb my privacy. Then he lost his head," she said slowly.

Frank nodded. "He went to other quarters. Then as he was getting ready to turn in, the thought of you stuck in his head. It began to torment him and he took a drink or two and that made it worse. He came back here and barged in on you as you were ready for bed and that finished him."

"Yes. For a moment I was badly scared. He saw that and it made things worse. Then you moaned in your sleep and turned on the bed. I could see that he suspected you were in there, in his room, which he had left for the sake of my privacy. That was more than he could stand, especially in his drugged, alcoholic condition. But it did something to me too."

"I get you," Frank said. "It shifted your worry about what might happen to yourself, to what was pretty certain to happen to me. That pulled you together?"

"Yes, that's just it. Instead of being afraid of this brute I felt more like a mother. I remembered then something Jim had said—that when you knew you were certain to be attacked not to wait for it—to strike first."

Frank looked at her with a fresh glow of admiration in his eyes. "And you struck! If he hadn't got within reach of that water-monkey I'll bet you'd have got away with him."

"I don't know. I was nearly played out. But so was he, for that matter. If it could only have turned out that way it would have been better."

Frank was silent, then said as if to himself: "I wonder—"

"Wonder what?"

"If he'll remember what really struck him. He couldn't have heard the door open or he'd have looked around."

"That's an idea. The chances are his head was humming and his brain confused. The trouble is he suspected already that you were in there. And I don't see how he could help but remember that I couldn't have laid him out."

"It looks that way," Frank agreed. "But still you can't tell about a man in his condition."

"At any rate," Clare said, "that seems to be our only chance. The best we can do is to try it. Wait a minute."

SHE rose and went into the room where Considine was lying unconscious. The ferule was where Frank had dropped it. Clare picked up the water-jug and as she did so Considine moaned. She glanced at him and saw his eyelids flicker. Clare stooped over him, raised the water-jug and smashed it to pieces on the floor beside his head. A quiver passed through his limp limbs and body and they seemed to relax again.

Clare went out. She looked at Frank and tapped her lips with her finger, then motioned him to the door of the cabin.

"You had better go back," she said when they were outside under the stars. "Where are you quartered?"

"Old Pierre took me in with him. He has a small room partitioned off in the factory."

"Wake him up and tell him what's happened. Get him to say that he was with you all the evening if Considine should question him."

Frank nodded. "Pierre is my best bet. Considine may not believe him, but Pierre's a stubborn old bird and they couldn't get along without him."

"You'd better go," Clare said. "Considine seems to be coming round."

Frank hesitated. "I'd rather stick around outside."

"There's no good in that. There'll be no more to fear from Considine tonight, and besides you might be seen."

When he had gone Clare stood for a few moments breathing deeply the sweet night air; then she went back into the cabin. She picked up the heavy ferule, wiped off its end and replaced it on the table. There came a sound from the bedroom. Considine opened his eyes and stared at her blankly. The side of his face was covered with dried blood.

Clare pressed the button of the Chinaman's bell.

Considine's consciousness was rapidly returning. He stared at her unwaveringly; there was something reptilian about his steady unblinking scrutiny.

Clare asked in a low voice: "How do you feel?"

He blinked, then swallowed and tried to speak, but failed to make more than a strangled inarticulate sound. Clare stepped into the other room where there was another water-jug, brought it back and held it to his lips so that a little water trickled between them.

"My head!" Considine gasped. He moved restlessly, stretched, but all the time his eyes were fastened on her. She moistened a piece of the torn sheet and washed away the blood that had clotted on his head. Unconsciousness had probably saved him from a considerable hemorrhage. She parted his thick hair and saw that his skull was sliced for several inches as cleanly as if with a knife. The blow from even an obtuse object makes a scalp wound of this sort.

Considine did not speak nor did he show any feeling whatever whether of mind or body. He watched Clare under his half-closed lids. The scalp wound should be stitched, she thought. She had at different times performed such minor surgery aboard the yacht, but did not know where to find the accessories now.

There came a soft slithering outside and Sun Yat the Chinaman appeared in the doorway. Glancing at him Clare had a fleeting impression that she saw a look of satisfaction, a sort of pleased recognition of the state of affairs, before his face set in a mask of Oriental immobility.

In fact, an astute mind was not needed to guess precisely what had happened. The bruises and abrasions shown by both, and Considine's semiconscious condition, told a story of which Clare was not the victim.

Without waiting for an order Sun Yat vanished to reappear with the sort of medical and surgical box that might be required by the Board of Commerce for deep-sea ships. Clare stitched up Considine's head. He did not wince, due perhaps to the opium not yet eliminated from his system. Yet Clare had the feeling that he was rearranging his ideas, putting his thoughts in order before making any commentaries or asking questions.

It was not until she said to the Chinaman, "Let's carry him into his own room," that Considine spoke.

"I can walk," he muttered, and swung his legs out of the bed and stood up. Then, aided on either side by Clare and Sun Yat, he went through the door and took a few steps toward the other bedroom.

As he stood upon the threshold Clare realized too late her fatal oversight. Absorbed in her first-aid treatment, she had not thought about going first into the next room to remove any traces of Frank's presence there. Now it was too late. Considine stood staring at the rumpled bed, the cover flung aside and partly on the floor.

He looked at Clare. "So that's it! I thought so."

There seemed nothing for her to say. Her heart sank as though she had heard a death-sentence pronounced on Frank. Sheer despair seized her. It seemed each successive day brought a crisis worse than that of the day before. She wondered what further climax there might yet be.

CHAPTER VIII

CONSIDINE stared at the rumpled bed as if trying to decide whether or not to use it. Sun Yat had smoothed it and folded back the flowered cover. Clare wished that Considine would say something. The suspense was worse than action, however violent.

But he moved to the bed, stretched himself out upon it without words and closed his eyes. Sun Yat brought fresh water. Considine said to Clare, who had lingered in the hope of learning what might be the extent of his suspicion: "You need not wait."

She went back to her room and sat on the side of the bed, shivering slightly. Considine silent, uncommunicative, stricken, was more terrible than Considine bullying in the full vigor of his strength. A man of that type, she reflected was most to be dreaded when he fell back on his thoughts, plans and broodings. Violence for such men is not a safety-valve, but leaves the subject still more malign; they are of the venomous order like serpents, apt to strike without warning.

Clare had already thought that Considine's bullying was probably no more than a faulty effort at intimidation and a gesture to impress himself with a sense of determination. He knew now that there had been somebody lying on that bed when he came into the cabin and he would suspect that it was not Clare who knocked him senseless.

She had hoped to persuade him that it had been herself who had managed to get hold of the water-jug and had dealt the blow. This might have been possible through his confusion of mind if she had thought first to remove all signs of his room having been occupied. But it was now too late for that and not even an attempt on Pierre's part to establish an alibi for Frank could be of any use.

Sun Yat looked at her with dancing eyes. "Missus fix Captain pretty good," he said.

There was nothing to do about it, Clare thought wearily. She switched off the light and lay down on the bed. Though crushingly fatigued she felt she could not sleep. Her mind was on Frank and on what might happen to him. It would have been better if he had carried out his offer to make an end of Considine. But that would have been an act of cold-blooded expediency that she could not possibly have sanctioned.

It was one thing to kill in self-defense and entirely another to do so when the victim lay unconscious. She wondered if Frank would actually have performed such an act. Probably, if convinced that her safety demanded it; for her sake but not for his own, just as he had said. That was what Guiana did to a man. The fact that he had not killed Considine without her sanction was probably because of the other man whom he had mentioned as a greater potential danger to her than even Considine himself, and the hope that the latter might be persuaded it was Clare herself who had knocked him senseless.

The fault in such cases was usually an incompleteness of method, a lack of finality. An utterly ruthless opportunist would have killed Considine, then gone and made way with the other source of danger if necessary. But people with any lingering sense of scruple could not do that sort of thing—and many had perished through sense of scruple. Perhaps after all it was better to lose one's life than to extinguish the divine spark of human conscience.

Clare wondered what Frank had meant, or rather, if he had spoken the truth in saying that he did not greatly care what happened to himself now that he had tasted liberty and known her. It was a declaration of wholehearted devotion and it had rung true. There could not be much criminality in Frank, she thought, not any more than there might be in most persons lax in self-control.

Turning these problems in her mind, Clare fell asleep and did not waken until daylight was streaming into her window. She found she was extremely stiff and sore and bruised, but she put these minor considerations aside and wondered how Considine had fared and what his next move would be. She was thinking about this when there came the sound of somebody outside her door. It opened softly and she saw Considine himself standing in the aperture.

For a moment their eyes remained fixed on each other. She saw that Considine's face was pale and marred by scratches and contusions, but otherwise he did not seem much the worse for what he passed through. He even smiled a little as he looked down at her.

"How do you feel?" he asked, and came into the room. Clare repressed an impulse to shriek. She did not feel equal to another struggle.

Considine read her thought. He drew up the wicker chair to the foot of the bed and sank into it, then said: "Don't be afraid. I am back in my right mind. I'm sorry about last night."

"You ought to be," Clare answered. "You broke your promise."

"I know it. That was due to drink. I seldom drink. I can't afford to, with this game of mine."

"Why did you, then?"

"Because I couldn't sleep. But it only made it worse. I was a little off my head."

She did not answer and he sat staring at her thoughtfully for a moment, then glanced down at the shattered water-jug on the floor.

"Did I strike you with that thing?" he asked. "I don't seem to remember clearly just what happened."

Clare's intuition told her that he was lying.

"No," she said. "If you had I'd be dead. The jug was full of water."

"Then what did happen?" he asked.

Again she felt intuitively that he was tempting her to lie. The same instinct warned her too that to do so would be faulty tactics, an admission of fear.

"What do you think?" she parried.

"I don't think—I know. Somebody who was in that room opened the door and struck me over the head. That could only have been one person—this man Fanch or Frank, I believe you called him."

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"Nothing. On the whole I am glad. As you say, I might have killed you otherwise. He saved me from that. It's far better to be knocked out oneself than to kill a girl like you."

His voice was smoother now but Clare did not believe him. No doubt he spoke the truth when he said that he was glad to have been saved from killing her, but she could not believe that he intended to do nothing about it—to let Frank's act pass without revenge.

She said steadily: "It all depends on what you think is apt to be most worth your while, Captain Considine. Whether to revenge yourself and then try again to maltreat me, or to strengthen what you call your 'field force.'"

"Do you think there's still a chance of that?" he asked. "After what happened last night?"

"I am willing to put that aside if you keep it from happening again. I knew that you had been drinking and were out of your head."

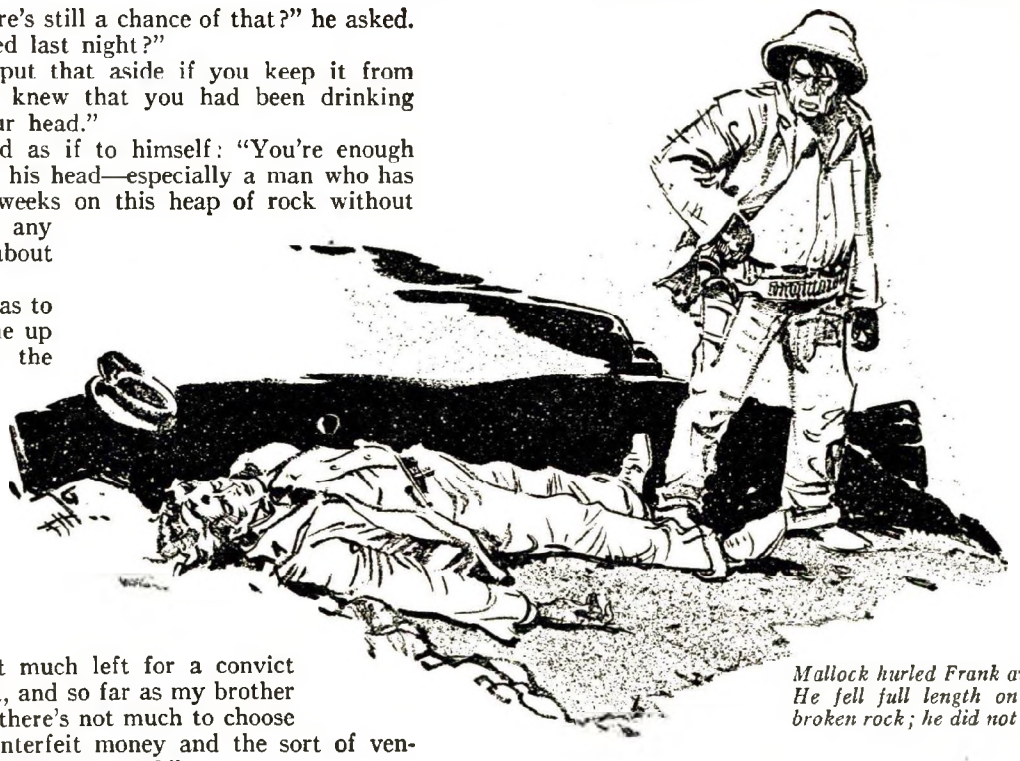
Considine muttered as if to himself: "You're enough to drive any man off his head—especially a man who has been marooned for weeks on this heap of rock without seeing a woman of any sort at all. But what about this Fanch?"

"His only object was to protect me. He came up here to talk about the offer you made us."

"What did you both decide?"

It seemed to Clare that the time had come to temporize. She needed to gain time.

"We couldn't see what else there was to do about it. After all, there's not much left for a convict escaped from Guiana, and so far as my brother and I are concerned there's not much to choose between passing counterfeit money and the sort of ventures in which we've been engaged."



Mallock hurled Frank away. He fell full length on the broken rock; he did not stir.

Considine gave her a searching look.

"I hoped you'd see it that way," he said. "It gives me even less excuse for my insane behavior last night. However, as it turned out perhaps it's just as well. It's taught me something."

"What?"

"Well, I'd never have believed that there was such a girl as you—one ready and able to protect herself as you did. I may be wrong, but I'm under the impression that you pitched into me before I'd made any hostile move."

"Your coming here at that time was hostile move enough for me," Clare said. "There could be only one reason for it."

He nodded. "Sometimes I like to think of myself as the ruthless avatar. As a matter of fact, I am no more than a fairly clever crook."

This frank statement surprised her but she was still distrustful. "You seem to be rather more than that," she said equivocally.

"Yes, rather more than that. I am Irish born, and English educated. Since the war I've been a 'wrong 'un.' Probably I was always that way but it didn't ferment until then. Never mind about that now; what concerns us at the moment is our next step. I've fallen hard for you, as they say in the States. That's apt to make it hard for us both—unless something's done about it."

"Why not parole me and let me go?" Clare asked.

"I don't dare. I can't afford to take the chance. Besides in that case I'd have no hold on your brother."

"You'd have no hold on him now if he knew that you were keeping me here a prisoner."

"That's just the point. He mustn't know that. You've got to write him a letter to say that this proposition looks good to you and you think he'd better throw in with me."

Clare considered this, or rather she considered what she had best do about it. She did not think that Jim would ever believe that she had written such a letter, giving such advice, except under coercion. She had urged him too many times to keep clear of all crooked traffic.

But she was afraid that Jim, in his present situation, might see fit to join up with Considine and try to persuade himself that he had her sanction. Jim's scruples she knew had become more and more elastic and he might stretch them to the point of letting himself be misguided. If Considine were to carry out his agreement, visit Jim in jail, tell him that the schooner had been captured by escaped convicts and Clare set ashore on this island station of counterfeiters Jim might easily feel that the best he could do for them both would be to accept the terms offered. Considine would take care that these were tempting. Jim might be actually in a very bad fix. No man was apt to protest a measure that would get him out of a filthy South American jail and at the same time put him in a way to retrieve his lost fortunes. It was, as Frank had said, like being captured by pirates and offered the alternative of joining a so-far successful venture—or walking the plank.

"When would you try to get my brother out?" she asked.

"At once. I'd go myself. I'm under no suspicion and free to come and go as I choose. It's thought that I'm engaged in this research work of making a substitute for tire rubber." He smiled. "You may believe me or not, but the curious feature of it all is that I am really not so far from doing that very thing."

"If you could, it would make your counterfeiting business look like stealing pennies from a poor-box. Also it would have the added advantage of being legitimate."

Considine nodded. "The trouble so far is that our product dries and hardens too quickly. But this old convict Pierre hopes to find a solution for that. He was a very able analytic chemist before he turned to counterfeiting. In fact, he did that latter thing for the sake of finding funds to go on with his research work."

"Then Pierre is your mainstay here?"

"Yes. That's the reason I've had to put up with him as I did yesterday. And to be perfectly frank, that's the reason I must keep my hands off your shipmate. On the other hand, if Pierre gets too high-handed he knows that all I have to do is to put him aboard a boat and shove him ashore at Cayenne when I am through with him. But that,"—he gave his thin smile,—"has its drawbacks."

Clare began to feel better. This sort of talk was the last

thing she had expected. When they had sighted the island it had seemed to her that all was smooth sailing ahead; they were to find the treasure, get Jim liberated, and all become rich. Going even farther back, she realized that the very situations that appeared dreadful had turned out fortunately and the ones that appeared fortunate had turned out dreadful. One never knew how things were going to break. It gave her a sense of fatality, as if she were a sort of pawn being shoved about by a tricky destiny.

Somebody came into the cabin. "Here's Sun Yat with some breakfast," Considine said. He rose stiffly and raised his hand to his head. "If you want to go down to the shore and bathe, it will be perfectly safe."

Clare felt that that was precisely what she needed. The soft stimulating brine would be good for her abrasions. Sailors know the healing to be found in sea-water.

Considine went out, closing the door behind him. Clare got up, put on her wrapper and slippers, went out and walked down to the beach. She saw two or three men going in and out of the plant. Coming to the beach of black lava sand she went around a little point of rock that sheltered her from observation. Stripping, she plunged into the limpid water and swam about slowly and luxuriously. She seemed to feel the soreness and stiffness leaving her limbs and body, though at first they smarted keenly.

MUCH refreshed, she went back into the cabin. Considine had had his breakfast and gone. Sun Yat served her excellent coffee and brought in some eggs and fresh fried fish.

"Pretty good chow," he said, watching her eat with approval. Then he looked at her with dancing eyes. "Missus fix Captain pretty good."

She thought that he was referring to her surgical attentions. "I've had a good deal to do with cuts and bruises," she said.

He shook his head. "Don't mean that. Mean you beat him up whole lot. Maybe he lay off you now."

Even the inscrutable Oriental face can show the workings of the mind behind it, when it so desires. Clare saw that the Chinaman's sympathy was entirely with herself. She asked: "Does the Captain pay you pretty well, Sun Yat?"

He shook his head. "Captain like money pretty good. He pay me only what I go ashore. He promise by-and-by land me in the States. Maybe so."

Clare was not greatly surprised. Considine had avarice plainly written in his face. She asked: "Do you mean to say you don't get any share in the profits of what they are doing here?"

"No fear, Missus," he replied. "Why pay me more when he don't need? Suppose I get ashore—then he pay me pretty good, I guess!"

The Chinaman's resentment and his hint of blackmail was not lost on Clare.

"Couldn't you manage to get ashore?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No can do. How get-um boat? How know which way go? Maybe sailors know how. Me no sailor. Me Canton man."

Here, at least, was a possible ally if occasion for escape presented itself. But the chances for that were nil and there was no time to plan. Jim could not be neglected indefinitely.

She finished her breakfast and going to the desk sat down to compose the letter. It must be, she reflected, of a sort to satisfy Considine, yet not urging Jim to accept his offer. Also, knowing her brother's stubbornness she felt that to say in so many words that she was a prisoner here exposed to danger would be making a stalemate. Jim would take no action until he knew to his positive knowledge that she was safe. and Considine would not set her free until Jim was bound to him—if then.

After considerable effort Clare produced the following:

"Dear Bud:

"In acting on your directions to clear for Trinidad I had to shove off single-handed. The crew had sneaked ashore while I was asleep. The searchlight of a boat was showing around a bend three miles upstream.

"I cleared, and a little offshore picked up a boat-load of castaways. I had been below to dress and eat and to look up the course, and they were alongside when I popped up on deck. Their looks were against them, and I took a sheer and spilled them, so there was nothing to do then but take them aboard. For certain reasons that you will understand I thought it better not to go to Port of Spain. Three days later my rescued castaways landed me on a desert island. There's a man here who has set up a plant for making a cheap substitute for tire rubber. He has also a by-product or side-line that he will explain to you.

"I am here with no schooner, and nowhere to go. This man insists that I remain because he does not want to have it known that he may shortly put this product on the market—probably for some reason that has to do with rubber stock." (She considered this touch rather clever.) "I can't say that I sanction what he wants you to do; you shall have to decide that point for yourself, letting it depend a good deal on how bad a fix you may happen to be in. There is nothing I can do to help you out, with no schooner, no money, not even liberty to leave this place.

"I am comfortably off with nothing to fear. The chief tells me that his operations should be completed in about three months. You must not be influenced by my position, which really is not bad. You know that I am darn' well able to protect myself.

"Whatever happens do not take any action about the schooner, even if subsequently it should be lost. There are extenuating circumstances to their setting me ashore. You will have to read between the lines of this letter.

"I know that the sort of hole you must find yourself in is pretty bad, and you should not risk your life or health. On the other hand, you must be guided by your sense and conscience and the fact that you are a gentleman.

"With love, and hope that you may find a good way out and that we may soon meet again,

"Devotedly,
"Co-Co."

She had just finished writing this when Considine came in. He looked much better, though his face was taut and angry.

"I've just been talking to friend Frank," he said in a clipped voice. "He's a cool hand."

"That's what you need in your business, isn't it?"

CONSIDINE nodded, then glanced at the letter she handed to him. He read it through, his face clearing.

"Perfect!" he said. "You don't seem to harbor any grudge against this Guiana outfit."

"No. They played square."

"Why did they land Frank with you?"

"The man who was running the show was fond of Frank and wanted to give him a chance. They expected to be overhauled and sunk."

Considine said grimly: "That might easily have happened. I'm taking no chances here. I can never tell when one of my shore gang might see fit to let me down."

"How many have you?"

"Only three. Two in the States, and one in Italy. France would be a good field because their rotten money is easily imitated. The trouble is that the low value of the franc makes the smaller notes scarcely worth while, and every-

body looks too hard at the big ones. They might trace them back."

"What about the German mark and the Italian lira?"

"The Italian money is well made—not easy to imitate. For obvious reasons it is bad policy to make the money of the Government where you are located."

"How do your agents get rid of it?"

"That's the problem. I put it up to them. All I demand of them is the equivalent value, out of which they get their cut. One of them has been working a good graft in Cuba and in other points in the West Indies. He buys travelers' checks from small tourist agencies, then cashes them back in the States. Another buys new cheap cars, pays for them in cash, leaves them for the moment at the agency, then comes back a day or two later and says he's had to shift his plans and sell back the car. Sometimes they hand back what he paid, sometimes he pays a gratuity. I'm telling you all this because I'm banking on your throwing in with us. If I could only be sure that you'd shoot square with me, I'd be tempted to fit you out with several thousand dollars and let you try it yourself." He smiled.

She shook her head. "That wouldn't do."

"Why not? You're a pretty cool hand yourself."

"Well, stop and think."

He gave a short laugh. "I get you. Too easily identified. When they stamped you out, they stamped only one of you and melted up the plate."

"There's another reason."

"Yes, a girl like you is apt to have a change of heart." His eyes narrowed. "Some fellow comes along and changes it for you. What sort of looking man is your brother?"

"He's big and dark and tanned to the color of a Pan-American. More than that, we were born in Tampico and grew up in Maracaibo, where our father was in oil—so we naturally speak Spanish like natives."

Considine was elated. He slapped his thigh. "Perfect! He could work Brazil and the Argentine—all of South America. Young lady, you could roll in wealth!"

"I'd rather roll in respectability," said Clare.

"Well this needn't last so long," Considine assured her eagerly. "And besides there might be something in this other stuff we're making. I'd let you in on that."

Clare thought with a good deal of astonishment that here was a curious aftermath to the horrible struggle of the night before. It was hard to believe that had actually occurred. The man who had a few hours ago attacked her with a ferocity that could not occur in any wild animal under a similar urge—because wild animals do not indulge in narcotics, perhaps—was discussing calmly with her a business proposition that was actually criminal and offering what he appeared to consider a splendid opportunity for a young man of her brother's talent and ability.

IT was grotesque—it would have been farcical but for the fact that it was a possibility. Considine, utterly ignoring all late unpleasantness, now began to describe to her in more detail the workings of his organization. When finally he mentioned casually the profit that it had already shown in a little less than the last six months he caught a look of disbelief in her eyes.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"It's hard to see how your receipts could be so great in making notes of such small denominations. I'd think the market would be flooded with them."

"I've not told you the half of it." He hesitated for an instant, then said: "We've turned out some French Government bonds handled through a fence. That's risky, of course, but still we manage."

"Has there been any suspicion so far?" Clare asked.

"Not of our stuff to my knowledge. Not long ago there was a large issue of American hundred-dollar bills from Germany, I believe, and that did us a good turn."

"How?"

"They identified the makers and now are concentrating on their capture. They'll probably succeed before long. Then it will be thought that the source of evil has been removed."

"And you'll work overtime."

"Of course. It's an advantage for me to have other counterfeiters collared. The experts pick up the bad stuff without much trouble. But there is probably only one man living that could spot old Pierre's work and that's the Chief of the United States Secret Service. Others would need a microscope, a laboratory, probably spectrum analysis. But the man I mentioned doesn't need that."

"Why?"

"Because he's got something else. Either a clairvoyance for money or else a visual and tactile sense so fine that he's aware of an imitation without being able to tell why. When that occurs in a person there's nothing to do about it. Some men have it for precious gems. But nothing of course is ever absolutely safe, whether honest or dishonest."

"Do you ever have any qualms about being in such a business, the danger of it aside?" Clare asked.

HE gave her a penetrating look. "Why should I?"

"Because you are clearly a gentleman born. You've got culture."

His thin lips lifted at their corners. "The danger itself is a sort of excuse for most criminals. If the whole world were on an honor system, there'd be no fun in breaking laws. Besides, a man in my position can always show himself an excuse of some sort—usually a score to be squared with society. About the easiest thing in the world is the self-justification of the criminal mind."

"When it's intelligent like yours?"

"I may be an exception," Considine admitted. "The vast majority of wrongdoers spend a certain amount of thought on squaring themselves with themselves. I don't. I say merely: 'Here I am with no restraining inhibitions of any sort about me.' Somehow I've got past without the divine stamp of conscience. The right and wrong of things is apparent to me only in their results. Take this counterfeiting game of mine. The benefits to me should be enormous and the damage to the world at large is as slight as the proportion between myself and the population of the world. Why should I not profit by opportunity? That was my luck in having got hold of the one person to make my efforts effective."

"Old Pierre?"

"Yes. His attitude is different, naïve. He said to me one night: 'But, monsieur, since I am endowed with the ability to make counterfeit money better than anybody else in the world, why then should I not exercise my gift?'" Considine laughed. "Rather as if in not doing so he would be showing ingratitude to the Providence which had bestowed this delicacy of hand and eye."

"You make a good case for yourself," Clare said, and thought of her brother's ductility. "I'd say that Jim was apt to fall for it."

Considine smiled, evidently pleased.

"I'm going to shove right off. The weather's fine, and the glass nailed fast. I hope to get back here and report success within forty-eight hours."

"Jim will want to see me," she said. "How will you put him off?"

"I'll tell him that I'm not returning immediately and don't care to send a strange boat here."

"If he seems to like this game of yours, can't you let me go?"

Considine shook his head. "Not until I go myself. You needn't be afraid of a repetition of last night."

He rose. "Good-by. I've instructed my next in command that you are not to be disturbed at all. Sun Yat will take care of you."

"May I see Frank sometimes?"

Considine frowned. "No, I'm taking him with me."

She had a sinking feeling. "Why are you doing that?"

"To start him on his way with a supply of notes."

"But he's still too weak," she protested.

"He should get stronger as he goes along."

"But what about his papers, passports, and all the rest?"

"Pierre fixed him up last night with all he'll need."

Pierre stared at Frank with a look that had in it something of awe.

Clare felt that Considine was lying. He would be fairly sure that it was Frank who had struck him down. He knew of Frank's devotion, in fact had mentioned it. He would not dare trust to Frank's avarice or dread of re-imprisonment to keep silent about the operations on this island or the fact that Clare was held a prisoner and in danger of violence.

No, it was much more probable that Considine would sail off with Frank aboard the schooner and return without him and that Clare would never lay eyes on Frank again nor would anyone else for that matter. She was gripped by a horror actually worse than that of the night before, when she had turned to see Considine on the threshold. Then, there had been at least something to do, some action to take.

She thought of what Frank had said about Considine's second in command, describing him as worse than Considine, if such a thing were possible. It flashed through Clare's brain that a part of Considine's object might be to have her long for his return: to welcome him back to the island; to see in him a protection against a worse evil.

He interrupted her train of thought by saying curtly: "Well, I'm off. You are going to be all right here."

Clare could not answer. This was worse than anything that had happened yet. She felt that Frank was doomed. It had come to the pirates' alternative, and Frank had been offered his choice—made it, then mutinied and struck down the pirates' chief. He had, in fact, needed only her assent to make an end of Considine as one might stamp on the head of a crippled snake.

Clare wished now that she had given it. For the first time since this deadful sequence of events had been set in motion she felt herself breaking down. Her trouble now was neither fear nor coercion nor domination. It was an overwhelmingly pity for a man whom she believed had suffered long and unjustly and who was now condemned to a shameful death. That was the trouble with showing mercy to a stricken beast like Considine. He got up, only to bury his fangs in you.

She said abruptly: "I know what you intend to do. You can't fool me about Frank."

"Well," he answered, "can you blame me, considering what has happened?"

"What do you know?" she asked.

"I know that Frank was in my room last night when we had our"—his thin lips writhed—"our lovers' quarrel."

"You utter brute!" The only emotion that could have steadied Clare at that moment was coming to her rescue.

"Perhaps, but a consistent brute. I know that he opened the door and knocked me on the head with that thing." He pointed to the heavy ferule.

"How do you know that?"

"I took it to the laboratory when I went out this morning and examined it for fingerprints. There were two sets, his, where he had gripped it to lay me out, and yours when you held it to wipe it off."

She looked at him hopelessly, then asked:

"What if I offer to ransom him?"

"How?" Considine asked.

"Urge my brother to join up with you whether he likes it or not."

"He's going to like it, anyhow," Considine said.

"Then what if I join up with you myself?"

Considine said slowly: "If you'll agree to that, I'll leave Frank on the island. But your joining up has got to be complete. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Then will you agree, when I come back?"

"Yes," she answered, "if you'll do no harm to Frank. Leave him here."

"That," said Considine, "is a bargain!"

He gave her a brief nod, rose, and went out. Clare sat staring through the window at the smooth shimmering sea.

CHAPTER IX

CLARE was sitting in the same numb stasis when the express cruiser crossed her arc of vision, headed out. This sight roused her from her hopeless lethargy because it meant at least a respite of several days. She hoped also that it would mean Jim's release, at whatever cost. It would not be at any great cost to Considine, who would pay whatever fine might be imposed, or, failing this, merely bail out Jim with spurious notes. Then he would return to hold Clare to her agreement.

She began to wonder why she had volunteered this ransom. It was true that Frank had saved her at a critical moment the night before, but in doing so he had no more than squared his obligation. Her agreement to "join up" with Considine on condition of his sparing Frank's life was the equivalent of a promise to aid and abet his unlawful traffic, to become a member of his gang. There could be only one end to such a step, and Considine himself had

seemed to read that meaning into it when he had said: "But your joining up has got to be complete, you understand."

She had agreed to this, and now she wondered why she had done so. Frank certainly had no such claim on her. The first act of mercy that had saved his life had already cost Clare her liberty and her vessel and now she had again redeemed it by an agreement to become the associate of this crafty counterfeiter. And why?

The answer was plain enough. Clare knew that she had acted on the desperate impulse to gain time. Besides, what did such a promise really matter? She was the helpless prisoner of a man who was not only carrying on criminal activities, but was cruel and merciless and lost to all sense of decency or fairness. He was also a drug addict and subject to the mad impulses of such.

IT relieved Clare a little to reflect that after all her impulse to gain time was reasonable. Considine knew that Frank had struck him down, and he would surely have paid off that score. What would such a man care for the life of a broken escaped convict? What she cared for it herself? She returned to the deeper motive for her impulse. This would be sheer compassion, she believed.

At this moment she saw Frank coming up the footpath worn in the dry scanty turf. Evidently Considine had not left orders that his movements should be restrained.

Frank came into the cabin. "Well," he said, "he's gone. Looks like a little respite at least."

"Yes," said Clare lifelessly, "that's worth something."

He gave her a searching look. "What's happened? You look sunk."

"I've sent a note to Jim practically advising him to accept Considine's offer, telling him that I'm well enough off here."

"What else could you have done?"

"Not much," Clare said. "But I've done that too."

"What do you mean?"

"I might as well tell you, I suppose. He knew that you were here in the next room last night. He knew that you knocked him out with that ferule. Our plan didn't work. That devil is too clever. He'd have known, even if I'd thought to wipe away your fingerprints."

"Well, and then what?"

"He told me just now that he was going to take you with him aboard and start you to work ashore, but I didn't believe that. He didn't want me to believe it."

"I see," said Frank. "He meant to shove me overboard somewhere between here and the mainland."

"Yes, and he'd have done it too."

"Well, why didn't he?" Frank asked sharply.

"I couldn't stand it!" Clare said. "To think of your having got this far and then being done for."

"We haven't got so far that I can see! What did you do about it, Clare? Don't stall. Tell me the truth."

"I—I made a bargain with him."

Frank's knees gave way. He sank into a chair and sat huddled, staring at her.

"You did that—for an animated corpse like me? An escaped convict?"

"I don't believe you ever deserved to be a convict, Frank. After all, what was there for me to do? Besides, it would come to that in the end. I might have put up another fight, but I couldn't keep that up indefinitely."

Frank drew a deep breath. "You are paying too high, Clare. First for your brother, who brought it on himself, and then for me, who brought this upon both of us."

"You couldn't help that. After all, what does it matter?"

"What does it matter?" Frank echoed.

Clare said with a return to her habitual decisive manner: "Listen, Frank, I may be wrong, unfeminine, hard-boiled, as they say in the States, with a lack of sense of values that is supposed to be a good woman's deepest instinct. But I don't entirely share the view set out in heroic dramas and dramatic fiction. I believe there are occasions where through no fault of hers a woman may be forced for the sake of others to give up her last trump."

"Oh, stop it!" Frank groaned. "You don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do know—perfectly. Perhaps my point of view may sound hard and raw and shameless, but it's the way I feel. In my opinion a woman who marries a man whom she detests for the sake of what he can give her personally in return is a lot more degraded than the woman who is obliged to give in to save others who are worth it."

"But that's just the point," Frank said. "In this case they're not worth it. You must be off your head, Clare."

"I'm not; I'm talking sense. That stage and fiction stuff is a lot of rot. Such forced marriages aren't fatal."

Frank took another line of attack. "What's a bargain with this swine worth anyhow? What's any promise worth when it's got under compulsion?"

"Nothing," Clare said. "I'd break it like a shot. The trouble is I've really made a bargain with him even if it was forced on me—and he's going to hold me to it."

FRANK nodded gloomily. "Yes—it gives the rotter a sort of moral edge."

"Especially as it was my own proposal. How could I stand by and see him take you aboard that yacht when I knew that as soon as they were a few miles off he meant to shoot you and slide you overboard?"

"Of course you would do a thing like that, Clare. Offer all you've got to this four-flusher of a pirate to save the life of a four-flusher escaped convict like me!"

"You're not a four-flusher, and no matter what you say I don't believe your sentence was fair."

"Well, anyway you fix it the price was too high. As you say, it's going to make him insist on his pound of flesh, which otherwise he mightn't have done."

"Well," Clare said wearily, "that may be better after all than dragging the siege along. Something may happen. A vessel might come here."

"Ivan isn't the sort to let us down," Frank said. "The trouble is he and the others look like pirates now."

"Yes and they'd look more like pirates—dead ones—if a British patrol-boat was to investigate them."

"Ivan would tackle a rescue if he had a gun," Frank said. "He couldn't do anything against this Caiman yacht's three-pounder with small arms only. Besides, I don't think the others would back his play."

"No," Clare agreed, "they are older men and weak, and a different sort."

"Guiana," Frank said, "has vampired them beyond repair. Even if they get back their strength they'll never be more than automatons."

"Why did Ivan take them with him, Frank?"

"I don't know. I never could understand it, because Ivan is the sort who might feel pity in a general but not a detailed way. He knew those others would prove an incumbrance."

"We can't expect help from Ivan," Clare said. "He'd not dare land to mail a letter. Besides he'd know that a rescue-party would be apt to send you back to Guiana."

"Any way you put it I'm not the goat, I'm the obstacle," said Frank. "But we may manage to change all that."

His voice was almost flippant, but Clare gave him a searching look. "Don't you go and make it worse for me by acting the fool, Frank!"

"I can't always help that."

"Well, you help it now," Clare said emphatically. "The result is bound to be the same for me. Considine is a sort of would-be devil and his ruffians don't care three cents what happens to my body or your life. My only chance is to stand off Considine a little longer."

"And what then, Clare?"

"To get a real hold of him. What he tried last night was out of character. There's just one chance that any woman's always got with a such a man if she is fairly young and not too ugly."

FRANK gave her a sharp look. "Make him fall in love with her?"

Clare nodded. "That, or the nearest he can come to it."

"I understand. Of course, it's a chance but with such a blackguard it's an even bet which comes first—" He checked himself.

"Say it out," said Clare. "This is no time for mincing things. I know what you are thinking. It all depends on whether he falls in love with me before he decides to try to help himself."

"That's it. On the proportion between the physical and the mental, or let's say the artistic part of him. He's something of an actor."

"Well, I'll have to take my chance on that. But there's one thing left always to wipe off the slate of a woman who may be victimized this way."

"What?"

"To kill the man."

Frank shook his head. "That doesn't save her what she may have been through." He rose and moved restlessly about. "Let's not talk about it any more. We've got at least one man that we can count on here—that's Pierre."

"Then we may have two," Clare said. "Considine is holding this Chinaman as a sort of slave."

"So he is Pierre. I don't say that either of them would be apt to put much importance on what might happen to you. An old French savant convict and an Oriental are not the sort to value abstract quantities highly. But they've got their own interests to consider. Pierre tells me that unless he can manage to get away from here in some way or other there will be nothing in the game for him. He believes that as soon as Considine has made his clean-up and decides that he has watered the money market enough he may let him down."

"Shove him back in Guiana?"

"Yes. Why not? With all the evidence destroyed, nothing could be proved on Considine. That devil's not only crafty and mean, but he's avaricious and a double-crosser. He's not going to pay any more than he has to."

Clare was silent for a moment, then asked: "Have you thought any more about the treasure that's supposed to be on this island?"

"Yes. But I can't see how that's going to get us anywhere. If we tried to use it as a bribe there's nothing to prevent them from grabbing it off and leaving us flat."

"Don't you think that Pierre would shoot square?"

"Yes. I believe he would. So might this Chinaman. But what could they do against the others?"

"How many are there?" Clare asked.

"Ten, all told. That leaves seven on the island, now that Considine has shoved off."

"Five, against four of us." Clare's eyes began to glow. "You and I and Pierre and Sun Yat."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"If we were to offer Pierre and Sun Yat some pearls they might decide that there was more in that than sticking on here to work for Considine with the prospect of being let down in the end."

Frank nodded, then looked hopeless again. "Even then, what could we hope to do? This brute of a Mallock is the boss of the outfit in the chief's absence—and the hardest kind of an egg. And we've no boat; we couldn't hope to do anything with those loading lighters on the beach."

"We could after we'd got the drop on the rest of the crows."

Frank shook his head. "They are all armed, and their interests are with Considine. He pays them all in real money and they're satisfied. Then he's kidded them into believing that he can do something with this rubber substitute. As a matter of fact, Pierre believes that he can put it over. He says the trouble now is that it will stand heat but not cold. It hardens and cracks in cold. It would only work in hot countries. He hopes to get around that, though."

"Another good reason for his getting rid of Considine," Clare said.

Her demeanor had changed with this thin ray of hope. She leaned forward and said: "Frank, let's first make sure that the treasure is really there."

"We're apt to be watched."

"I'll go there alone tonight," she said.

"You're certain to be followed. I don't believe that Considine would go off without leaving orders that you were to be closely watched."

"What do you think about Ivan?" Clare asked.

"I don't know what to think. If for any reason the schooner were to be held up and questioned it would be all up and they'd be apt to get a short shrift."

"Not if they were to report what had happened here. That would be investigated first."

"Do you know what I really believe, Clare?"

"What?"

"Well, I've kept this to myself because I didn't want to add to your burden of cares, but I think it more than probable that Considine's left orders for us to be made away with in the event of any boat butting in during his absence."

"That's possible," she admitted. "But why do you think it?"

"From something that Pierre let drop."

Clare said bitterly: "Yes, Considine's not the sort to overlook a bet like that!" She rose, went to the bell and rang it. Frank looked at her inquiringly.

"I want to talk to Sun Yat," she said.

THE Chinaman came up the path from one of the smaller cabins that served evidently as the cook-house. He entered, looking disturbed.

"I want to ask you something, Sun Yat," Clare said.

"No can talk, Missus. Must get all hands dinner pretty quick."

"Just a minute. Do you know if the Captain left orders to have me watched?"

Sun Yat nodded. "He tell one man watchee you alla time—day and night. He watch you right now. Must go."

"That's that," said Frank hopelessly. "I'd better shift. I'll see what more I can get out of Pierre. I'm willing to tackle anything you say, Clare."

He went out. She watched him as he swayed down the slope. She felt an emotion that was not associated with their mutual danger nor even with the character of the danger threatening her. The tears gathered in her eyes.

She did not try to analyze feelings so vague, but she was conscious of an overwhelming pity for this shattered man, still young, who in spite of a devastating physical weakness could yet find strength to act in her defense regardless of the consequences to himself. The pity of it stung

her. If only things could have happened differently! Here was a body rescued and its divine flame rekindled, only to be extinguished in this puddle of filth.

The day wore on wearily and passed. Clare did not see Frank again except at a distance. In an effort to escape from her dark thoughts she walked round the island late in the afternoon. But even this attempt proved futile on discovering that she was being watched and followed.

The night was filled with disordered dreams. Toward morning she rested better and awoke to find the sun well up and another long day of heat and glare and dismal foreboding that must be faced in some way.

She went down to bathe and that refreshed her. Sun Yat served her breakfast but was uncommunicative, as if something had been said to frighten him. After he had gone Clare sat in the open doorway of the cabin staring out moodily at the bright calm sea. Before she had been there very long she saw Frank come out of the laboratory and start up the path to the cabin.

He walked slowly and unsteadily, as if the slight grade taxed his strength. About halfway up he paused, apparently to rest. At that moment a bulky figure came out of a smaller cabin close to the laboratory and shouted in a husky bellow:

"Hey there, you! Where d'you think you're goin'?"

FRANK turned and answered something Clare was unable to catch. The big man started up the slope. Frank stood waiting.

Even at the distance of one hundred yards it was easy to see that here was a mere brute with no doubt a good deal of forceful ability and no lack of animal cunning; a type of which the city gangster is made. This, Clare realized, must be Mallock.

There was a swagger about the man, an air of self-importance and of harsh authority. He looked the sort to enjoy a free hand for application of discipline in the absence of the chief. The man reminded her of an orang-outang, with his great barrel body and legs disproportionately short and slightly bowed. He was dressed in white pith helmet with white duck clothes and shoes and wore a belt from which was strung a heavy old-fashioned army revolver of large caliber in an open holster that sagged down over his hip, cowboy fashion.

He was smoking a big cigar and carried in his hand a rattan swagger-stick. Even Clare, to whom the type was not familiar, recognized it at a glance. She knew that the man would be actually less dangerous than Considine. The comparison between the two was merely that of the savage beast who was Mallock and the vicious domestic animal that was Considine.

Mallock stopped abreast of Frank, to whom he said something. She could hear even at this distance the bass grumble of his voice. The contrast between the two was pitiful. Frank looked like a suit of tropic clothes on a hanger. But he stood erect as he talked to Mallock. There was even a sort of defiance in his attitude.

Then a shocking thing occurred. With a quickness to be found even in the most bulky of wild animals, the boar or bear, Mallock struck Frank across the face with the rattan. Frank clasped both hands over his eyes. But Mallock, as if unsatisfied with the injury inflicted by the light rattan, reached out and hauled Frank's head tight against his chest while with the other hand he jammed the lighted end of his cigar against Frank's forehead.

The whole of this act of devilish cruelty was as evident to Clare as if she had stood within a yard or two of the man. There reached her ears through the still air the sort of strangled agonized bleat given by a calf at branding. Then Mallock hurled Frank violently back away from him so that his heels tripped and he fell full length on the broken rock that happened to be just there. He did not stir.

Mallock stood for a moment with shoulders hunched, staring at him; then he spat, flicked away the cigar of which the fire had been quenched against Frank's brow, and continued his lumbering way up the path.

Clare had become to some extent inured to shock, but the brutal act she had just witnessed left her aghast. Her impulse was to rush out to where Frank was lying. She was about to obey this impulse of her hot Gaelic blood when the Spanish strain checked her. There was no lack of courage in this part of the blend, but the Iberian was more saturnine and gave thought and direction.

"Here," it said now to her objective brain—a reverse of the usual brain-process where the orders are issued from the objective to the subjective, "here comes your most dangerous enemy in this place at present. Here comes the brute who has just inflicted torture on a weak and helpless man whom you have rescued. But more than that here comes the man who at this moment stands between you two and any possible attempt at liberty."

As this suggestion went through Clare's head, Mallock had got within fifty paces of the cabin door that was wide open. Clare looked around her. At the moment if she could have laid hands on a firearm she would have waited until Mallock stood on the threshold and shot and killed him with no more compunction than if he had been a rabid wolf. But there was nothing except the ferule with which Frank had stunned Considine. This octagonal stick of ebony, about one and a half inches in diameter, though almost as heavy as iron could not be expected to produce concussion through a skull as thick as Mallock's was apt to be. There was also his pith helmet to consider. This was a case for strategy.

Now was presented a comparison between the merely brutal mind and that of a higher and more ruthless human intelligence. If it had been Considine instead of Mallock who had perpetrated the act of cruelty, Considine would have given no further thought to it. He would not have bothered about its consequences, but have continued on his way without looking back. But Mallock was incomplete in his role of *bête féroce*. Within a few paces of the cabin door he stopped and glanced over his shoulder at Frank, who just then made a futile effort to rise.

Clare was looking at Mallock and her line of vision included Frank's weak attempt. The sight fired her and ignited a flood of rage. Also it gave her a sort of desperate inspiration, this latter because Mallock as he turned had brought his fist to one hip in a movement that brushed aside his unbuttoned tunic to expose the butt of the big heavy revolver. Perhaps it was the sight of that weapon that roused Clare to action.

As Mallock stood in the blazing sun staring back at Frank, Clare picked up the ferule, then placed a chair just inside the door. She mounted it as Mallock turned to continue on his way. She was still standing there, flattened against the wall as he came shambling up to the doorway, rapped once or twice with his great heavy knuckles, then getting no answer, stepped across the sill.

CHAPTER X

AS Mallock entered the comparatively dark room, for an instant his eyes, accustomed to the dazzling sun outside, could not adjust themselves to the dusk.

As he stood for that fraction of a second blinking, Clare's left hand tilted off his pith helmet while with a synchronized movement she brought down the heavy

ferule with all her might on the stubble crown exposed. Mallock's big bulk sagged. His knees buckled under and he sank down without a sound. As he did so Clare struck again, this time the blow landing farther back as the target lurched forward. Mallock had hardly collapsed on the floor before she was beside him and had tugged the revolver out of its holster and stepped back, cocking it.

Such was the man's thickness of skull that although dazed he was not completely stunned and possibly the blow may have glanced. He lurched forward, raised both hands to his head, and stared up stupidly at Clare. Then as full consciousness returned, he snarled:

"Say, what's all this, you hell-cat?"

Clare did not answer. Mallock began to curse her, but he did not try to rise.

CLARE was standing in line with the open door, so Frank was in her line of vision. As she watched him he scrambled to his feet, stood for a moment swaying slightly, then started up the path toward the cabin. As he came nearer Clare saw that he held in either hand a fragment of rock. She could see also the round livid burn between his eyebrows.

Admiration surged up in her. Here was a man who at this moment was suffering torment in addition to his prostrating weakness, coming now to her defense with no other weapon than two chunks of lava rock! He came on slowly but with a stubborn persistence that had in it something supernatural, like the avenging corpse of a man. Mallock, staring at Clare, was struck by the fixity of her gaze and looked back over his shoulder. His heavy jaw dropped.

At this moment another man appeared within the sector of Clare's observation that was cut by the door jamb. She recognized him as the guard detailed to keep her under observation.

Almost to the cabin Frank appeared to discover Mallock just inside the door. He could not yet see Clare who was back in the dark interior. The other man must have seen Mallock go up the path and enter the cabin.

It seemed to Clare that this action of Frank's was more of an indomitable reflex than any hopeful effort at rescue. He could scarcely walk or even stand, let alone have strength enough to throw or strike with either of his missiles. Yet he had plodded through with what could have been no more than a sort of automatic valor.

Frank came to the door and stood there staring owlishly at the slouched figure of Mallock. Then he saw Clare standing with the big revolver leveled at the crouched figure. Frank leaned against the door-jamb and the jagged stones dropped from his nervous hands.

"Come in," Clare said sharply.

Frank gave her a dazed look and lurched inside, brushing against Mallock who gave out a sort of growl.

The guard was by this time within hearing distance of the cabin. Clare saw his hand go down to his hip. This man had evidently seen Frank gather up the stones and start for the cabin and had also seen Mallock enter it.

He could not have been much worried about the result of such an attempt, for he now came swinging up confidently with his hand still resting on the butt of his gun.

Then a curious thing happened, of a sort that Clare could not possibly have anticipated. Frank, who seemed on the verge of collapse, looked around and saw the man striding toward the door.

It seemed as if a galvanic current had been sent through Frank. He straightened up; his limbs and body stiffened. He stepped to Clare's side and said in a voice such as she had never heard him use before: "You mustn't, Clare. Let me do it."

The firm authority in his voice struck her with a sense of shock. She knew what he meant. But there was no time to say anything. The man outside had just caught sight of the huddled figure inside the door and identified it as Mallock.

He stopped short and drew his revolver. As he did so, Frank took the weapon from Clare's hand—raised it. The two revolvers were thrust out simultaneously, but that of Frank's volleyed the mortal fraction of a second before that of his opponent. The guard leaped forward like a diver, as does any live creature, whether human or lower animal, when shot through the head. His bullet went wild, his hand deflected or the trigger pressed before he could aim accurately. And then there came another thundering report in the confines of the cabin space. The great bulk of Mallock projected itself forward so that his head and shoulders crashed into the legs of the table and brought it down. Then silence.

Clare lurched backward against the wall. Frank turned and said in his usual cool voice:

"Brother Considine promised that you weren't to be molested, I believe. So all agreements are off. Besides, *I* didn't make any."

She could not answer. In such violent and fatal action the active part is easier than the passive one, that of the observer. She glanced at the flaming burn on Frank's forehead. "He deserved it," she managed to say.

Frank's curious strength appeared to be sustained. He said quickly: "You see what this means now, Clare?"

"Yes, it leaves only three—the chance to get away from here." Her voice came eagerly. "Are you sure that you can count on Pierre?"

"No fear of that. There's nothing else left for him now. He must back our play. He'll realize that Considine would never believe he had not backed it already."

IT was early in the morning and in the stillness that hung over the place the reverberations from the cabin door must have sounded like an explosion. Looking down the slope toward the plant they saw that Pierre and three other men had come out and were standing at the corner of the building, staring at the cabin.

Frank said quickly: "Let's drag this fellow inside before they start up to see what's happened."

They hurried out and between them dragged the body of the guard in through the door. The brim of the little plateau on which the cabin stood prevented those below from observing the character of this act—or at least Clare and Frank hoped it had. They saw Sun Yat come out of his cook-house. He stood for a moment peering at the cabin, then started toward it.

"This gives us two guns." Frank unbuckled the revolver belt from the guard and put it around his own waist—which was so attenuated that he was obliged to catch a hitch in the strap. Then he stooped, unbuckled Mallock's belt, and handed it to Clare.

Pierre started to walk slowly up the slope. The three other men appeared to be undecided. They grouped together as if discussing what to do.

Clare asked in a low voice: "Must we fight it out?"

Frank shook his head. "I don't know. Let's hope it may not be necessary."

Old Pierre came up breathlessly. The door of the cabin was open and the brilliant sunlight outside made the cabin's dark interior invisible. The door was like the mouth of a cave against which the sun strikes aslant. All that Pierre and the other three men and Sun Yat had to go on was the fact that two men had gone up to that cabin when there had been two reports and the visitors had not reappeared.

But by this time they must have been thoroughly aware that something fatal had happened. For this reason Clare was surprised and startled when Pierre stopped within ten paces of them and stared at Frank with a look of fright and horror that had in it something of awe.

Frank was holding himself more erect than usual. The situation appeared to have acted on him like a powerful stimulant or perhaps a tonic of which the effect is more lasting. This was due to the return of hope and the possibility of playing a man's active part in what was now more than a fighting chance of escape. Clare realized that Frank had been suddenly transformed from slave to master, in his own mind at least. The dreariness and weariness had vanished. His eyes that had seemed so dull and lusterless were alight and something in the aquiline strength and sternness of his features thrilled the girl.

Nevertheless she was puzzled that the grizzled old ex-convict should be so affected by Frank's transformation. He was staring at the younger man with a look that held something of awe. Clare was waiting for him to say something to show the trend of his thought when Sun Yat glided up to where Pierre stood rooted. The Chinaman looked at Frank, blinking. His expressionless Oriental face showed a subtle emotion of some sort.

Frank said curtly and with no trace at all of the weariness that heretofore had hung on his speech:

"Well, what about it? What's the matter with you, anyway? These two brutes have only got what they had coming."

The effect of this speech was curious. Pierre muttered: "*Nom de Dieu!*" and the Chinaman blinked repeatedly. Clare gave Frank a puzzled look. At the same moment he turned his face to hers and she instantly understood what had so affected Pierre and the Chinaman.

The hole burned deep into the skin of Frank's forehead by Mallock's live-ended cigar had now the unmistakable appearance of a bullet-hole. It did not look as if it could possibly have been anything else. No doubt Pierre and Sun Yat had been furtively watching the cabin and had seen the guard follow Mallock there. They must then have seen him fire into the open doorway. As the report of Frank's gun had been synchronous with that of the guard they had heard a single report. Therefore it must now appear to them that the guard had fired point-blank into Frank, shooting him through the head between the eyes. Then had followed the report when Frank shot down Mallock.

And here was this prodigy of a man drilled through the long axis of his brain moving calmly about not only unscathed but acting as if a crushed spirit had been liberated and thrust aside to make place for an immortal and dominant soul.

Frank was evidently puzzled; it did not occur to him that he was accredited with supernatural powers. He said briskly: "What about those three men down there?"

Pierre swallowed, then spat vigorously and said: "There is nothing to fear from them, m'sieu."

Frank looked surprised as one convict might be when accorded a courtesy title by another who for some years had been a comrade. But before he could comment on this, Clare interrupted him.

"Mallock came up here and attacked me—" she began.

Frank interrupted: "And on the way up he stopped and—"

"Keep still!" Clare said so violently that he stopped speaking and stared at her. "Mallock came into the cabin where he had no business to come. Captain Considine had promised me I was not to be disturbed. Mallock did not count on Frank. He did not know the sort of man with whom he had to deal. You can see that for yourself."

"*Sapristi!* But you are right, mam'selle! A man that can take a bullet between the eyes and have it act on him like a glass of cognac is not a man to be trifled with. In fact, I am not sure—"

She snatched out the little sack and held it up. "Frank!" she cried. "Look!"

He paused, staring. Clare could guess what was in his mind and that what he had left unsaid would have been—"whether he is actually alive or a spirit."

Frank's quick wit then caught the idea. He looked at Pierre and Sun Yat with a grim smile.

"Go down and tell those three men that if they value their lives they had better not try to start anything. Mallock is dead and this guard is dead—and if you two know what is good for you, here is a chance to get away before Considine comes back."

Clare said quickly: "If you back us up, then we are four against three."

Pierre nodded. "And one who can not be killed is not any ordinary person. I've heard of such things but never believed them."

Sun Yat's Oriental mind may have accepted the prodigy without surprise. "How we get away?" he asked.

"In one of those big scows on the beach," Clare said quickly. "We can rig a mast and sail of some sort and shove off and get somewhere as soon as the wind comes. No matter where."

"Any place will now be safer than here," Pierre agreed.

Frank said authoritatively: "Go down and tell those men what has happened and what we want to do. Say that if they try to stop us they will certainly be killed."

"Perhaps after what has happened they'll want to go with us," Clare added.

"Well, at any rate, go and tell them and then come back and let us know what they say." He looked at Sun Yat. "You go back to the cook-house and put up a hamper of food."

"Can do. No good stay here now. Man or devil Captain, no care."

The two of them turned back down the slope. Clare said to Frank: "Come back into the cabin. We've got to decide what to do next."

"There's only one thing to do. We've got to get out of here and the quicker the better."

"What about the treasure?"

"That's so. I had forgotten about it."

Of the two Clare was nearest to collapse. She pulled herself together with an effort and said: "We're not yet out of the woods, Frank. We're apt to be sighted by some vessel and picked up and then we've got to have a story ready."

"Where can we make for?" Frank asked.

CLARE remembered in a general way the chart she had studied with Ivan. "We could only sail before the wind in one of those flat-bottom scows, but the prevailing wind and the current should put us on Granada. We've got to have some story if we are to finish it."

"Well, what?" Frank asked.

"The best I can think of is that we were aboard the schooner and hit a coral reef and had to leave her. I can easily prove who I am and that we had the schooner. You can pass for my brother and Pierre for a sailor and Sun Yat for our cook."

"That sounds all right," Frank said. "And what about the lighter?"

"Can't we say that we were towing the lighter for some reason or other?"

"Yes, I suppose so. It seems unlikely, but still—" Frank's ingenious mind suggested an idea. "Say we found the lighter adrift and thought we might as well take it in tow. Or we can say that we had brought it to freight some stuff out of a shallow river."

"That's better. If anyone is curious enough I can prove that we had been on an expedition after Mayan relics. What do you think about these three men?"

"They're not apt to bother us. For one thing they'll be cowed at our having got away with these two bullies and for another old Pierre is apt to put the fear of God into them. He was all ashake. The old boy thought I had been drilled through the head and still carried on."

Clare gave a laugh that was semi-hysterical. "I'd have myself, if I hadn't known. It wasn't only that hole on your forehead; it was the change in you—the way you looked and spoke and held yourself. First of all I must dress that burn and cover it."

She did this immediately, first cleansing the wound then bandaging it with a strip of bed sheet. She had finished with this when Pierre came into the cabin. He looked at them and shook his head.

"I've seen some strange things in my life, especially in my half-life in Guiana. Some of them were real and some were not so real. Once when I had escaped into the bush I saw things and people that were not of this world. But now—" He shook his head.

Frank said solemnly: "There are moments when a man is kept alive for a higher purpose."

Pierre did not answer. It was evident to Clare that he had not expected to find Frank still alive and had thought the spirit to animate him would withdraw itself when the crisis was passed. He changed the topic.

"These *voyous* are badly frightened. They have a right to be, *pardi!* First they are terrified at what has happened and now they are terrified at what may happen to them when the Captain gets back."

Clare took command. "Go down and see if you can rig a mast on one of the lighters. Then you must find something to use as a sail."

"*Bien*, mam'selle. There are poles that we used for scaffolding to put up the factory pipe and there are some awnings that will serve for sails. Have you thought about where to go?"

"Yes. To the island of Granada."

"What about money?" Frank asked.

Pierre shook his head. "The Captain has never paid me a *sou*. He said that I could not spend it here—but that he would settle with me when our work was finished. Perhaps!"

"Never mind that now," Clare said. "Go and start to rig the lighter. We'll be down there presently."

When he had gone she said to Frank: "It's not going to do for us to get picked up or landed when we are flat broke. That will be bound to rouse suspicion."

Frank nodded. "Yes, a crowd would scarcely shove off from a wrecked schooner without a cent."

"That's just the point—and besides we can't afford to be subjects of charity. That gives us the choice of one or two things."

"What's the alternative?" Frank asked.

Clare went to the desk in the corner. She took from the drawer the sheaf of counterfeit money that Considine had shown her the night before. "This stuff," she said.

"Not so good."

"I don't think so myself."

"Well, then?"

"I think we'd better see if the treasure is really there. If so we could take enough and leave the rest."

"The trouble is," said Frank, "that we should disturb the ground and it might be noticed."

"We've got to be careful not to disturb the ground. To put it back as we found it. We can take only enough to get us out of this jam."

"All right," said Frank. "You're the Captain! Let's go."

They went out into a glaring sun so brilliant that outlines were indistinct. The heat devils danced on the corrugated iron roofs of the cabins and gave the ridgepoles the look of writhing. But relief was soon to arrive. Out seaward the band of ultramarine was widening; the trade wind was a little late but on its way.

"They'll wonder why we're going over this way," Clare said.

"Let them. They're not apt to interfere. But we ought to have a pick and shovel."

"We'll have to manage without. That would be sure to give the game away."

BY making a detour they were able to get quickly out of sight of anybody who might be watching their movements. Frank said as they walked along: "You had better let me do the excavating—if there is anything to excavate—and you stand sentry on a point where you can signal me if anybody comes this way."

"If anybody comes this way he'll be apt to turn back again," Clare said. "We've not got this far to get sunk now."

There was a curious inflection in her voice. Frank gave her a quick glance. "All the more reason for our not taking a chance. Up to this minute we've had everything against us. But now we've got a break. We mustn't make any."

She nodded. "I hate to risk Ivan's treasure, with Ivan not here. But there's no help for it. This place is so dried up that the ground should not show much disturbance."

Frank nodded. "There's so little turf that the chances are the stuff is in a fissure of the rock with loose stones over it. If we find it there I can put everything back just as it was."

They went on in silence, heading for the southwest foot of the mole. Blue land-crabs scuttled into the low scrub and lizards darted away in front of them. They came presently to where they had been when they had first caught sight of Considine. The ground was open here with thin patches of turf alternating with areas of naked rock.

"Too bad we haven't a compass," Frank said presently. "Where do you make the southwest?"

Clare glanced at the sun. It was by this time so high that it offered no accurate indication of cardinal points. But she remembered where it had set the day before when she was in this same position.

"Let's separate a few yards and look for that block of stone," she said when they had reached what seemed to her must be the southwest foot of the mole.

THEY did so, Clare taking a course forty-five degrees as nearly as she could estimate south of the point of the setting sun. It seemed to her that she was under a greater excitement than she had been at any time since their landing on the island. What had happened subsequent to that moment had been more of dread and desperation and horror. But now that they were given a chance of escape the nervous tension was if anything greater, as is invariably the case under such circumstances. The helpless captive facing something that is dreadful may feel despondency or a numb resignation to a fate which seems inevitable, but at the first flash of hope despair gives way to a thrilling expectancy and an anguished tension of suspense.

More than that there is something about the thrill of treasure hunting when the objective is close, that is unlike any other human emotion. There is something of the gambler's passion where success and failure seem to be hanging in a fine balance that may be suddenly and violently disturbed. Many natures have been unable to endure this sort of suspense and have given way under its strain, even before the prize has come within their certain grasp. Whatever scruple Clare had felt at unearthing the treasure described by Ivan was now swept away in eagerness to discover it. After all, Ivan had anticipated some hitch of this sort in their joint venture or he would not have given them directions. There was no telling what might have happened to Ivan and the others or what still might happen to them and the need of Frank and herself was great.

In the swale in which they now found themselves there was scarcely any scrub to mask the marks they sought. Almost immediately they discovered the big flat block of stone described and as it lay where Clare had expected, its identity seemed certain. They hurried to it. Clare oriented herself and her eye fell upon the heap of stones that appeared to determine the position as both had memorized its distance and bearing from the first mark. They stood for a moment almost afraid to continue the search.

In a voice that was husky from excitement Frank said: "Clare, you'd better go over there and keep watch."

She did so and discovered a cluster of figures engaged in prying one of the scows grounded on the beach down to the water. There were five men, from which it appeared evident that Pierre had coerced the other three into lending a hand. Clare thought that rather than face Considine's rage at what had happened they had decided to join in the escape.

SHE hurried back to Frank, who was scraping away the dry turf and bushes and the slight depression. His face was strained and mottled and streaked with sweat.

"It's just as I thought. There's a crevice here filled in with loose stones. See anything?"

She answered in a shaking voice: "They're all busy getting the lighter afloat."

"All?"

"Yes, five of them. It looks as if the other three want to get out of here themselves."

"Well, we'll see about that," Frank said. He began feverishly to haul out the loose stones and throw them aside. Clare dropped on her knees and helped him.

"It's got to be the spot," she said. "There's no other that corresponds to it."

They continued the process of excavation. It did not seem likely that the treasure chest could be very deep. The formation of the ledge indicated no more than a slight depression and also there would have been no need to go deeply even if the formation had permitted of so doing.

Then as she hauled out a long flat lozenge-shaped rock there appeared a section of dark tarnished wood across which ran an iron band. There could be no mistake. In her overpowering excitement Clare did not notice for the moment that Frank had stopped his efforts and drawn back. She cleared away some more of the loose stones, working frantically, and a moment later had exposed the rectangular outlines of a small chest not much larger than what sailors call a ditty-box and used to hold their small personal effects.

That frenzy of triumph which is perhaps the treasure-seeker's greatest reward came over Clare. She turned her flushed and streaming face up to Frank.

"We've got it!" she cried.

FRANK was lying back on his elbows. His face was livid. He seemed to be breathing with difficulty. The effort and excitement that had so quickly followed the stresses through which he had passed seemed now completely to have overcome him. It was plain enough that he was on the verge of collapse.

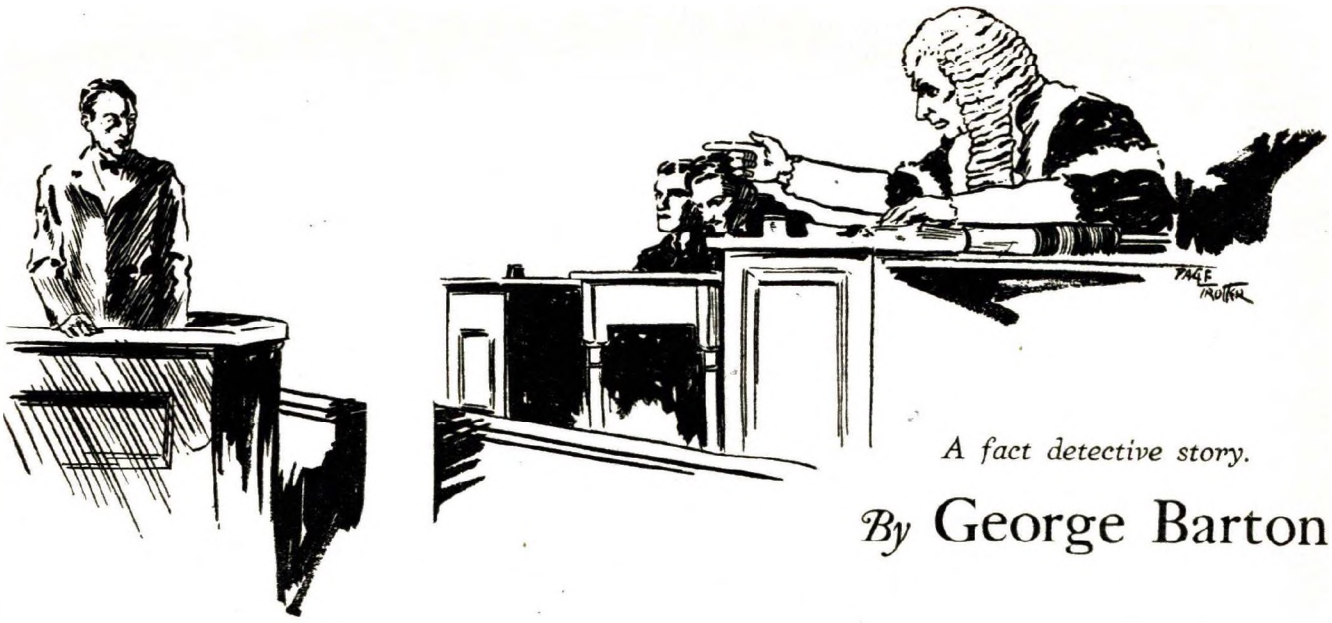
"Lie down," Clare said, "flat on your back. Pull yourself together; I'll finish it."

She did not try to remove the little chest that was only about eighteen inches in length and about one-half that in width. As her fingers fumbled with the lock she touched a little prong of rusty metal that had evidently been the key.

Clare picked up a V-shaped spike of rock and drove it against one corner of the chest, splintered it and pried open the top. There was exposed a neatly fitted tray of some thin light wood in a perfect state of preservation. This appeared to contain documents of some sort in long envelopes and in one corner partitioned off was a little muslin sack tied around with a rope yarn. As she ran her fingers over its surface her heart gave a tremendous bound. There had been no mistake about the pearls. They felt like buck-shot. She snatched out the little sack and held it up.

"Frank!" she cried. "Look!"

This thrill-crammed tale of Clare's desperate attempt to outwit the crafty and ruthless Considine continues with mounting interest in our forthcoming April issue.



A fact detective story.

By George Barton

The Mills of God

V—The Man in the Black Wig

Illustrated by Page Trotter

OLD-FASHIONED melodrama of the most approved type may be found in the story of the famous gold robbery of the Southeastern Railway Company of England three-quarters of a century ago. When plays of this kind are placed on the stage today we smile tolerantly at their seeming unreality. Yet false names, false hair, false whiskers, false promises, false pretence and false friendships are only a few of the melodramatic details that go to make up this stirring story from actual life.

Millions of dollars were at stake; the thieves might never have been found, and the mystery probably never solved, if it had not been for the rage of a woman who discovered that she was being double-crossed by one of the actors in the little drama. It only needed this realistic touch of the "woman in the case" to make this actual tale as absorbing as anything ever placed on the stage.

It begins just before dusk on an evening in May, 1855, when three iron-bound boxes filled with precious gold were placed in the safes of the Southeastern Railway at the London Bridge Station of that corporation. All of the formalities required for transporting such valuable freight were carefully fulfilled. The boxes were examined, weighed and sealed before they were placed in the iron containers. The gold was to be delivered at Paris and other parts of the Continent. The guard who was in charge of the van was a man named Burgess, who was looked upon as one of the most reliable officials in the employ of the company. So far, so good.

But when the boxes were taken out of the safes at Boulogne and weighed, one of them was discovered to be forty pounds less than the required weight. Each of the other boxes weighed a little more; the overweight was quite as strange and disquieting as the underweight. Their suspicions aroused, the officers of the company immediately opened the boxes. They were stunned by the sight that greeted them. The boxes were all filled with lead shot.

The gold was gone; in other words millions of dollars had magically disappeared in the brief journey between London and Boulogne!

The most perplexing part of it lay in the fact that the safes and boxes were fully locked and sealed when they left the London Bridge Station and there was not the slightest evidence that they had been tampered with *en route*. Guard Burgess was vigorous in his assertion that no one had entered the van from the time it left the place of shipment until it reached its first destination. The guard was plainly upset by the incident, but belief in his innocence was strengthened by the knowledge that he did not possess keys to the safe; his duty was simply to see that train-robbers did not interfere with the treasure.

The police and the railway detectives were utterly at a loss how to solve this strange puzzle. It reminded them of the mysterious murders which sometimes occur when the body of a victim is found dead in a room where all of the windows and doors are securely locked from the inside. The first suspicion in such cases is that of suicide, but when the dead man is found with a bullet in the back of his head the detectives are naturally mystified.

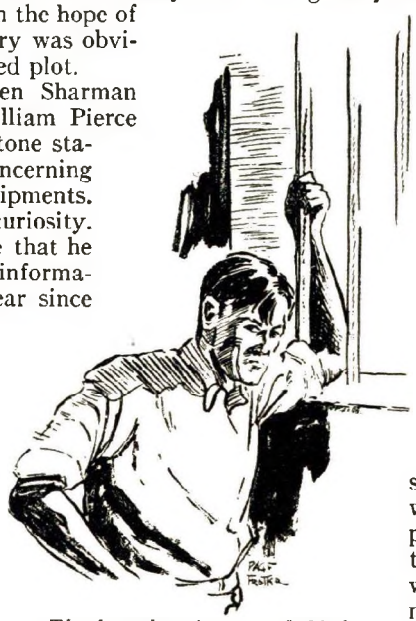
So it was with this celebrated gold robbery. How were the detectives to proceed when there was no evidence that the safes and boxes had been opened during the course of the journey? Plainly, if there was to be a key to the mystery it would have to be found in the keys to the boxes. One of the first things they learned was that there were two sets of keys to the bullion safes. One set was kept in London and the other at Folkestone. A most thorough investigation at both places satisfied them that the employees at these points were innocent of wrongdoing. This included a search into the antecedents, habits and lives of the men entrusted with the keys.

A young man named Sharman had charge of the keys that were kept at Folkestone. He entered heartily into the work of the detectives and coöperated with them in trying to get a clue that would furnish an inkling to the

identity of the culprits. It was the very novelty of the thing that disconcerted the police. If the guard had been overpowered and the safes blown up it would have been in accordance with the methods employed by burglars from time immemorial. Crooks of that kind always left some clue that might be followed with the hope of success. But in this case the robbery was obviously the result of a carefully planned plot.

The first ray of light came when Sharman remembered that a man named William Pierce had been hanging about the Folkestone station and had tried to "pump" him concerning the methods of handling bullion shipments. His queries might have been mere curiosity. But in any event Sharman was sure that he had not given him the least bit of information. Moreover, it was nearly a year since Pierce had asked the questions.

Naturally the first move of the detectives was to find out all they could concerning William Pierce. That was not difficult. They learned that he had no regular means of livelihood. He had been at one time a ticket-printer for the Southeastern Railway. It was also discovered that he had stayed in Folkestone on several occasions. One woman testified that he had taken lodgings at her house in company with another man.



The fact that Agar was behind the bars would seem to absolve him of connection with the gold robbery.

That in itself meant nothing, but the suspicions of the police were aroused when they found that he had stayed at the house under an assumed name. Their experience assured them that when a man used an alias it was not for any good purpose. Later they found a man who had seen Pierce wearing a black wig. But the fact that he had asked questions of the station agent, that he had used an assumed name and that he was once seen wearing a wig, while highly significant, did not necessarily connect him with the gold robbery.

About this time, however, it became known that Pierce had once been seen in the company of a very slippery character named Edward Agar. But at that time Agar was in Newgate Prison serving a sentence for forgery. The fact that he was behind the bars would seem to absolve him of any connection with the gold robbery. Yet an examination of the records indicated that he had been arrested after the bullion theft, but on an entirely different charge. He was undoubtedly one of the shrewdest and cleverest operators of the underworld. He was well known to the police, but, except for the matter of the forgery which landed him in Newgate, he had always been able to slip through the fingers of the law.

He had lived with a woman named Fanny Kay for some years, but whether the union was sanctioned by the rites of the church is not clear and at this time the woman and her child were living in a precarious fashion in the east of London. At first blush the detectives were inclined to think that Edward Agar was the king-pin of the whole business and that it was his shrewd brain that had devised all of the details leading up to the theft of the gold. The only thing that weakened this theory was the fact that his wife—for so he regarded her—and her child were in absolute want. Now while Agar might have had many faults he was known in the world of crooks as a "square-shooter" and was not the sort of man to leave his wife and child in want if he had the money to care for them. That he was deeply in love with Fanny Kay was unquestioned.

It he had been concerned in the robbery his share of it would have amounted to a fortune. Having all of this money it was entirely unlikely he would have permitted his dependents to live in poverty. Moreover, why should he go to jail and permit his associates in crime to go scot-free? These are questions that can only be answered by those who are familiar with the philosophy of criminals. At all events the detectives dropped all thought of Agar for the time being; although they kept his name in the back of their heads for future reference.

In the meantime they continued to run down other clues. Sharman, the agent at Folkestone, remembered that during the year it had been necessary to provide a new set of keys for the safes. These changes were made from time to time in the interest of safety. Sharman recalled that a man in the office of the traffic superintendent seemed to have something to do with the business of securing the new keys which were made by a well-known manufacturer named Chubb. This person was George William Tester. The detectives had not one but several interviews with Tester, but he threw no more light on the mystery than did Burgess the guard.

So far we have related the details of this remarkable story in a more or less connected manner, but it is only fair to say that they were brought forward in a haphazard fashion and that the case was not nearly so coherent to the police as it is to the reader. In the earlier stages of the investigation came a tiny bit of evidence fraught with significance. It was an infinitesimal bit of wax which adhered to one of the keys that hung in the railway office at Folkestone. Small as it was, it threw a great ray of light on the whole business. It suggested that wax impressions had been made of the keys. That meant that a new set of keys had been made from the wax impressions.

This cleared the employees at the London and the Folkestone stations from suspicion of being concerned in the robbery. Sharman, the agent at Folkestone, as the result of further inquiries, admitted that there were times when the office was left unguarded. As the trains came in it was the duty of himself and his assistant to go out and look after the mail and receive instructions from the London office. At such times there was much bustle and confusion around the station. It was possible that some one could have slipped into the office unobserved. The keys were kept hanging on a nail in a closet behind the counter. This place, of course, was presumed to be known only to the employees, but it is the business of thieves to worm out such secrets in one way or another.

The newspapers were filled with stories concerning the sensational robbery, and as a consequence tips came to the police from many sources. Some of them were obviously worthless, but others had to be run down.

One morning the police detectives received an intimation which took them down to a place near Hungerford Bridge. A short distance from this place was an old-established shot tower. The manager was questioned concerning the sales he had made in the last few weeks. Most of them proved to be entirely legitimate, but one had a rather significant aspect.

"Have you had any strangers as customers in the last fortnight or so?" asked the police inspector.

"Why, yes," was the reflective reply. "About ten days

ago two men came in to buy some shot. They purchased two hundredweight of small shot and carried it away with them. They seemed to be in a big hurry."

The time indicated was two or three days before the date of the robbery on the Southeastern Railway.

The manager was asked if he could recognize the two men if they were brought before him and he said he thought he could, although he had waited on a number of persons since then. His description of them was very much like that of Edward Agar and William Pierce.

About the same time it was discovered that the same men had gone to a shop in the neighborhood and purchased four leather courier-bags. Obviously these were for the purpose of carrying the gold which they expected to steal if their plans worked out. The bags were the kind that could be worn under the capes which were then almost universally used by Englishmen of the middle class.

It was also learned that at about this same time a man had been seen in the neighborhood wearing a black wig and false whiskers. The police assumed at once that this could be none other than William Pierce. If their theory was correct it was evident that the very means which Pierce was taking to conceal his identity might really prove to be the means of landing him in the net of the law.

Up to this time it had been a battle of wits between the crooks and the police and now for the first time it began to look as if the law would be the victor.

Mention has already been made of Fanny Kay, who while Edward Agar was serving his term for forgery in Newgate Prison, was living from hand to mouth, trying to support her child at the very time William Pierce was living in luxury. Only a few months before Pierce had been down to his last nickel, wondering where the next meal would come from. Now he sported a carriage and resided in a fine house and was bedecked with jewelry. It was obvious that the man had money to burn. Where did it come from? Fanny Kay put on her thinking-cap. She remembered that Agar had come home one night in company with Pierce and that the two men had gone into the cellar of his home where he had built a furnace. Both of them carried bulging bundles. At intervals they came upstairs perspiring and looking as grimy as if they had been working at the forge.

"What are you doing down there, Ed?" she asked.

He smiled and chucked her playfully under the chin.

"We're making leather aprons," he cried.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"Well," he retorted playfully, "what you don't know won't hurt you."

She knew very well he was telling her to mind her own business and said no more about it. Having cast her life with a criminal, she had long before learned the lesson of obedience. But she knew well that Agar and Pierce were in some unlawful enterprise. She knew likewise that Pierce had nothing to do with sending Agar to jail on the forgery charge. For a while after that incident Pierce had called on her at intervals, but when he went up in the world he ceased to see her at all.

One day she received a letter from Agar telling her to buy some toys for the child. He instructed her to call on Pierce who would give her the money for the purchases. She did so and met with a brutal refusal. He told the woman she would not get a penny from him and warned her to keep away from him. That was the undoing of William Pierce. Shortly after, Fanny Kay Agar called on Agar at the prison and when she left she was flaming with rage. She went to the governor of Newgate Prison and told him a story that amazed him. He immediately communicated with the London police.

This information was the final link in the chain they had been welding with such care and patience. In less than twenty-four hours a police inspector called on Pierce at his palatial home.

"Pierce," he said, "I want you to go with me."

"What for?" Pierce asked with the confidence of a man who is sure of his position.

"For the theft of the gold from the safes of the Southeastern Railway in May, 1855," was the calm reply.

The unexpectedness of this charge robbed the man of his self-possession. His face paled; his knees shook.

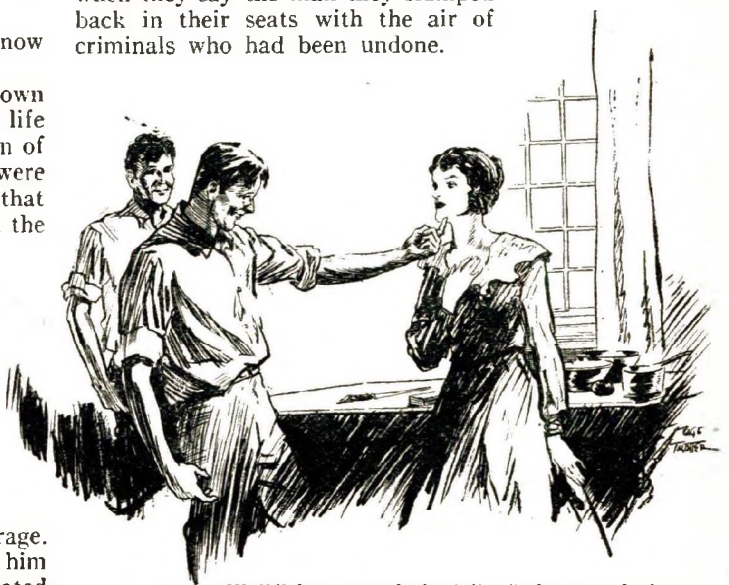
"That's absurd," he shouted. "I hadn't anything to do with that affair and I can prove it!"

"Very well," was the quiet rejoinder, "you can produce your proofs in a court of law. In the meantime you might as well be warned that anything you say will be used against you at the trial."

A few hours after his capture Burgess and Tester, the two employees of the railway company, were taken into custody. Even then the three men felt confident it would be impossible to convict them—any evidence the Crown had against them would be of a circumstantial nature and not the kind that would be accepted by a British jury.

On the day following the arrests the police proceeded to the home of Pierce and made a systematic search. At first they found nothing of an incriminating nature, but presently one of the officers of the law brought forth a little map of the premises and proceeded to follow the instructions on it. In the course of time they found themselves in the pantry of the house. Some marks in the floor indicated that it had been tampered with. They ripped up the flooring and discovered a hole. The top was covered with rubbish, but when this was swept away they found the remainder of the gold of the Southeastern Railway at the bottom. With it were a number of bonds and securities worth thousands of English pounds.

The prisoners were unaware of this search and the discovery of this startling evidence, and on the day of the trial they took their places in the dock, hoping against hope that they would extricate themselves from the plight. They sat in a row—Pierce, Burgess and Tester—and when instructed to answer to the charge pleaded not guilty. Baron Martin, the Judge who presided over the trial, called on the prosecutor to bring forth his first witness. The prisoners strained their eyes to see who it was—and when they say the man they slumped back in their seats with the air of criminals who had been undone.



"Well," he retorted playfully, "what you don't know won't hurt you."

Pierce particularly felt faint, and well he might—for the witness was none other than Edward Agar, brought from prison to confront them.

Agar, his eyes burning with rage and the desire for revenge, told his story with distinctness and with a ferocity that attested its truthfulness. He said Pierce was the instigator of the whole scheme—that he had come to Agar and suggested how easy it would be to make a fortune by robbing the gold safes of the company. From that moment Agar, who was the most resourceful of the criminals, took charge of the planning of the robbery. Burgess and Tester had been persuaded to join in the enterprise, by assurances that it was a sure thing and that there was not the slightest danger of detection or arrest.

Burgess was the guard and he was the man who had permitted Pierce and Agar to gain access to the vans in which the gold safes were carried. Tester had helped them to get possession of the keys long enough to take wax impressions from which duplicate keys were afterwards made. After the lead shot had been substituted for the gold bars the boxes and safes were resealed, Pierce and Agar taking the gold to Agar's house where it was melted and thus made salable. They had no difficulty in disposing of part of it to a well-known "fence" in London.

The first hitch in the program came when Agar was arrested for a previous crime and sent to Newgate. Before going to prison he made an arrangement with Pierce by which that crook was to pay Fanny Kay a specified sum each month for the support of herself and her child. When Agar came out of jail the remainder of the booty was to be divided into four equal parts. It was the failure of Pierce to keep this agreement that brought him and his two accomplices to grief. All this was told with dramatic effect upon the witness-stand. The narrative was brought up to the day on which the robbery was to take place.

LET Edward Agar tell in his own language what followed. He explained that he and Pierce were in a cab outside London Bridge Station waiting for the signal that the time had come for action. Burgess was to give it by pulling out his handkerchief and casually wiping his face. He did so, and what happened came as the result of the carefully planned scheme. Said Agar:

"Burgess went to his train and I returned to Pierce in the cab and told the cabman to drive us up to the Dover railway office. I had previously seen Tester on the incline near the terminus, when he said to me: 'It is all right.'

"I went to the ticket office and procured two first-class tickets. We kept our courier-bags on, but gave two carpet-bags to a porter. I handed Pierce his ticket and he entered a first-class carriage. I walked up and down the platform until the train started, and saw the carpet-bags given to Burgess, who placed them in the van. Watching for my opportunity, I jumped unobserved into Burgess' van, where I crouched down in a corner and Burgess threw his apron over me.

"I was in the guard's van until the train started, after which I got up and saw there were two iron safes in it. I opened a safe and took from it a wooden box. It was fastened with nails and iron bands and was also sealed. I had a pair of pincers with me for raising the iron, and also boxwood wedges with me to force open the lid.

"I took out from the box, I believe, four bars of gold. One bar I placed in Tester's bag and gave it to Burgess. The other three were placed in the carpet-bag. I then put the shot in the box in place of the gold. The train by this time had arrived at Reigate. When we stopped I gave the bag to Burgess and heard Tester say: 'Where is it?'

"When the train again started Burgess joined me in the van and I opened another box in the same safe, containing American gold coins. I don't know the amount of these coins, but I put them in a bag and substituted shot for them. I then fastened down both of the boxes—the one that had the American gold coins in it with a screw—and I sealed them again with some seals and a wax taper which I had purchased for the purpose. I then locked the one chest and opened the other, which I found to contain small bars of gold. I took out as many of the small gold bars as I thought I had sufficient weight to replace, and then I fastened up the box again."

THE rest of the story we know—how the stuff was taken to Agar's house and melted down in order that it might be sold, of how Agar went to jail for a previous crime and of Pierce's betrayal of his trust and of the dénouement by which the culprits were brought into the dock.

The evidence was overwhelming and all concerned were found guilty by the jury. Before Judge Baron Martin passed sentence on them he was called upon to make a decision on another phase of this queer case. Fifteen thousand dollars' worth of bonds which Agar had handed to Pierce for the support of his wife and child had been seized by the police and were claimed by the railway company as part of their property. Agar protested that this had no relation to the loot taken from the safes—that the bonds were the result of his savings and that they had been given in trust for the support of his dependants.

This was a delicate point of law and the Judge finally decided that the railway had no right to the bonds because they were the property of Fanny Kay and the child. Perhaps the fact that Edward Agar had assisted justice by his voluntary confession helped the jurist to come to this conclusion. The ending of this celebrated case conformed to all of the standard requirements of melodrama.

Agar had his revenge on his false friend; Fanny Kay was given her bonds; the railway company recovered most of their property; Burgess and Tester were sentenced to transportation; Pierce was given a term in prison.

The final moment in the play came when the learned Judge of the English Court excoriated one criminal for betraying the trust of another.

"On you, Pierce," said the Judge, "I am unfortunately compelled to inflict a punishment less severe than upon the other prisoners. They were servants of the company and you were not. By a strange construction of the law you might perhaps have got in the same category with the other two; but I am unwilling and my brother Willes agrees with me, to strain the law against you. But I do declare that if *I* stood in the dock to receive sentence, I should feel more degraded to be in your place than in even that of your associates.

"You have been long connected with this man Agar; he trusted you and he gave you three thousand pounds in stocks to be invested for the benefit of his child and its mother, together with six hundred pounds, his share of part of the proceeds of this robbery and the rest of the gold that had not been sold. In all, you must have got out of him over fifteen thousand pounds. This you stole and appropriated to your own use. It is a worse offence than the act of which you have been found guilty. I would rather have been concerned in stealing gold than in the robbery of that wretched woman and her child. A greater villain than you are, I believe, does not exist!"

What followed was almost unprecedented in a court of law. The people did just what the spectators in the pit were in the habit of doing when the villain is foiled in the play. They burst out in a storm of applause. And thus the man who thought he could outwit justice by the flimsy expedient of a pair of false whiskers and a black wig met a deserved fate.

The Wild One

The author of "Scandalous Bill to the Reskue" is at his joyous best in this blithe tale of a rodeo rider who became wild indeed.

By BUD LAMAR

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IT was after I had paid a dime to see a wild, ferocious octopus that a bright idea come to me. Everybody has heard the old saying, "You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all of the time," which is a pretty good saying as sayings go.

But I have been in the show business for some years and I know for a fact that there is more or less fooling going on all of the time. And even if this here fooling parades under various assumed names, it don't change the nature of the thing none whatever. And when the customers find out that the bearded lady's name is Oscar, they don't do anything much about it except maybe stroll across the way and pay another quarter to behold the genooine, live mermaid which was catched in the South Sea Islands by Captain Alexander J. Dingbat on the morning of the first day of April, at seven forty-five A. M.

The thing to do is to keep your hat on and your suitcase packed and not invest too much money in doo-dads which cannot be carried away at a moment's notice.

Emery McCoy and me had been attracted to this wild octopus by the ferocious and blood-curdling growls issuing from the tent in which he was displayed. We had paid our dimes, mounted a stairway and peeked fearfully over the edge of a dark pit. I do not know yet whether an octopus growls, but I do know that this one had long since ceased protesting against Fate. He was a defunct octopus in none too good a state of preservation and I would not even be surprised if he was nothing more than an old dried up cow-hide cut into strips.

And so, as we came down the steps again I said to Emery: "Emery, this is just what we have been looking for!"

My partner did not answer me, but he let out a sigh, and a troubled look appeared in his eyes. Emery and me were partners, engaged mostly in the Wild West business, and together we had traveled all over the country, using every mode of transportation known to man, including walking. Due to the fact that my mind functions with great speed and that I am always ready to bulldog every opportunity which might not be grasped by a slower-thinking person, I was the brains of the team. Emery was a big burly fellow, not much given to deep meditation, and following the disastrous outcome of some of the undertakings in which I had launched him, he had come to look upon me with a suspicious eye and to question my every move. He was very unreasonable that way, and I always had a hard time convincing him that we would not get anywhere unless he took a chance now and then.

It so happened that we were at liberty, following a sheriff's seizure of the show with which we had been connected in the capacity of bronc' riders. And the spending of twenty cents to see the wild octopus could of been considered an extravagance had it not given birth to my fine idea. I should say here that my wits are always very sharp when I am hungry and I have devised pretty fine schemes while my stomach was growling in an ominous manner.

We walked away from the carnival and sat down under a tree and while I was busy thinking, Emery kept chewing blades of grass and casting long inquiring glances at me.

"Emery," I says after a while, "I got it all fixed; you are about to become a wild man!"

"Wot!" yelped my partner, his eyes bogged out in alarm. "By gad, I aint!"

"Emery," I continued patiently, "you should feel very lucky that you have a smart man for a partner and it would be more to your advantage to coöperate with me than to bark silly statements like 'By gad, I aint!' Now the way I have this figured out—"

"I don't give a kiss-my-foot how you got it figured out," put in Emery. "I aint goin' to be no wild man! Locoed pelicans like you is a menace to life and limb of society. Allus thinkin' up ways to cause me trouble! Violence and strife! I aint had a moment of peace since you took up with me! My life is in danger every time that puny brain of yours goes to rattlin' around in your head!"

I let this pass. It looked like Emery was very determined to have nothing more to do with my schemes. I would have to be diplomatic in order to change his mind.

"No, Emery," I began, "there's no violence at all connected with this. It is in fact the tamest undertaking which I have ever thought of!"

"Wot? You thinkin' up somethin' tame? Haw, haw, haw! That's what you said when you fixed it up for me to bulldog the wild African gnu, and my back is still sore from it! And that box-fight you got me into—if I hadn't used my head where would I been?"

THERE was indeed one case where Emery had put his head to work for him. He had butted his adversary clean out of the ring and had it not been for the quick work of the police, we would of been lynched on the spot.

"These incidents are past," I said; "we are now faced by the present. But if I have become obnoxious to you, Emery, I will go my way and you can go yours." I arose and started away.

"Wait a minute!" called Emery, looking alarmed. "What would I have to do to be a wild man?"

"There is nothing much to it," I explained, "on account you are so well suited to the part."

Emery let out a sigh and rolled his eyes, a helpless and resigned look on his face.

"Oh, well," he said, "I'll try it, but if it don't turn out right, you better look out!"

NOW, successfully to launch a wild man on his career is not an easy task, even after you have obtained the wild man's consent.

Emery wasn't going to be just another carnival freak. I had bigger things in mind for him. We had to procure several things which required money and in order to do this we sold our spurs and chaps. Not, however, without a great amount of protest from Emery.

I bought myself an ancient cut-away coat, an Ascot tie, a stiff-bosom shirt, a pair of spats, a walking-cane, a big glass diamond, a pair of spectacles and a stovepipe hat.

"Now," I said to Emery, "I am Professor Aloysius P. Mahoney, A.M.—P.D.Q.—F.O.B."

"What's them things?" asked Emery.

"My scientific titles," I explained. "If you aint got some letters tacked on to your name in this business, you don't amount to no more, Emery, than a tick on the tail of a bull."

Two days later, in the middle of the night, we dismounted from a freight train on the edge of a town called Troy Mills. The reason I had picked this city for Emery's first appearance was on account of it being a small out of the way place, where the natives would not be likely to ask too many questions.

We walked through the deserted streets until we came to a hotel. I draped a dark sheet over Emery's head, then I opened the door and led him inside. The clerk regarded us with surprise.

"Have you a nice strong room without windows?" I asked.

"I guess so," said the clerk. "What have you got under the sheet?"

"Shh!" I put in, looking mysterious. "His name is Boo-Hoo-Ma. Scientists have denied my claim that he was related to the human race!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed the clerk, not looking very easy in his mind. "Is he—er—quiet? I mean peaceful and all? We wouldn't want any ape scaring the guests!"

"I keep him hypnotized," I said. "Under my spell he is harmless!"

I signed the register: "Professor Aloysius P. Mahoney, A.M.-P.D.Q.-F.O.B., Boston. —Boo-Hoo-Ma, Capetown, Africa."

The clerk gulped a couple of times and led us to our room, staying as far as he could from Emery.

The next morning I spent in the library reading up on the subject of wild men, and before dinner I had all the known facts in mind. In the afternoon, I dressed in my professor outfit, and obtained an interview with the proprietor of the Palace, a movie house which opened its doors every Saturday night. This gentleman's name was Mr. Alfred Green, and he had an eye open for business. He was very much taken with my dignified manners and agreed that my proposition sounded interesting. We signed a contract whereby I would advertise my act in connection with his picture. The admission was to be raised to 75 cents and we split the takings 50-50. The day was Tuesday, so I had plenty time to coach Emery in his new role. On Wednesday several hundred handbills were distributed in Troy Mills. They read as follows—

SEE BOO-HOO-MA ! ! !

Genuine Living Member of the Homo Neanderthalensis race.
Wild Ancestor of the Cave Man ! ! !
The Only Specimen in Captivity!
Captured only after a terrific struggle in which 14 grown men were torn limb from limb by the Monster.
SEE this beast in human form tear and devour raw flesh with his sharp, jagged fangs ! ! ! !
SEE the fearful spectacle of this savage being struggling in his stout chains and screaming his defiance at civilization! !
HEAR the learned scholar, Professor Aloysius P. Mahoney, A.M.-P.D.Q.-F.O.B., tell of the capture of BOO-HOO-MA in a lonely African Cave. Fifteen armed men walked into this dismal, dark cavern. Only the Professor and the beast came out! A terrible, hair-raising, blood-curdling tale ! ! !
Come one, Come all. Bring the children.
In connection with The DANCE of DEATH, a moving picture of Love and Hate in the Orient, starring Miss Goldy Goldbucks and Antoine Tremolo.

Admission 75 cents and 25 cents.

I showed one of these bills to Emery and he read it very careful. Then he looked at me and said, "Bill, I aint never had much learnin', but I can tell you right now that a dang lyin' crook like you will only come to a bad endin'! And what's this here devourin' of raw meat with my jagged fangs? What about that, eh?" He jabbed his finger at the bill and waited for my answer with a wild look in his eyes.

"Oh, that!" I said. "After all, Emery, you must remember that cooking is only a recent development in the life of man!"

"Is that so!" he snorted. "Well, well, well, you don't mean to tell me!"

"Yes," I put in, "a wild man who would refuse to eat raw meat in public would right away be under suspicion. And we can't afford to have this happen right at the beginning. I have big things in store for us!"

Emery gave me a long, threatening look. "Keep this in mind!" he said. "I been layin' there thinkin', and I can only see a flock of trouble hoverin' over my head. Well, I'm warnin' you, some day I'll be pushed too far!"

"The trouble with you, Emery," I said, "is that you have got a suspicious nature. You are always imagining some catastrophe. Why don't you think of the bright sides of life?"

"Because I aint never seen any bright sides since I cast my eyes on you, that's why. Oncet I was a carefree cowboy. Look at me now, penned up in a room day and night, about to become a droolin' hyena feedin' on raw meat! There should ought to be a law against it!"

THE announcement of Boo-Hoo-Ma's appearance at the Palace created great excitement in Troy Mills. Strolling up and down the main street of the town in my awe-inspiring get-up, I was treated with much respect by the inhabitants. And as I looked back over my younger days, I was glad that I had not been expelled from school until I had reached the 6th grade, because a man without an education is like a woman with a busted larynx and not at all in a position to enjoy life.

But as the day drew nearer, Emery began to get very nervous and I could see that he wasn't trusting me as much as he should have. Instead of showing enthusiasm for the chance I was giving him, he was full of misgivings and kept saying that he wished he was following his calling, which had to do with riding bronc's and bull-dogging ferocious Texas steers. There was no ambition in him and he had no desire to better his position in life.

Saturday after dinner I started preparin' Emery for his performance. His hair did not look wild enough so I shaved it all off close and applied a thick coating of furni-

ture glue on his bare scalp. This furnished a good substantial base for a long black shaggy mane, which had previously served as a tail to a horse I had found tied near the hotel at a late hour. This alone was a startling improvement, but it was not all.

Emery's chest and arms were hairy enough, but his skin was too pale, so I rubbed him good and hard with several handsful of soot, until his hide became a sort of gun-metal color.

While I was fixing him up, Emery just sat there staring at me with a sad, resigned look in his eyes, and once in a while a brief flash of resentment. We had at one time owned a pair of angora chaps but one leg had been lost in transit. With the remaining leg, I made Emery an elegant apron which I draped around his bare middle and tied behind him with a piece of string.

"Wake up, you dumb ox!" I whispered. "Grab that bone and chew on it."

And as I backed away to judge the general effect I decided I had done a good job. His own mother would have ran screaming for help had she met him face to face in broad daylight. But I didn't like the look of his face—it was resigned-like and sad. I wanted him to be fierce. I told him this but he answered that there was plenty time for that.

And then I was taken with another bright idea. I said to him: "Emery, I am going out to get something that you will like. Remember I have always your happiness in mind!"

Fifteen minutes later I was back with a large bottle in my coat. "There," I said, "take a sip of this medicine and you will feel better."

Emery's eyes gleamed like fish scales in a skillet. He grasped the bottle and quick elevated it to his mouth.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. "You do have a good idea off and on in that pea head of yours!"

"Now, Emery," I cautioned him, "don't make a hog of yourself; we have work to do!"

"I am hired out to be wild, aint I?" asked the crazy jigger. "All right, I'll be wild, never fear about that!"

And about fifteen minutes before we were due to step out on the stage at the Palace, Emery was ready and willing for anything. In fact, it was all I could do to keep him from singing "Buffalo Gals" at the top of his voice. I told him to sit down behind the screen until the picture was over and that I would step out in front and make a speech before they raised the curtain on him.

"Here, Emery," I said to him, "is your raw meat, in this package. Be ready to eat it when I give you the signal."

He unwrapped the package and disclosed a great big ham-bone with some raw flesh hanging from it. He held the thing in front of him and regarded it with distaste.

"It looks," he said, "like you would get me something more appetizin' than this here carcass. Or maybe you figured sirloin steak would be too good for me? I get to chaw on a bone, like a dang dog! It's come to a pretty pass when a man—"

"Shh!" I put in. "You can have your steak after this thing is over!"

"I won't want it!" he declared. "My appetite is already plumb spoiled." Saying which, he pulled the bottle from behind his fur apron and took a big drink.

"Now don't forget," I cautioned him, "while I am out there talking to the people, I want you to let out some growls and rattle your chain now and then. And, don't sing!"

"All right," he said, "I don't like it, but I'll try anything oncet!" Then he went to muttering soft-like: "Yeah, oncet—"

I stepped in the wings just in time to see the movie hero clutching the heroine and trying to inhale her features and I knew from this that the picture was over. The lights were turned on and a long sigh followed by a buzzing of voices issued from the audience.

I waited a minute, then stepped out before the curtain. The crowd became silent.

Facing me were about six hundred curious people, men, women and children. The place was full. This crowd consisted mostly of miners and their families and I knew that if anything went wrong, I would have a terrible time because miners aint supposed to be gentle folks. But I couldn't see where I had slipped up on any detail and I felt sure that we would get by with it all right.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" I announced, holding up one hand. "You are about to be confronted with the strangest, most savage human being ever encountered in modern times."

Here I paused and tapped my foot, but no sound was heard from Emery. I figured maybe he wasn't expecting his cue so soon and proceeded with the speech.

"When this drop arises," I declared very impressively, "the curtain of the ages will be pulled back 25,000 years, and you will behold man as he was in those unenlightened times, long before he was enslaved by the flapper and reclaimed by the saxophone! By a strange freak of nature, and disregarding all treaties, codicils, international laws and other human disagreements, Boo-Hoo-Ma managed to escape civilization and refuse its blessings. You are about to see a being, ladies and gentlemen, who is not even a member of the Book-of-the-Month Club!

"He speaks no known language, eats raw meat from the quivering, bleeding body of his prey, keeps his body warm with the epidermis of his slain victims and does not know the difference between a home run and an attack of halitosis of the feet."

I tapped my foot again, but no answer. What had happened to Emery? I was worried.

"His capture was effected," I continued, "under the most terrible and tragic circumstances. Far back, in the depths of the sinister African jungle, I was leading a party of fifteen, searching the flora and fauna of the country for the lost epiglottis. Suddenly, at a turn of the trail, I stood face to face with Boo-Hoo-Ma. Ladies

and gentlemen, imagine my embarrassment! Luckily for myself I remained calm and assumed a pose of nonchalance. I lit a Cabbago, and blew a puff of smoke into the scowling features of the monster. Taken aback by this unlooked-for development he retired, coughing and howling, into a dark cave which happened to be near at hand.

"All thoughts of the lost epiglottis were driven from my mind. I turned upon my followers and pointing at the entrance of the cave, I cried: 'After him, men! And do not harm a hair of his wild head. Science must have him, as is, bona fide and in toto!'"

AGAIN I tapped my foot and strained my ears for signs of life behind the curtain. But an ominous silence reigned over the scene.

"Hcrumph!" I said in a loud tone of voice; then in a hoarse whisper out of the corner of my mouth: "What in blazes is the matter with you, you big fat-head?" But even this brought no answer. Now what—

I turned again to the audience which was anxiously waiting for the outcome of my story. "Hesitating not at all," I declaimed, "the brave fellows rushed into the darkness, after Boo-Hoo-Ma. These men were heroes, my friends!" I shouted, striking a dramatic attitude and putting a sob into my voice. "The world owes them a debt, which it can, alas, never repay!" I stopped and wiped a tear from my eye.

At this the Palace theater trembled and shook under the wild applause rendered as a tribute to these poor heroes that had laid down their lives for Science. Taking advantage of the commotion, I kicked the curtain and grunted, "Emery, you big lummox, what are you doing? Growl, confound you, growl!"

The applause quieted down. But I was about to suffer a nervous breakdown.

"Yes," I announced in a very sad tone of voice, "their united efforts against the superhuman strength of the prehistoric one served as naught! One by one, they were torn asunder. Waiting outside the cave, I heard their dying cries and realized that I would have to capture Boo-Hoo-Ma myself!"

What the dickens was that big pie-eyed loon of an Emery McCoy doing back there? Supposing that he had got scared and— I did not dare dwell upon this! I had to put an end to this speech and find out what was what.

"It was a case of mind over matter," I continued my address, "I walked into the cave, stepping over bleeding limbs and torn bodies, and stood before the gory beast. 'Enough of this, sir!' I thundered, fixing a stern orb onto the shifting eyes of the maddened savage. And before my hypnotical glare, Boo-Hoo-Ma began to cower and whimper! Intelligence had won over murderous instincts. He was in my power!"

I reared back, scowling, with two fingers inserted into my vest.

"I thought you said the cave was dark?" asked a man setting in the front row. But his question was drowned under a terrific burst of applause.

I took a careful look around me, gave the signal for the curtain to go up and prepared to run for my life. Out of the corner of my eye I watched the thing rise to disclose—what?

The Palace theater was so silent, you could have heard a sheep-tick calling to its mate. I saw hundreds of faces staring at the stage, eyes bogged out in expectation and mouths wide open.

Slowly the curtain lifted.

Lord almighty! There was Emery—the big ornery toad was settin' there, sure enough—sound asleep and breathing gently through his mouth! His head was pillowed on his shoulder and a silly grin of complete happiness gave him an angelic appearance. Held lovingly to his breast was the bottle, while the ham-bone rested in his lap, on the angora robe.

The crowd let out a gasp of surprise. They had not expected such a lovely scene of fireside contentment.

There was just one chance that I could maybe save the situation. I stepped to Emery's side and exclaimed: "Ah! He sleeps!" Then following this statement, I jabbed him in the back with a pin. *"Yaow-w-w-w-w!"* yelled Emery, jumping to his feet and upsetting his bottle and the bone. Then he turned facing me, his eyes blinking fast, and rubbing his injured part.

The crowd went, "Ahhhh!"

"Wake up, you dumb ox!" I whispered. "Grab that bone, chew on it, growl!"

Emery was trying to remember what was taking place. His already cloudy brain was still more befogged by the spirits he had partook of. He picked up the bone, examined it very careful and went to wiping the dirt off of it on his fur piece. Then he shook it a couple of times, not looking very pleased, and stood there gazing at me, like an old cow at milking-time.

He glanced at the sea of faces on the other side of the footlights; then he made the startling discovery that outside of the dangling chap leg he was naked!

"Erk!" he said, his alarmed orbs searching the scenery for a way of escape, which he was not long in ferreting out. Divining his purpose, I stepped before him and held up one hand. But the crazy jigger was not to be arrested so easy. I struggled with him and he fetched me a terrific whack over my stovepipe hat with his ham-bone. *"Yow!"* he yelled, panic clutching at his heart, and he stampeded from the stage, yipping, "Yow! Yow! Yow!" every jump, his horse's tail streaming behind.

The audience right away went into a volcanic eruption. There was no doubt in their minds now but what this was indeed a wild man of the most ferocious nature. And when they realized that he was loose and likely to rip up the whole town by the roots, they began climbing all over each other, screaming, kicking and scratching in a wild attempt to go elsewhere.

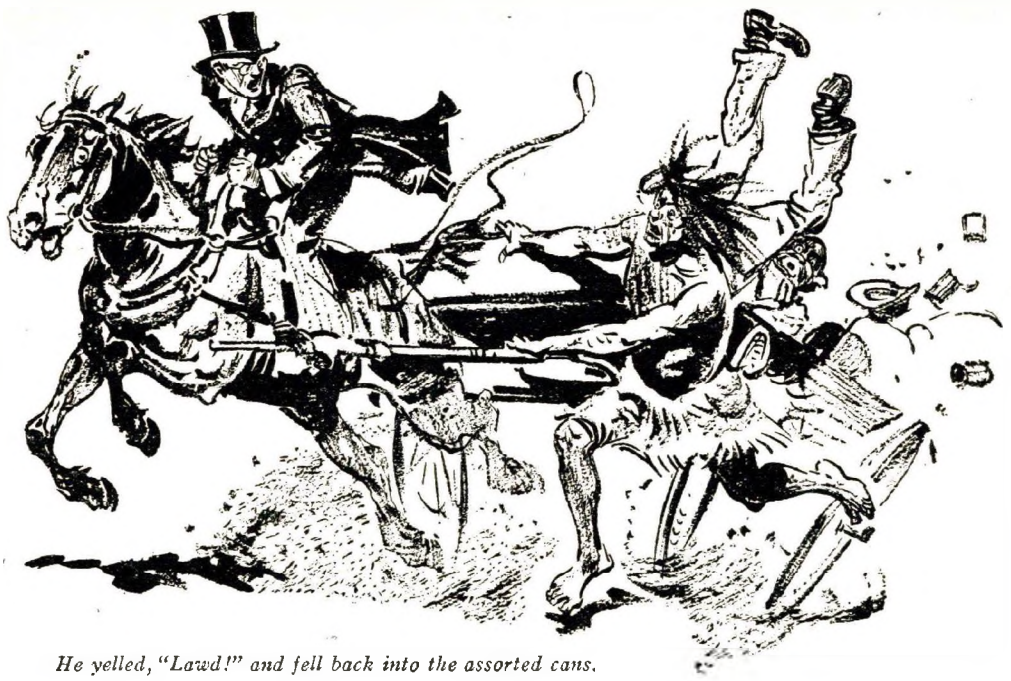
I pushed the rim of the stovepipe hat from my eyes where it had become lodged, got back onto my feet and took after Emery. I also wanted to travel. I had a glimpse of his black mane and white chap leg turning a corner and I followed in that direction. But just as we got to the door leading into an alley, a shot rang out and a bullet whistled over my head. My mind was again working very rapidly and I decided that it would be better for me to run in an opposite direction from Emery. The more opposite the better. So I made sure that he was going east before I struck out due west at great speed.

I had no more than turned the corner into another alley, when I heard footsteps close behind and, not even reducing my speed, I glanced fearfully back over my shoulder. There was the big ox lumbering after me, looking sure enough like he had become wild in earnest.

"No, no! Emery!" I shouted, trying to wave him back. "Do not follow me! We must split up!"

BUT he did not see the wisdom of this suggestion and kept right on my heels, whichever way I turned. He was even too scared to be sore at me and kept moaning, "Oh, my Gawd, Bill, oh, my Gawd! What'll we do, what'll we do!"

The town was in an uproar. We could hear people yelling and running on the streets and I knew that if we did not reach open country pretty soon, our lives would not be worth much. Suddenly we ran face to face with an old



He yelled, "Lawd!" and fell back into the assorted cans.

colored man who was driving a horse hitched to a garbage wagon.

"There's our chance!" I yelled to Emery. "Jump on—quick!"

The old colored man, who had been smoking a pipe and driving slowly along, saw Emery emerge from the shadows before him like an avenging demon. He threw his reins into the air, yelled, "Lawd!" and fell back howling into the assorted cans behind him. The horse snorted and jumped sideways, but I grabbed a hame of the harness and swung on his back as he darted past. Emery scrambled onto the clattering wagon, causing its owner to go plumb crazy and scream at the top of his voice for the angels of heaven to come down quick and save him. But Emery squawked him off and poked him into a large wooden barrel half full of refuse and clamped the lid back on the top of it.

We thundered down the alley, sowing tin cans, slops and garbage in our wake and ran smack bang into a large party of armed citizens who were cautiously searching for the escaped Boo-Hoo-Ma. They scattered before us like leaves in a Kansas twister but several bullets hummed past our bustling chariot and I knew that we would be leading a long parade before very many minutes had passed. The old horse was running for home as fast as his ancient feet would guide him there. But I did not intend that he should pick his own way, which might have been the shortest but not the safest for us. I reached down and swooped up the reins and kept him headed for the city limits. I heard a loud hum coming up behind and turned to see a number of automobiles gaining on us.

I yelled to Emery: "Emery, jump on behind me—we're going to cut loose from this bouncing vehicle!"

"Wait a minute!" yelled back my partner. "I aint quite ready."

I looked back to see what could be delaying him and saw that he had dug out the colored man and was peeling the clothes off of him and putting them on his own naked body.

"This aint no time for dressing up!" I hollered. "Your life aint worth a plugged dime if you don't mount this horse now!"

"All right!" I heard him grunt. "Here I come!"

And as he landed behind me, I cut loose from the wagon with three or four well-applied swipes of my knife.

The wagon rolled on toward a ditch, then wrapped itself up around a telegraph pole, busting up into a hundred pieces, spillin' out the colored man and his cargo. But he was not hurt in any way, because we saw him scramble to his feet and fade out into the darkness, letting out terrified *"O-O-O-O-o-o-o-s!"*

Two hours later, safe in a speeding box car headed west, I said to Emery, "Emery, I wish you wouldn't stand so close to me; you do not smell like a geranium!"

"Well, for goodness sakes!" said Emery in an injured tone of voice. "Could I help it if the man wallowed in the garbage can? Whose fool notion was this, anyway? Me, a wild man! And this horse's tail, I can't pull it off nohow. And I'll never be washed clean again, I betcha. You're a fine promoter! Look at us—we aint got a dang thing to our names. We don't dare show up at a rodeo lookin' like this. You don't never want to pull any more of your smart aleck tricks on me! I'm done, by gad! I'll bet we aint got a dime between us. I'm gettin' hungry, too!"

"Emery," I said, lighting a cigarette and gazing out at the night, "you will never amount to much. It was your fault that this thing went phooey on us. But in spite of your locoed actions, I am not worried much about the future."

"No," he said, "a locoed pelican like you wouldn't worry much. I'll betcha you'd be worried if you had an appetite like me!"

"Why worry? When time comes to eat, we'll eat! We can't jump off this train going forty miles an hour!"

"How will we eat?" he asked.

"In a restaurant, of course," I replied.

He shook his head, hopeless-like.

"You can't eat in a restaurant without money!"

"Well, we have money!"

"What?"

"Sure," I said, pulling out a handsome roll from my pocket. "I have here about two hundred and fifty dollars, of which half of it is yours!"

"My Gawd!" said Emery. "I wouldn't of thought it possible!"

"When that crowd was inside the Palace," I explained, "I went to the manager and demanded our half, and here it is!"

"Hanged if it aint!" whispered Emery.

The both of us were silent for a long time.

"But I aint gonna be no more wild men!" put in Emery, as an afterthought.

"No, Emery," I said, "I will not ask it of you. I will think of something else."

I glanced at him from the corner of my eye. He was staring out into the darkness, a dumb, helpless look in his eyes.

High Explosive

A tense little drama that came to its final climax in a nitroglycerine factory.

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

"Spike Slavin, he come buttin' in," coughed Donovan. "Full o' booze an' hop."

IN the nitrating-house of the New Jersey dynamite-plant, at ten P.M., Terry Donovan was watching a "charge" of nearly two tons, preparatory to running it off into the purification-tank.

All alone was Donovan; all alone in that grim, reeking chamber of potential annihilation, inside its huge barricade of timbers, earth and stone. As he peered over the rim of an immense leaden tank, where bubbled enough inferno to blow a city to dust, Donovan was worried.

"Gosh!" he murmured, rubbing his jaw, which dolefully ached. "Gotta go to N' York tomorrow, see that damn' dentist an' get these here two loose snags out."

If anything in the world could unnerve Donovan, it was New York. "Them devilish taxicabs an' automobiles make me nervous. Crossin' them streets an' all—gee, I rather take a beatin' any day, than do it. Some auto or other is sure gonna get me, one o' these days. Damn N' York!"

All the time of the nitrating in the steel tank cooled by brine-coils, Donovan had been worried. Brooding the perils of motor-traffic, he had watched the most critical process of any in a dynamite-works—the terrible process of mixing the nitric and sulphuric acids with the glycerine. He had still been worried while drawing off the hell-broth into the separator. All through both processes he had successfully held down the heat in that seething venom of destruction, that devil's poison ever eager to "blow."

And he was still worrying, as he watched the thermometer of the separator; the tank where ugly, leprous, brown and gray bubbles scummed the surface. Keenly he observed, ready to open a valve and "drown the charge" in a water-pit, if it overheated. A witches' caldron! So far, the temperature had not risen unduly high. A few more degrees, though, and—well, a crater might yawn where the nitrating-house had stood.

That, however, was not Donovan's worry. No; it was his teeth and the taxicabs. . . .

Any sudden shock may "shoot" nitroglycerine. Any stray spark, from sources unseen. Or the temperamental virus may just spontaneously detonate. Afterward, the "strict investigation"—does it ever find out exactly why? Worse than a woman is "powder" for doing the unexpected. *Powder* being the word always used in the business, to mean nitroglycerine.

Donovan, however, wasn't thinking of trouble tonight. This was a safe plant. The electric lights, all wired in special containers, were cased in heavy glass boxes. Built of asbestos-board, the structures were grounded to protect them from lightning, even from static sparks. The floors were of sheet-lead, where no spark could strike. All tools were of non-sparking bronze. At every entrance, a rubber mat had to be used, to keep from bringing in gravel. Even the tram-rails, outside, were of wood.

Save for Donovan's aching loose teeth, and the prospect of New York traffic, why should he feel uneasy? He was all alone, with a familiar job which for more than three years now he had put through without accident. Alone, in the little building with the sign that stated only one man could work there, and never more than two men be there together.

And was he not keeping all the rules? His clothing had no pockets. His shoes were sewed throughout; not a nail in them, a metal eyelet or even a metal shoelace-tip. He had no matches. Hardly! Just to be found carrying even a safety-match meant ten days' lay-off without pay; while a strike-anywhere match was instant dismissal. And now

that he was married to Jennie, and they had the kid and the cozy little house over in Brewerton, his job meant everything.

He remembered one fool workman—old man Higgins—who had used a jack-knife to cut up some dynamite. Then when Higgins had snapped the knife shut, the blade had pinched a tiny smear of nitro, in the handle. After that, with only a left hand, of course old man Higgins had been out of luck.

No, never monkey with nitroglycerine! Nothing at all like that, for Donovan. No misplays! . . .

"Gee!" he pondered, making ready to draw off the charge. "Wish I didn't hafta go to N' York tomorrow. Damn them two teeth, anyhow! It sure does worry me, N' York does, with all them automobiles an' taxicabs!"

HE felt, on the whole, a bit seedy. The "powder-line" —that is, the process of manufacture—had this time been especially trying. It had started late and gone slowly. A powder-line, when once "on," has to be carried all the way through. Not even a thunderstorm can stop it. For nitro won't "stay put." Nitro is a live, venomous thing. Run away and leave it unfinished, it will finish itself and everything else, by heating, fermenting, "blowing." Once you set your hand to that kind of plow, you must finish the furrow.

Seedy and tired—and worried—was Donovan. The April night seemed packed muggily close about him, the fumes unusually strong. Even though partly drawn away through ventilators, enough of those fumes clung, to induce a little headache. Long handling of the deadly stuff had given him practical immunity against one of the most excruciating agonies in the world—nitroglycerine headache at full tide. But still, tonight, he felt a touch of it. And coupled with the throbbing in his jaw, it set his nerves crosswise.

"Wish to God this here line was done!" he growled. He wanted to get through, wash up and go home to Jennie. Home, to a hot supper, a smoke and a long snooze; even though after waking he must face the terrors of the New York traffic.

He saw the charge was ready to draw off, down the leaden gutter from the top of the purifier to the eight-foot drop that would plunge it into the washer. It had not yet "gone up," and now seemingly the most acute danger was past—once more. Soon now, home and rest!

Three turns of a valve, and all at once—swift, questing, sinuous—a serpent of nitroglycerine sped down the metal trough. A pale, straw-yellow serpent, that thickened to a stream; a swift, venomous, terrible stream of death that without warning might strike, that never needed to strike twice.

Down into the water it plunged, to sink there, lurking like the evil spirit it was; rebellious, malignant with power incalculable.

Then all at once, from the little raised runway that, sheltered only by a light rail, ran above those caldrons of death, a sound made Terry Donovan look up.

"For God's sake!" he ejaculated.

GRINNING down at him, he beheld the distorted face of "Spike" Slavin. Slavin was his passionate enemy, who had sworn an underworld oath sometime to "get" him. Very good reason too, was Spike's, for hatred. Had not Donovan reported Spike for infraction of rules at the dynamite works—an infraction that had menaced the whole establishment—and caused Spike's discharge? And had not Jennie thereafter turned Spike down, cold, and married Donovan?

Spike had drifted into the abysses of crookdom, had become a "coker" and a gunman. Despite the oath of vengeance, Donovan had almost forgotten him. But now —well, there stood Spike on the runway, with an unlighted cigarette stuck into his grin of triumph and hate.

"Get out o' here, you!" ejaculated Donovan. "How the devil did *you* get in, an' what d' you want?"

"Climbed up the slide, see?" answered Spike, naming the escape-chute, like a fire-escape, through the barricade. "An' I want *you!* Gonna get you too, see?"

Hot with booze and coke and hatred was the gangster. Donovan measured the distance, glanced at his thermometers and at the swift-running serpent of nitroglycerine, and tried to parley.

"You bum! Say, if you wanna scrap, I'm your huckleberry," he proffered. "But take it outside, an' later. Just now, there's a powder-line on, an'—"

"Fine!" grinned Spike. "That's just what I want. Plenty o' powder. 'Cause I'm gonna blow it, see?"

"Blow it? The hell you say!" Donovan tried to stall. But his heart quaked, for he saw Spike Slavin meant business. "You're nuts! If you get *me,* you'll get yourself, too!"

"Hot dog!" drunkenly mouthed the gangster. "Tell you what, old kid. They pinned a piece o' gun-play on me. The guy croaked. I'm in wrong. Get the chair, if I don't beat 'em to it. So I wanna go to hell, blazin'—with you. We'll both go, see? Swell!"

He struck a match, lighted his cigarette and flipped the match over the rail. It landed, still burning, on the leaden floor beside Donovan, who instantly plopped his soft shoe on it. "Hey, cut that out, you hop-head!" he cried. "Drop that cigarette an' step on it!"

"Oh, yeah, I'm gonna step on it, all right! You'll *think* I did, anyhow, 'fore I'm through. You're gonna travel a damn sight faster tonight, old boy, 'n you ever traveled before. Me an' you's gonna travel some. One-way trip to hell—see?"

"G'wan outa here, you bughouse dope!"

DONOVAN'S measuring eye judged the distance too great for a leap and a grapple. Before he could scramble up over that rail and slug the gangster, Spike could—

The gangster's hand swung to his hip. He flashed a stubby automatic, balanced it a moment, aimed it at the pale-yellow, venomous river of death speeding down the leaden spout.

"See this here torch, old kid?" he snarled. "It'll be one —two—three, an' out, for both of us! One slug in that there powder, and—blooey! Say your prayers, you snitchin', woman-stealin' son of a she-pup! *One!"*

"Hey, you! Drop that!"

"Two!"

Donovan's right scooped into the hot, vicious liquor of annihilation, swirled up a handful, flung it.

The nitroglycerine, poisonous, choking, hit Spike full in his twisted face. Freak stuff, always doing the unexpected, it did not "blow." It quenched the cigarette. Blinded, strangling, Spike pulled the trigger.

Crash!

The roar of the "torch" mingled with the tinkle of broken glass from an electric-light shattered by the wildly aimed bullet. Clawing at his face, coughing and burbling strange noises, Spike staggered against the rail.

And on the instant, Donovan had him.

Up over the runway and rail he surged, slugged the gangster, tried to wrench away the gun. His curses blent with the other's gasps.

But Spike, though crippled, was not yet out. Not yet had the nitro wholly robbed him of his drug-spurred strength. Still he held the gun, tried to turn it, to fire

again. Even if that shot missed Donovan, it might ping into the nitro. And then—

The enemies closed in a primitive and deadly battle. Both went down, tangled, writhing on the leaden runway floor. Clothes ripped to rags. Donovan fought to hold the

Another inch, and both would plunge into that hell-broth kettle below.

gangster's hand, wrest the gun away, land a stunning blow. Now he was on top, now Spike. Grunts, wordless gasps troubled the fume-laden air.

A moment they struggled at the runway's very edge. Another inch and both would have plunged into the bubbling, hell-broth kettle below. Just another inch—but Donovan dragged back from the edge.

He got his grip on Spike's throat. Vapors from the nitro-drenched face grinding against his, were blinding him too, choking him. But still he held a bulldog grip. What unexpected strength in that "coke"-maddened body! The gun! Could he never get the gun? He thought he had it—but no; Spike jerked it free, and struck. The weapon slogged home on Donovan's mouth. Blood gushed.

Maddened, Donovan shook the gangster rat-and-terrierwise. He heard the gun go *plop!* to the runway floor, and kicked it away. Wrenching free, a second, he showered blows on his desperate antagonist. One landed behind Spike's ear.

The gangster quivered, groaned, relaxed.

Half-blind and strangled though he was, Donovan heaved up to his knees, swayed a moment, then grabbed Spike by the coat-collar. Wheezing, gasping, he hauled the limp thug to the slide and hove him down it.

Spike vanished swiftly into outer darkness—down, away to a miry, weed-grown field. There he moaned a couple of times, writhed feebly to get up, fell back and was swallowed by the blackness of Nirvana.

"Whew!"

Donovan smeared his face with a tattered shirt-sleeve, gulped deep breaths. None of the actual nitro itself had got into his eyes or mouth; nothing but fumes. And Donovan was almost immune to fumes. A couple of minutes—his head cleared. Turning, he dragged himself back, heart furiously thrashing.

His mind flashed to the powder-line. Was the temperature soaring? He blinkingly fumbled along the gallery, down the steps to the caldrons; squinted painfully at his thermometers. They were only two degrees up. All safe—as yet. The pale wine of death still was speeding down its leaden gutter, still cascading into the water-tank.

"Halloo, there, Donovan! What the hell—"

A voice sounded at the doorway. Turning, Donovan dimly saw the frightened face of Pat McKenzie, night-watchman.

"What the devil's goin' on here?"

"Spike Slavin, he come—buttin' in," coughed Donovan. "You remember Spike. Full o' booze an' hop. Was gonna shoot a gun in the powder—blow the works. I knocked him cold an' fired him down the chute. Go get him—out there!"

"Gawd's sake, man!"

Gaping, pale and trembling, McKenzie mounted the steps and hesitatingly picked up the gun.

"He—he slugged ye?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Man, ye're all blood!"

"Gee!" Donovan's hand came away crimson from his mouth. He spat red. Tentatively he wriggled his tongue.

"Say, Mac!"

"What?"

"See if you find a couple o' teeth up there, too!"

"Teeth? Why?"

Again Donovan spat. Then he burst into a cackling laugh.

"Hooray! I don't hafta go to N' York, now! That was worryin' me, Mac. N' York an' all them damn taxicabs an' automobiles—gosh, they sure was worryin' me, *some!*"

Hell's Hinges

An American cowboy fights alongside the British in a strange and savage battle.

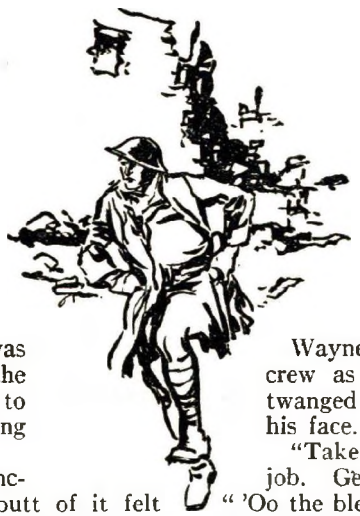
By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

Illustrated by Ernest Townsend

THE Tommy guiding Steve Wayne gave a curse, threw up his bayoneted gun, and plunged forward. Wayne stood hesitant for a second, and then realized that he was in it.

Wayne was a victim of army mistakes, though it did not matter to him especially. Why an American cavalry private should be detailed to a dismounted British cavalry outfit for *liaison* was a thing that he assumed some War Department clerk would scratch his head over some ten years from now.

It didn't matter. Steve was up and was getting into the lines a lot sooner than the outfit he had crossed with. It was all one to a cow-puncher who had spent his life drifting about without reason anyhow.



As he followed his hand dropped instinctively for the six-gun at his side. The butt of it felt good in his hand. Ahead of him, outlined against flares and gun-flames, were moving and huddled shapes.

Then there were other shapes, as wild commands roared through the night, and the firing increased. Wayne placed the machine-guns nearest him. In front of him were the Tommies holding this isolated section. As he stumbled forward he saw sandbags looming above the parapet and could distinguish the tangled wire at intervals.

"This is a sweet reception!"

Wayne's voice held a drawl that stamped him as from the Panhandle. He did not even need the drawl. There was a certain horseman's swagger about him, a far-seeing look in his blue eyes, and a significance in the way he wore the unflapped holster at his hip.

Wayne could distinguish the British by now. He stumbled on toward the parapet, tripping over an inert body in the mud as he came. And as he came, he realized suddenly that there were many coal-scuttle helmets coming over the bags.

A Tommy dropped against him and sank with a groan. Another fell sidewise. Wayne halted, uncertain for an instant, and was aware that one of the near-by machine-guns had ceased. He was caught in a trench raid which was rapidly turning into an attack!

Wayne had not yet reached the firing step. He had not thought of it, and no one had noticed him as yet. Germans were dropping down into the trench now.

Turning quickly toward the gun that had just ceased, he ran along the narrow board which alone guided his way through the mud. A German was struggling through uncut wire. He had gained the edge of the sandbags.

The German and Wayne saw each other simultaneously; the former's gun lay across the bags—pointed, ugly bayonet forward, into the trench.

Wayne's revolver came up like a flash. Part of his arm seemed to be jetting the red flame that spouted out from it. The enemy gun dropped forward before it had been fired. Its bayonet dug into the ground at Wayne's feet.

And then Wayne saw the machine-gun. If it only had not jammed! He was guided to it by a red spat of flame from the ground. A man lay there badly wounded, but game. The flame had come from his rifle. Two others were stretched out beside him.

Wayne dropped beside the lone survivor of the crew as another flurry of shots came and lead twanged on the metal shield directly in front of his face. His hand fell on the Tommy's rifle.

"Take the gun!" he commanded. "I'll take this job. Get that sewing-machine in action!"

"'Oo the bleedin'—"

"Just a Yank!" Wayne clipped. "Hop to it. Don't let 'em pick us off while we argue, man!"

With a curse, the Tommy rolled over and reached for his gun trips. Wayne rested the barrel of the rifle against his cheek, and ripped out a shot just as a redoubled flurry came from opposite him.

A form lurched out of the dark—the silhouette of a huge helmeted figure, and its rifle loomed there. A hand went up in command. A guttural command followed. A low cheer came from the batch of Jerries besieging this gun emplacement.

Wayne sighted carefully. If his man didn't get that Vickers in operation, he was due to make his debut and farewell to the Western Front, on the same evening. The rifle spat out, its mark the breast of the giant figure advancing. It struck home—the big German sprawled forward.

But he had started things. Two more of the enemy rose behind him, cursing. A third! They came on. Wayne saw a fourth as he sighted again.

Crack! They were unbelievably close now, and here the wire had been torn. But the rifle spoke truly. One man fell. His cry came to Wayne's ears. The others were too close now, though. Wayne worked the bolt furiously. And then the hammer clicked upon an empty chamber!

He flung himself to his feet and his gun went hurtling into the men negotiating the wire. The leader was now coming at him hard, bayonet gleaming—and behind the bayonet, eyes aflame with battle fury. Wayne's hand dropped to his six-gun. It flipped up, spoke once. The leader came stumbling on, but he only lunged against Wayne's shoulder in passing. The shot had caught him between the eyes.

Suddenly a new sound broke in. There was a short exultant "Ah!" from beside Steve Wayne. Then without warning came the first staccato shots of the machine-gun.

They tore and ripped through the wire. The minor attack went down before them as though they had not existed.

Wayne dropped beside his companion. "Swerve the muzzle!" he cried hoarsely. "Down along the line. They'll be needin' it down there."

At the instinctive command of that voice, the Tommy at the gun swung its arc slowly down along the line. Even through the fury of the crashing shots, the shouts of alarm and surprise could be heard.

A star shell circled over the fighting. A black wave of men could be seen, some scattered and others bunched—advancing from the German trenches. Supports! Wayne groaned. But the Vickers poured lead across the open. Before it, as Very lights gleamed and died, men went down in rows. The enemy had believed this gun silenced for good. The attack crumpled and the supports wavered.

THE Germans had not intended a real attack, anyhow. They had simply found during a raid that they could take the forward trench. Supports had been called for, and they were coming. It was all a sporadic affair; and now they suddenly were meeting with real resistance.

Another gun started to speak, from farther down the line. Wayne swore softly and his operator cursed with fluency. The gun tore on with its rataplan of death.

It was a matter of seconds only. The German line melted before determined resistance. The raiding-party was no more, and the supports were falling back. The wave that had started over crumpled as it came. None followed it. It was a strange thing, the way that suddenly the whole line became quiet as the grave. A single Very light floated above the lines. Its rays fell over a dead line—a wide-open front in which there was no sign of life. There were dead men lying there; but not even a shot followed the single crawling, wounded German who seemed a part of the mud and darkness. The light died. Wayne heard a groan from the man beside him and remembered that the Tommy was wounded.

He turned. "Hurt bad? Anything I can do?"

"No. . . . Stretcher-bearers any minute. I say, we did 'em proper that time, eh?" the Englishman gasped. "Stopped 'em right. If only—"

He broke off. His hand was tearing at the collar of his tunic and Wayne was reaching over to help him. They were both exposed, but there was no firing.

"What the 'ell's this—a tea-party?" a hoarse voice broke in. Wayne turned, still half lying. A heavy figure stood just below him, chin-strap adjusted belligerently, hard jaw outlined even in that turgid darkness.

"I'm hit, Sergeant-Major," the gunner said.

"And you're sittin' up there talkin' about it?" came back the other. "Call for stretchers when you're hit. And what about the others?"

"Dead, Sergeant-Major."

Wayne detected the fear in the man's voice. He was puzzled at it. In this man's war a certain definite discipline was required. He could not, however, get himself to understand why a wounded man who had just saved this section of the line was open to hard-boiled tactics.

"Dead, eh? And you've not even called for— Say, who in hell's that up there?"

Steve Wayne slid down and over the parapet. There was nothing of fear or cringing in his mien.

"If you're the sergeant-major in command here, I'm reporting," he said easily. "Private Wayne, U. S. Cavalry, detailed to your command."

"And for why?"

"Ask my War Department—and yours. Maybe some day we'll find a reason for it. I'm here, anyway, and this man behind us is hit. Are we going to take care of him?"

The sergeant looked at him for a second, considering. He was a huge man, and powerful; in his trench clothes he looked a mountain, and as immovable as a mountain.

"Yank, eh?" he repeated dubiously. "Well, maybe. Hey, stretchers!" he called over his shoulders.

The stretcher-bearers were coming up on the run. The wounded man behind the gun looked wide-eyed at Wayne as though the cowboy had affronted some strange god. The sergeant-major was again regarding him, there in the dark.

"Yank," he repeated. "Another bleedin' Yank! I'll have to make damn' sure of that before you go any further. You got up here mighty funny—who brought you?"

"He's dead, I guess, my guide. We hit here just as the raid started. I'm just detailed to *liaison*, and I reckon I'll be on your hands for a while, Sergeant-Major."

The sergeant-major growled. His hand dropped to his gun. He jerked his head. "Come along!" he commanded gruffly. "We'll see 'oo you are."

Wayne accompanied the huge sergeant down along the trench line. Men were slouching or lying against the duckboards or the back. As the sergeant-major approached, however, they straightened into a kind of fearful respect. It was not real respect; Wayne could sense that. It was almost cringing—a sullen, unwilling cringing—and from fighters on the line, who had just gone through a fearful raid!

Wayne remembered the man at the gun emplacement. That man had rated a citation at least. Yet, even wounded, he had been fearful at the sergeant-major's voice. Wayne remembered something else. His interrupted conversation with his former guide—the whispers he had heard as he was coming up—the one time that some one had broken off at the words: *"the trench that's called 'Hell's Hinges.'"*

This was the trench. He was beginning to understand a little.

At a jerk of the head from the sergeant-major, he slipped down past a gas curtain and into a small dugout. It looked as though it had been occupied for some time, as did all this section of the line. Across a table on which a single candle guttered in its own grease, Wayne faced the sergeant-major.

"Let's see your papers," demanded the latter. "We've been havin' a lot o' spies and such-like along this sector o' late. We're not takin' chances. Anyway, I'm not."

WAYNE made no move. There was a nonchalance about his slim frame as he stood there, in marked contrast with the other man's heavy brutal strength.

"I'm directed to report to the officer in charge," he said. "You're a non-com. Isn't there an officer?"

The sergeant-major threw up a heavy chin and gave a loud laugh. "Officer in charge? You're talkin' to him, sonny. Never heard o' Sergeant-Major Boyce? I'm him. And before you're through with this section o' the line you'll know him. They don't send an officer up into this section. I've been enough to hold it, for almost a year. Now let's see your papers!"

He held out his hand authoritatively. There was an unreasoning hostility in his manner.

Wayne threw out his papers. Boyce read them through reluctantly. He did not want to believe them; that was evident. He laid the papers on the table in silence; and as Wayne picked them up, their eyes met across the candlelight.

"We're not going to get along, Yank," the sergeant-major said.

Wayne smiled. "Maybe not. But I'm only attached to you—not directly under you—don't forget that. What do I do now?"

"Wait till the hell starts—there'll be plenty before we get out of this place," Boyce returned grimly. "I'll see that you get your share. Now I'll get you a billet. In the morning, report to the company sergeant and stay under his command until you get other orders. You're not supposed to be a fighting man, but maybe we'll find some use for you up here!"

Wayne flushed. His hand dropped toward his gun in an instinctive gesture. But it did not fall. He remembered. This was not the Panhandle nor the Pecos. Here he was a number, among other numbers.

Late morning found him lolling indolently outside the company sergeant's dugout. His way of rolling a cigarette in one hand had caught the attention of an Australian ex-corporal who was also lounging there. Along the parapet men stood at ease. In front of the line there was no sign of movement. Only the guns far off, near Amiens, gave evidence that there was a war.

"And you don't know why you're up here?" the Anzac demanded.

"Not by a long shot, Mac. And there seems nothing to do."

Wayne's revolver came up like a flash. . . . The enemy gun dropped before it had been fired.

"There will be," MacDonald assured him. "There's perfect hell due along this line. We're at the edge of a box. It's quiet enough, usually." Mac's voice lowered.

Wayne was looking for information. There was something wrong with this trench, and with this outfit.

"Boyce—" The way MacDonald said it made it sound like a curse. Wayne was listening eagerly. But suddenly Mac stopped. The sergeant-major came swinging along the trench line, alone. He wore a belligerent expression; his eyes were glassy and fierce. But he was well shaven and his uniform was spotless. Wayne stood up.

Boyce halted before the two men and looked them over with a grim grin. It was as though he recognized he had been talked about, as though he knew he was hated—relished it, and relished Wayne's knowing it.

"Come on with me, Yank," he said contemptuously. "We'll look over the posts along Saville Row! Maybe you're sent up here to learn something."

Wayne followed. The men on duty snapped to attention at Boyce's appearance as though a member of the General Staff was approaching. There was a real fear in their manner. Wayne watched it and wondered, and remembered what his guide had said—there were other things in this war beside the enemy. Boyce could make life an inferno for the men under him. And he was doing it.

The sergeant-major stopped in front of a man who was half leaning over the duckboards. The man had not seen them come up. He snapped to attention with a furtive expression on his face.

Boyce looked him over.

"Laurens," the sergeant-major said deliberately, "you're the dirtiest-looking man in this command. You haven't shaved. Why?"

"I was going to shave when I got off duty, Sergeant-Major." Wayne could not help seeing the little chevron on the man's arm which marked him as a member of the Old Contemptibles, who had stemmed the first advance through Belgium in '14. And he was taking this sort of thing. Worse—he *had* to take it!

"You shave before going on duty, in my command!" Boyce rapped out. He motioned ironically at Steve Wayne. "We have with us a Yank—observing. Between the Yanks and the Jerries, we can't afford to be found even dead without being properly dressed down." He turned away. "There's hell bustin' within a few hours. Don't let me see you on duty without being fit for it, once more, Laurens."

The way he turned off, the man of the Contemptibles might have been an animal. Wayne saw that Laurens' face was white. He turned away quickly himself, to avoid embarrassing the other.

Along the duckboards, on the way back, Boyce stopped with that bitter, twisted smile.

"We're probably in for hell tonight, Yank. But discipline comes first. I been out here since '14 and I know."

He waited doggedly for Wayne's reply. Wayne gave a nod. "I reckon you're right. This seems a funny place to start in on discipline, though."

"Any place!" the sergeant-major roared. "Where I'm in command, they're dressed to the eyeballs! And they snap to, don't forget it. They hate me, but you saw 'em snap to, didn't you?" His grin was provocative. Wayne wanted to slash in at it.

But he only nodded. "You've got courage, sergeant-major," he drawled lazily. "We're pretty much alone up here, I figure. And you're not makin' yourself too popular."

"Popular! I've never been popular and I never will be. But I handle my section o' the line—don't forget that! And as for being alone—I'm in command."

Wayne met the cold steel eyes. His own were as cool, completely unperturbed.

"Command wouldn't mean much up here, if things came down to it," he said quietly. "You haven't got a *juzgado* to—"

"A what?"

"A jail—a coop. You can't sling a man into the *cuartel*

if he falls down. This trench is as much alone as if the rest of the world didn't exist—except for the Jerries."

Boyce spread his legs apart and his heavy jaw shot outward. Compared to Steve Wayne, he was a huge bull elephant facing a young panther. His thumbs were significantly in his gun-belt, and a heavy forty-five was slung there.

"Listen to me, Yank: I said I was in command here. Like you say, we're alone. And I don't need a jail. If anything goes wrong, I'm the last law—and the law is here!"

He slapped the holster at his thigh.

"That law goes for you too, m'boy. I want you to understand it proper!"

It was almost a challenge. Boyce had sensed steel as hard as his own, even if of a different temper. He knew that either he or this newly arrived American must be the master. He wanted to impress his own mastery.

Steve Wayne glanced down at the gun without apparent interest. His eyes were languid.

"If I had to count on a gun—just speakin' from experience, pard," he said softly, "—I'd carry one without a flap on the holster! Me, for instance, now—I'm plumb peaceable, and I'm up here to fight Germans. But if you should start pullin' that iron of yours on me, I'd have you down before you got to it."

Boyce stepped back. He looked down inadvertently at the open-topped holster—non-regulation—which Wayne wore. A lot of the regulars, bred like Wayne, did the same thing.

Wayne stepped back. His expression had not altered. "I reckon, Sergeant-Major, you never saw a Panhandle boy draw a gun fast. It'd be an education. And you never saw one of 'em bluffed much, either!"

He went on down to the dugout which he shared with the company sergeant Poole, MacDonald, and Laurens. None of them were in and he lay down.

With night, though, Wayne knew that things were due to happen. The prophecies of Boyce were not to go unfulfilled. Along "Saville Row" supplies and ammunition kept creeping up. The low barrage which the enemy had been laying crept along. If the trench had been isolated before, it was like a desert island now.

The guns rumbled more heavily. Across the line, lurid flares ripped out at intervals. Wayne watched across the parapet. There were no rifle-shots coming across, except from an occasional sniper. Beside him MacDonald stood on duty, rifle in hand.

The Anzac sniffed the air as if he could smell something brewing. "Trouble, all right," he nodded. "I shouldn't be surprised at some gas. Damn 'im—"

He broke off. A heavy figure lurched against the duckboards; a heavier voice was in their ears.

"Quiet, Aussie?" It was Boyce.

"Yes, Sergeant-Major. Nothing out there." The Anzac's voice had lost all personality; it was dry, like the rustling of report sheets.

Boyce nodded. "There'll be something, before long." As he started away, he looked at Steve Wayne, who had not spoken, nor moved. "You, Yank—you don't have to be up here, y'know. Your orders don't call for it. You can be holin' up."

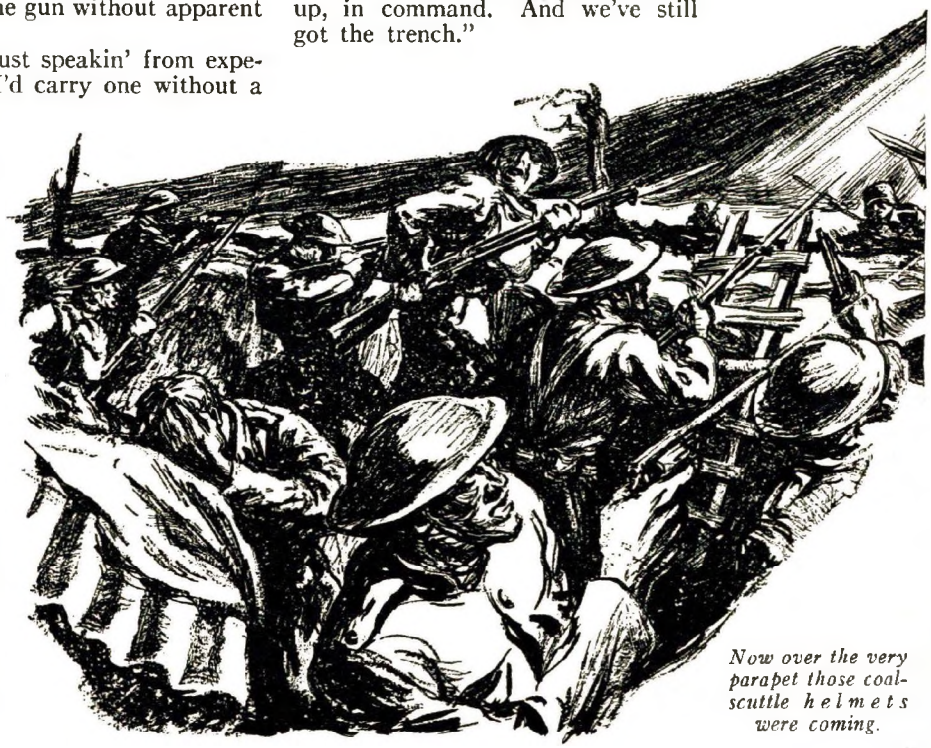
He awaited the reply to the taunt. Wayne's lips were tight as he replied simply:

"Thanks, Sergeant-Major. I know my orders. I'll stick along here for a while."

Boyce looked at him, hesitated, and then went on without another word. For a long moment after he had gone, MacDonald and Wayne were silent. The guns rumbled. A machine-gun stuttered somewhere, but not close enough to be noticed. A Very light circled over No Man's Land.

Then MacDonald looked at his companion. "You was wondering, Yank, why they called this trench a certain name—'Hell's Hinges'—why they hate to come up here. Maybe you know now."

Wayne nodded. "I'm still wondering. But they keep sending him up, in command. And we've still got the trench."



Now over the very parapet those coal-scuttle helmets were coming.

MacDonald grunted agreement. "It's because we fight with our backs to the trench wall. And it's generally new ones come up with 'im. Generally most of us are gone by the time the eight days here are up. But he lasts." The Anzac shuddered—it was as though he shuddered at some secret dread.

But there was nothing secret about it to Steve Wayne. As a leader of men Boyce was a bully and a brute. He could never become an officer. Perhaps that fact preyed upon him—made him bitter. Here he had his authority; here he showed it.

It was possible that Boyce could not entirely be blamed. Certainly he had done his share. But these other men—these dogged, despairing soldiers who shuddered at the thought of a shift up in this line with him—who dreaded him more than the enemy—

Wayne ducked by instinct as a whining bullet ricocheted off his helmet. For a moment he was dazed, clutching at the edge of the trench parapet. He blinked rapidly, then realizing he was not hurt, he straightened. By that time the attack was coming.

Wayne ducked into the nearest billet and reappeared

with a rifle. He threw himself up beside the Anzac on the firing step. The Germans were coming over. It was a swift foray, but a vicious one. Even at a glance, it was not a real attack. But the British in this trench were well cut off. There were no supports—they had to take it. Wayne heard Boyce's bellowing voice behind him driving the lagging men on.

Then suddenly the night was a thing alive with rifle and machine-gun fire, while below it rumbled the heavier stutter of the German big guns.

Wayne found himself firing automatically, his rifle spitting little tongues of red at the black shadows that hove out of the blackness before him. With rhythmic regularity they fell—and were replaced by other still blacker shadows. A man beside Wayne groaned, threw up his hands and clutched his chest. His rifle tumbled with a *s-h-li-s-h* into the slime; then the man slowly crumpled on the shelf of the trench. A terrific shiver went through his body and his weight, already half over the shelf, slowly dragged him down. He fell face downward in the muck. His legs and arms straightened out in one rigorous jerk—and he was still.

Out of the side of his eye Wayne saw Boyce give one look at the man, then spit and pass on. It was Laurens, the man who had taken such a tongue-lashing from Boyce during the morning—Laurens, one of the few who had survived out of that "contemptible little army" of '14.

Fire, reload, fire. . . . Black night, whistling shells, and flaming lead. . . . Laurens lying dead in the mud. But clean-shaven—

Wayne laughed—but his laugh was not pleasant to hear.

Splash!

"Hand-grenade! Duck!" shouted MacDonald. Wayne saw the tiny sparks spewing out of the mud not a dozen feet away. A half-dozen men jumped from the parapet and got out of range just as a dull explosion sent mud and dirt flying thick in air.

Closer. . . . Now over the very parapet, those coal-scuttle helmets were coming. One figure in gray loomed up out of the shadows, his gun almost in Wayne's very face. *Crack!* Down he came, head-first, to be buried up to his shoulders in the sticky mud. His place was taken by another, and beside that shadow loomed another —and another!

All up and down the line they were pouring over the parapets. Shouts and screams mingled with the staccato rataplan of the machine-guns and the bark of rifles. The batteries of the German trench-mortars played a bass accompaniment to the concerto of death.

At the farther end of the trench the fighting was heaviest. But there were more men billeted up there, and they seemed to be holding it—at that end.

Near him he saw a group of four gray-coats surround young Kingston. He'd been in the trenches for only three or four days, and hadn't been in the army much longer.

"Stay with 'em, Kingston!" MacDonald was shouting. "Give us a hand, Wayne? Come on!" With that, MacDonald left his position and dashed to the aid of the youngster.

Wayne's hand slipped off his rifle-butt and dropped down to his side. The feel of his old and battered forty-five gave him a feeling of exultation. He whipped out his pistol and it started speaking. One of the gray-coated men had whirled at his approach and had his glistening bayonet poised for a lunge.

Crack! A red tongue of flame darted from the mouth of Wayne's pistol and the man crumpled into the mud. Without stopping Wayne kicked him off the ledge and waded into the thick of the tussle. This was his meat. Once again he was back home. Once again he was fighting the hired gunmen of the sheep-herders who were making constant war on the cattlemen.

Wayne gritted his teeth and fired point-blank at another one of the invaders. He felt a blinding flash of light encompass him and shake his very vitals. He sank to his knees and darkness overcame him. He had been dealt a vicious blow with the butt of an enemy rifle.

When he came to his senses he realized that he could not have been unconscious more than a minute. The fighting was still going on. He looked around. The men who had been in the trench beside him were gone! Then he heard them. They had just managed to get over the parapet. After them—that was the word! Up onto the firing step he dragged himself, then over the parapet. He picked up a fallen rifle as he went, and refilled his friendly old revolver. He felt better with that by his side.

There they were—trying to get back through the barbed wire. And they had two prisoners—must be Mac and the kid. Wayne stumbled after them, trying to keep as quiet as he could. He lunged at the nearest man and thrust his bayonet through the man's ribs—retrieved his heavy weapon and lunged again. This man was pinioned to the ground before he had a chance to know what had struck him.

Two of the men were escorting each of the prisoners. Wayne made a dive for the nearest one. The man relaxed his hold on his prisoner and made an effort to defend himself. It was no use. Wayne was like one of the seven furies turned loose, and he had the strength of all seven.

MacDonald was straining to get loose from his other captor. Young Kingston was putting up a fight too. Both prisoners were now loose and mixing it for all they were worth. Wayne got another of the gray-coats, and then saw still another fall at the hands of the now liberated Kingston. MacDonald got his man.

One of the Germans whipped out his pistol; Wayne saw it out of the corner of his eye and his own six-shooter was spitting lead at the same instant. The German went down, but not before his Luger had spoken. Young Kingston crumpled in the mud and lay still. With increased fury Wayne and MacDonald lit into the remaining Germans. Things were quieting down all up and down the line.

"Save that last one!" shouted MacDonald. "We'll need him." Grabbing the surviving German by the scruff of the neck after the Heinie had thrown away his gun in token of surrender, Mac headed him toward their trench.

Young Kingston was dead when Wayne laid his limp body on the step of the trench. "No use for a stretcher for him," MacDonald commented. "Damn this dirty company, anyway! A kid like that hasn't a chance in this man's outfit. Sending him out to a man like Boyce!" And the Anzac gritted his teeth.

"When I get through with you, you won't be able to go over!"

MacDonald was giving the whimpering captured Jerry the works. Speaking to him in German, Mac was plying him with questions. The man was reluctant to answer. But MacDonald had a way of making him talk. One punch in the face made the Jerry answer one of the questions; a kick in the groin brought another answer. Rough tactics, yes. But this was a rough war—no pink tea here! These things were matters of life and death.

Wayne's thoughts turned to Boyce as he watched MacDonald question the prisoner. There'd been no snap to the outfit, no eagerness—simply grim hanging on!

MacDonald turned to Wayne after he had finished questioning the Jerry. The Aussie's shoulders were drooped in weariness, and despair warped the contour of his whole frame.

"Yank," he said grimly, "they're plannin' a real attack, an' we're whipped to begin with. It's a dirty shame I'm having to tell you, but it's as true as I'm standing here in the mud that we'll every one of us be slaughtered like sheep before very long. You mark my words!"

"What's the matter, pard?" Wayne asked. "Let's have it out. I knew something was the matter."

"The men are afraid of Boyce," Mac continued fiercely. "They haven't their hearts in the fighting—don't care what happens to them. You're right when you called this trench hell's hinges—it's all of that, and then some."

"Why doesn't some one do something about it?" Wayne asked. "Don't the officers know what's going on?"

"Plenty of word has gone back," MacDonald answered. "But the officers say he has held the trench a long time and against all kinds of odds. And he has! To them he is just a good soldier. They don't worry about us, damn 'em!"

"Why don't some of you talk to Boyce? Put him straight—tell him where to head in?"

"Nobody's got the guts to do it. He'd kill 'em in a minute. I thought maybe you, being a new man and not exactly under his command, so to speak, might put in a word. You don't seem to be afraid of him."

Wayne thought this question over for a minute. He wasn't afraid of the man. But whether or not he should make it his business to interfere was another matter.

Suddenly Wayne hitched up his belt. "Let's go talk to him." MacDonald, far from being a coward, agreed. Together they escorted the wondering prisoner before them and entered Boyce's dugout. Boyce was sitting on a box—shining his shoes!

"Here's a prisoner we brought in, Sergeant," Wayne announced.

Boyce looked at Wayne and his eyes were hard. "Sergeant-*Major!* Don't forget that again, Wayne," he growled.

Wayne ignored the thrust for the moment. "What do you want done with him?"

"We'll send him back of the lines so they can put an interpreter on him. Take him away," Boyce ordered.

"We've found that out already, and he knows plenty," Wayne answered without making a move to obey Boyce's order. "He's spilled the news and I thought you might like to hear it."

Wayne had less to risk than MacDonald had. He'd give Boyce the whole story.

"Well, what is it, Yank?" Boyce asked sneeringly.

"Just this," said Wayne: "The Germans have got wind that the morale of this outfit is bad—broken. They sent over the raiding-party just now to make sure. If they've taken any prisoners they'll know for certain what they've already guessed. Then there'll be hell broke loose shortly. Your men hate you and I don't blame them. They know you're a bully. They won't fight for you!"

Boyce, his eyes wide open in astonishment at the effrontery of this single Yankee private, stood up, towering above the slim cowboy-soldier and stared at him.

Then a grim smile spread over his face and he spoke. "Is that so? You can strike me bloody blind! My men won't fight for me, what? The Jerrys are going to come over and take my trench, are they? Well, let me tell you something, Yank. When I say fight, my men will fight, or by the living gods they'll wish they had! Hate me, do they? That's what I want 'em to do. When they hate me it's a sign they're afraid of me. And when they're afraid of me they'll do what I say. And I'm still running this show!"

Boyce laughed, a bellowing laugh that was unpleasant to hear. "I came here to hold this trench and that's what I'm going to do. What do *you* know about war, anyway? Say, I've been fighting in these trenches for four years. Wading in mud and dead bodies, up to my waist in ice-cold water, frozen, starved and ragged. I've got more lead in my body than you'll ever shoot in this man's war! There's work to do here, and you rookies don't know what it's all about. And it's a good thing they've got men like me to make you do the things that's got to be done."

"You're right in some respects," Wayne interrupted, "but you could handle your men differently."

"Who the hell are you to tell me how to handle my men?" Boyce roared. "If you were in my command, I'd fix you damn' quick!"

Wayne merely smiled and made a noncommittal gesture. He knew that Boyce wasn't sure of his authority. But he had gained nothing. He knew that as well.

THE next morning Wayne sat in front of his billet oiling his six-shooter and his rifle. He was thinking of Boyce—and feeling sorry for him too. Here was a man who was a born fighter, a brave man. And instead of loyally following him, his men hated the sight of his face. Boyce was bound to be a lonely man, doing his grueling task to the best of his ability and asking odds from nobody.

Word had come during the night that they were to advance in an effort to take Oudchateau. There were machine-gun emplacements there that must be silenced.

"What do you think the men are going to do about it?" Wayne asked MacDonald. "Doesn't look like we have much of a chance. With all this hatred they have for Boyce, they certainly won't do much to help him."

MacDonald looked up from putting the finishing touches to his rifle with an oiled rag. "Looks like a rum break, if you ask me," he answered dully. "The way the rest of the gang feels, they are just as likely to turn around and head for home as anything else."

They were interrupted in their conversation by the approach of Boyce himself. Word was sent down the line that he wanted to talk to all the men. When they all stood before him, he scowlingly eyed them up and down, giving close attention to each one.

"You in the middle, there!" he roared suddenly, pointing to one of the raw recruits who had been sent up the day before. "Come here!"

The soldier, hardly more than a boy, but a husky fellow, fumbled with his rifle and stepped forward. He had no idea of what was in store for him.

"Stand at attention when I talk to you! Do you hear?" the sergeant bellowed.

"Yes, Sergeant-Major," the recruit answered shakily, bringing his arm to position.

"Let's see that gun," Boyce shouted, jerking the rifle from the man's hands.

The young soldier stood awkwardly before his superior, and there was a little murmur that ran up and down the line of men, an ominous murmur. But Boyce failed to notice it or, noticing it, failed to indicate that he had heard it. He opened the breech of the gun and looked at the sky through the barrel. He turned it over in his hands and examined it thoroughly.

"What the hell do you think we're here for?" Boyce said angrily. "We're here to fight—fight with a gun, you bloody idiot! Do you hear? And you have to keep them clean to use them. You're guilty of rank disobedience of orders, and I'm going to make an example of you to the whole company. Stand over here closer!"

The new recruit started to protest. The men in the line held their breaths in subdued excitement.

Boyce's face turned purple. He roared once; then his fist shot out and clipped the man on the chin. At this unexpected onslaught the man slumped to the ground like a pole-axed steer. He rolled over and lay still.

"Take him away, somebody!" Boyce shouted.

Then he turned to the company. His fists were doubled up and his jaw stuck out ominously. No one else wanted to take up the argument where the rookie had left it off. But when Boyce's eyes rested on Wayne, who was standing with the rest of the men, they lingered there.

Wayne returned the gaze unflinchingly. Although he was inwardly boiling with rage he knew that it was not his business to interfere with discipline, no matter how unjust the sergeant might be. His eyes narrowed as he stared back at Boyce.

Boyce looked on down the line, then addressed the men.

"I want all you scum to know that I'm still running this show!" He spat viciously. "We're going over the top in a few minutes. And I'll shoot the first blooming one of you that don't follow me. We're going out to that farmhouse where those Jerries are planted, and annex it. And what that rookie got is not anything to what the man gets that I catch laying down on the job. There's not room in this army for a man like that, and I'll take care that he gets his medicine."

As he spoke Boyce dropped his hand to his pistol in a significant gesture, understood by the whole company.

"There's a French battery behind us to lay down a barrage. If we take that house, they'll send up some support. If we don't—they won't send 'em, and you'll be in the loving hands of the Jerries all by yourselves. Now get back to your stations."

"It's out-and-out murder," commented MacDonald in a low voice to Wayne. "These men have no more chance to take that position than I have of flying. That is, with Boyce leading them."

Boyce approached, grinning sardonically. "I think you'd better stay back here, Yank—it'll be a lot safer," he said. "Your orders don't call for you to go over the top, you know" he finished tauntingly.

"Don't you worry about my orders," Wayne answered, trying to control his anger. "I'll go anywhere you'll go, and then maybe farther. And while we're on the subject—when we get settled after this fight, there's goin' to be another. And those boys o' yours won't be in it—it's going to be between just me and you."

Boyce grinned contemptuously. "Listen, Yank," he grunted, "there's no use in waiting till this man's war is over, because your orders don't call for you to go over the top, and mine do!" His inference was plain. He was figuring on coming back.

Wayne's face froze, though a red flush mounted to his cheeks.

Boyce went on: "You haven't got guts enough, Yank, to start in. You're just what you call a false alarm."

MacDonald seized Wayne's arm. "Come on—let's get out o' here."

The Texan shook him off. His eyes glittered as he stepped forward.

"Not guts enough?" he said in a low tense voice. "What do you think of that, Mister Sergeant-Major?" His fist hit Boyce's heavy jaw with a sharp crack. "Not going over the top?" said Wayne. "When I get through with you, *you* won't be able to go over!"

WITH a roar the big noncom plunged forward. Wayne stepped to one side and his right fist caught Boyce's jaw with a solid thud. The big man simply shook his head and with threshing arms swung at the slender figure. But somehow his huge fists didn't seem to reach home. Wayne

sidestepped again neatly, and a right and left reddened Boyce's cheekbone. Boyce snorted and swung heavily. If he had connected with Wayne's jaw it would have been the end, but where his fist was Wayne wasn't.

The group of men watching seemed reincarnated. At last the fear and dread which they had held for their sergeant-major was slipping from them. Wayne had pried it loose. For the minute at least, Boyce, the devil, was human—just a man fighting another man. Admittedly he was a man they hated—but still a human being and not some one to whisper about in the dead of night.

SUDDENLY the group surrounding the two men split asunder. The harsh voice of an officer cut in incisively on the conflict. "Here, you men, what's going on here? This is a fine time to be fighting!"

Boyce, followed by Wayne, came to attention. Boyce saluted. The officer looked at both the men.

"Yankee, eh?" he grunted. "Well, these orders will keep you busy if you want fighting—as most of your tribe seem to. Here, Sergeant-Major." He handed Boyce a sealed envelope.

"I was late getting up here," he continued, "and you haven't much time. What does your ticker say?" The two men compared watches. "Twenty minutes, and over you go."

Wayne cursed under his breath and walked away. He and Boyce could resume their fight later.

The whole company was on the first step of the trench, bayonets fixed, and waiting nervously. Their lack of morale again showed in their actions, their nervous glances around and behind them. MacDonald and Wayne were lined up with the men, Wayne taking his place like the rest of the soldiers.

Boyce gave his last hasty orders. He kept a sharp gaze on his wrist-watch, watching the minutes, and then the seconds tick off until the hour of attack struck.

The last minute . . . . forty seconds—twenty—ten—five—

The still air was suddenly rent with the roar of the French artillery behind them. Shells whined through the air and landed with ear-splitting roars ahead of them. Great masses of dirt shot upward, leaving gigantic craters.

At the command the men scrambled over the parapet and started their mad dash. Guns blazed in a maddening fury. Rifles clattered and machine-guns poured out their rattling tattoo. Barbed wire was hurled here and there in the mad foray, and an open path lay before them—open except for the deadly hail of lead from the Germans securely lodged in and about the farmhouse which was their objective. Boyce was at the head of his men, shouting orders, cursing them, and firing at the same time. Following him step for step were Wayne and MacDonald.

The men forged onward with the blindness of desperation. Spurred by the lavish curses of Boyce, they progressed with machinelike lack of incentive. Yet forward they did go. Step by step, yard by yard they pressed on toward the frame building that they were to take.

A whistling bullet laid open the cheek of Sergeant-Major Boyce—and he laughed a bitter laugh. Turning to Wayne he shouted: "Come on, you blooming Yank, stay with me! You an' me's got business when this thing's over."

But Wayne needed no encouragement from Boyce. Side by side with MacDonald he was fighting forward.

MacDonald winced with the pain of a bullet through the flesh of his left arm. Blood was streaming down the sleeve of his tunic. "Nothing at all," he shouted at Wayne, who had offered to help him. He had hardly spoken when Wayne stumbled and fell. MacDonald stopped. The leg of Wayne's uniform was seeping red, but he crawled to his feet and found that he could stand and walk without assistance.

They were within a few yards of one of the farm outbuildings. Out of this little building was being sprayed a leaden stream of bullets. It was a little forward of the rest of the hiding-places of the enemy. Boyce gave orders and they concentrated their attack on that little shack. Bullets were coming thickly from other sources too, but this first one must be stopped before they could progress.

Men fell right and left, but the gods of war were with Boyce, it seemed. In front of his men he carried on, entirely oblivious of the screeching lead that whizzed by him.

Boyce gave orders to rush the place. Leading the way himself, he poured his deadly fire into the place. The door to the building was exposed so that the Jerries had no chance to retreat to a safer position. They were trapped like rats. And they fought with the desperation of fear.

The carnage lasted moments only. The Jerries in this refuge were wiped out and their guns trained on their own men hiding behind broken walls and fallen timber around the big house.

Overhead, like some giant hawk, circled a British two-seater. Its duty was to watch and report the progress of the battle. On its reports depended whether or not the Tommies would get reinforcements. If they took this strategic point, supports would be sent up to help them hold it. But the British were not bent on wasting troops if the point couldn't be taken and held. And the dots and dashes of that airplane's wireless set were spelling out the fate of that little band of Tommies who were fighting under Boyce.

The Germans in and around the ruins of that farm were giving ground grudgingly. Every foot the Tommies took was at the cost of soul-searing effort, and many lives.

From a point of vantage behind the breastworks of a demolished wall one enemy machine-gun was pouring out its blazing messengers of death. Men went down before its steady bark like wheat before a mowing-machine.

BOYCE raised his voice above the tumult in a curse. "Get that gun, you white-livered rats!" he bellowed. "What's the matter with you? Go get it, I say!"

The men wavered. Then without looking back, Boyce darted toward the hidden gun, alone and single-handed. Though his men refused to face that deadly hail any longer, he showed the stuff that a soldier is made of—he never hesitated, but with red-hot gun blazing returned the enemy's fire as he advanced. But this couldn't last—it was tempting the gods too far. An instant later Boyce jumped straight up in the air and fell to the ground in a heap, a bullet through his chest.

Wayne saw him fall, and realized the seriousness of the situation. He did not know whether Boyce was dead or not, but one thing he did know—he realized if that gun weren't taken almost immediately the company would be mowed down to a man—the Germans would have time to organize a counter-movement which would wipe out the whole company.

MacDonald realized the same thing and he was the first to follow when Wayne sprang up, shouting: "Come on, Mac! Help me get these men going!" Then to the men: "Come on, fellows, let's show Boyce! Don't let him have anything on you. He went after that gun. Let's finish the job."

The men hesitated; then realization swept over them that Boyce, the brute and bully, had probably made the supreme sacrifice. Why, Boyce was a man! Wayne sensed their change of heart. He threatened, pleaded. Slowly confidence came into the group. Wayne led them forward, pointing at the huddled heap that had been their top kick.

Without looking back, Boyce darted toward the gun; he never hesitated, but with red-hot gun blazing returned the enemy's fire as he advanced.

And the men followed! They surged forward, their courage reborn. "Boyce" became a magic name.

Under the impetus of their fierce charge the Germans crumpled. Wayne was the first to the gun and the first to turn it on its late owners. They had had no time to destroy it. Mac had fallen badly wounded and was lying prone a dozen feet away. Wayne—and the spirit of Boyce—had turned ruin into success.

The sizzling gun, its very oil frying in its own heat, mowed down the fleeing enemy as a reaper cuts through tall grass. . . . The old chateau had been taken.

With men milling around him, Wayne assigned them to the most strategic positions he could locate amid the wreckage. Two men brought in Boyce and MacDonald to the meager shade of a shattered tree. Mac was not badly wounded—it was his leg, and he was in no danger.

But Boyce appeared to be dying. Overhead a great tan hawk was still circling, sending out its dots and dashes. Wayne wondered, as he looked down at the wounded man, whether it could summon supports in time to do him any good. Beyond them in the trees flocks of German troops were reforming, crowding along trenches preparing for a counter-attack that without more support for his little group Wayne could not possibly sustain.

Boyce was conscious. He eyed Wayne with pain-filled eyes. "Well, Yank," he whispered, "you stole my stuff, didn't you? I heard you using *me* to lead 'em!"

Wayne tried to make him more comfortable. His feeling of hatred for this man had gone from him as a coat drops off. Boyce was a man—a bully perhaps, but a man.

Wayne nodded as he knelt over him. "You did that, Boyce—not me. If it hadn't been for you, we'd have been wiped out. But remember," he said earnestly, "they were *following*, not being driven!"

Boyce's lips twitched weakly. He tried to put on his usual questioning scowl. "Cut it out, Yank," he grunted. "Those birds hate me."

"They *did*," said Wayne grimly, "and no mistake. But they don't any more."

Boyce's lips twitched again, his eyes were losing part of their hardness. "You mean they followed me because they like me?"

"Not liked you, Boyce," said Wayne. "You've never given them a chance at that. They admired you."

Boyce's eyes were suspiciously moist. He spoke with an effort. "I tried to harden 'em like I was hardened—but I guess I went too fast, Yank. Us old regulars that spent a lifetime soldiering don't realize how tough we are."

"It's not too late," argued Wayne. "You'll have 'em eating out of your hand when we get you patched up."

MacDonald lying near by nodded. He crawled weakly over to the stricken sergeant. "Wayne's right, Boyce," he said. Boyce looked from one to another unbelievingly.

Then a dull boom sounded far back toward the French batteries. There was a loud shriek as a French shell whistled toward that ominous clump of woods ahead of them and burst into a thousand fragments. Trees and Germans were scattered to the four winds.

Another shell followed and another. The range was corrected. They were getting support at last. The great tan hawk, now many miles to the rear, had given the batteries of the French the location of the Germans. They were safe. The British were advancing to relieve them.

Wayne passed Boyce again as the stretcher-bearers were carrying his wracked body to the rear.

"Say, Yank," said Boyce in a hoarse whisper, "maybe you're right. There's been seven of the boys over here to shake my hand already." Tears were rolling down Boyce's lined face. He couldn't believe it. "The doc tells me I'll get well, Yank. But we'll have to put off that fight."

"Hell, Boyce," said Wayne in a low tone, "forget it!" His brown hand shot forward and seized the limp paw of the sergeant-major as the stretcher-bearers passed by him.

Boyce nodded his massive head. "I was hoping you'd say that, Yank," he whispered. "Think of it—now eight of the boys has shook my hand!"

Wayne kept in step with the stretcher for a few yards. "Yes, Boyce," he said, "every one of the outfit's going to."

And as Boyce fainted from the pain of the jolting stretcher, a smile crept over his hard, close-shaven face.

REAL EXPERIENCES

It is always frontier life when one is a miner burrowing far underground. Here is a narrative of desperate hazard such as is seldom survived.

By **Charles Hampel**

The Tunnel of Death

ONE experience remains forever vivid in my memory. The horror of it was so great that even yet some nights I awake, clawing at the wall, with the panic-stricken sensation of being entombed within the earth.

I had just left Mexican waters, where I had been engaged in the fish industry with decidedly unsatisfactory results—that is, in a financial way. Being then in a declining state financially, I made use of several freight trains, to find myself at last in the Pacific Northwest, after varied bumpings and what-not.

As my financial condition was even more precarious than at last reading, I hurriedly sought for some means of wresting an honest dollar by manual toil from some doubtful employer. At that time and in that region this was no inconsequential feat.

Finally down among the "slave markets" I observed a sign reading, "Muckers and Chuck-tenders $4.70 and $5.20 per day," and with the praiseworthy intention of restoring my waning bank-roll to its former proportions, I planked down my five dollars, blissfully ignorant of the kind of toil by which I would earn my daily stint. My contribution accepted, I was waved away with the information that on payment of a sum three times in excess of this, the railroad would cheerfully grant me passage to the scene of my future operations, the same being high in the Cascades.

Boy, but it was cold up there! About November tenth, with the peaks around us already covered with snow. Quite a difference in temperature from the hundred above I had been used to in Mexico. In an hour after arrival, everything was settled; we were assigned a bunk-house and given blankets.

The camp was built on a slope about a quarter of a mile from the entrance of the eight-mile tunnel that was being worked from both ends and the middle. Near the entrance were the powerhouses and the big boiler-room, where some would change into their "tin pants and coats."

The three shifts were changed about every six weeks. They had just changed when I was assigned the day shift. So the next morning after a hearty breakfast—for they sure put on the feed-bag in that camp—we repaired to the boiler-room to await the making up of the "loky" and the small cars that would transport us the three miles that the tunnel was driven at this end.

This ride I thereafter always dreaded. The "loky" was a miniature trolley pulling about a dozen fourteen-foot cars on which we sat, back to back, and about eight on a side.

The wrigglings and twistings of that track would have broken a snake's back. As most of it was timbered, and only ten by ten before the timbering, I never quite succeeded in getting in or out without scraping my knee or bumping my head, or for variety, rubbing along the trolley wire, thereby forgetting such trival things as bruised knees. Boy, what a shock that wire could give!

This was the working tunnel, with every sixteen hundred feet a cross-cut to what would be in time, the main tunnel. The center of the main tunnel would be cut out first, being mucked out and hauled through the working tunnel. When this center was cut out, the "rings" would start operations. On four uprights and separated by eight feet, these air-drills would drill thirteen-foot holes in a complete circle and when this was shot and mucked, the "bench" would get the remaining part from the lower end of the main tunnel and muck it out through the main tunnel. The face of the working tunnel is always called "Pioneer"—it is a movable title; thus, as the face is worked from cross-cut to cross-cut the new face is always pioneer.

PIONEER is usually a mile ahead of the rings, who are in turn almost a mile ahead of the bench. Pioneer was, I believe, the most miserable part of the workings. Usually there was water up to one's knees; most of it was warm, but sometimes we would strike with our nine-foot steel an ice-cold spring that for a half hour would gush forth with the force of a fire-hose, and with us working right through it wringing wet.

And racket! Bedlam was the Silence, itself, compared to pioneer. On a steel bar jacked tight on either side of the tunnel rose two uprights with attached arms to which

four air-drills were affixed, two above and two below the steel bar. In that confined space the din was deafening.

The man who is the chuck-tender stands in the little space between the steel framework and the rock face, to start the first three-foot steel and change the others, that run in three-, five-, seven- and nine-foot lengths in this particular part of the workings. He cannot get out if the face crumbles or a ton of rock takes a notion to drop from the vibrating roof. And this was the job I so blithesomely took. God deliver me from anything else like it!

Up to the time of the event that blew me up for underground work, everything went swimmingly. But not so with others. They carried 'em out by the dozens—smashed skulls, broken shoulders, sprained backs and what-not. The camp hospital was always full.

It's a wonder pneumonia didn't bump off half of us. Coming out of that warm tunnel, wringing wet, we would emerge into a blizzard. By the time we made our way up the incline to our respective bunk-houses, we would need a hammer and chisel to get out of our ice-encrusted clothes.

The day of the accident we went in as usual. The shift we relieved had already mucked out their last shot, and had set up for the next drilling. We were all working fast, for we had a bonus in sight that month; we had already reached the limit, and each succeeding foot gained brought a bonus of twenty-five cents per man on the three shifts.

It took us the usual two and a half hours to drill the fourteen holes on the top and the eighteen on the bottom. A loky dragged the set-up down to the next cross-cut while another brought up the dynamite car close to the face. To it I went to bring up the primers. These were the only eighty per cent dynamite we used, the rest being sixty per cent. These primers were set to fire at different speeds and were set off electrically. I never liked this part of it. Should these wired primers ever connect with the sparks continually coming from the trolley wheels that I had to squeeze by, my mates couldn't even pick up the pieces.

WE finally got the three hundred fifty pounds of dynamite tamped in and primers set. We went back to the last cross-cut, it being but eight hundred feet distant, carrying three or four hundred feet of lights to keep them from being smashed up by the flying rock. Arriving at the cross-cut the shifter connected the shooting wire to the light circuit, while we tensed and held our hats, for in that confined space the shots made a terrific concussion.

Then came the shots, two almost together, then three more, and the others so close together as to be hardly distinguishable from each other. Then—total blackness.

The wires had given way at some point. This had happened many times, so we didn't mind, but it was weird enough, our voices, seemingly disembodied, coming from nowhere. We had no candles; there were some a couple of cross-cuts down, but in this blackness, one would find it near impossible to make that mile. And we expected the lights on any minute.

Then came the gas from the shot. The pumping plant—there are three in the three-mile length of tunnel—is always shut down at the time of the shot, to be started again immediately after the shot, to remove the gas quickly from the workings. And the power was off. I could hear my companions coughing and choking in strangling gasps. My head felt as if it was constricted by steel bands. It was horrible in that blackness. The gas instead of dissipating gradually, hung about the cross-cut. By that we knew the worst—somewhere between us and Number Five cross-cut, that entered the rings, the roof had caved in from the concussion of the shot.

We were assured of this when the water began to rise. On either side of the trolley track was a two-foot deep ditch of water, running at all times from the workings. With the water we had been encountering at the face, this had swelled until for the last two days the tracks in parts of the tunnel were completely covered. And it was rising.

UNLESS one has been caught in a like predicament, he can never realize the panic-stricken sensation of being buried alive, especially when he must wait supinely for the end. Some of the boys were for walking through the darkness to the break, but the shifter dissuaded them.

"You'll never make it, boys," he said, "—not in this blackness. And besides in that drop around Number Seven cross-cut the water will be over your head already. Just sit tight—they'll get the other shifts to break through any time now."

What a wait! Slowly, silently, with malicious gurglings the water crept higher. We retreated farther into the cross-cut on a higher bit of ground. If we had only had a light, it would not be nearly as hard to bear.

And the gas—I thought my head would split. Terrific bursts of pain came from the back of my skull; a faintness was overpowering me. Half of our crew were in a semi-coma. Still the water crept up, lapping higher and higher. I wonder why the thought of drowning in a trap always stirs in us an unreasoning panic. I could bear the thought of being entombed, but to be found draggled and drowned like a rat—

By the shifter's watch, that he felt with his hands, we had been entombed for seven hours, when the water rose so high that we had to put the unconscious men on top of the mucking machine to save them from drowning. Crouched on top of the tool bench and of the mucker, we waited, while the water, but two feet from the roof, continued to rise.

I caught myself nodding. The gas and absence of air were getting in their work. I was aroused by a splash. Another one gone under! The shifter cursed, and I heard him splash, as he groped for the one who had fallen.

"Hold my hand," came his voice eerily from the darkness. "He's caught under the mucker." I heard him grunt as he tugged.

"All right, hold him now till I climb up." And as I held on to that limp cold hand, the shifter's voice came again: "He's probably done for anyway, but I couldn't leave him there."

Some one's nerve broke at the gruesomeness, and he shrieked again and again. "Cut that out, you!" yelled the shifter, in a nervously shrill voice. "You want to drive us all nuts? Take it standing up!" The man subsided to low moanings.

With my head pressed tightly against the roof, the water washed about my throat. I felt a mad desire to scream, but subdued it. There were two more splashes as others relaxed their hold in unconsciousness.

AND then I must have screamed in crazed relief. The water was receding. It was about my shoulders now. I heard gasps of thankfulness about me. The rescue crew had broken through.

I only dimly remember the rest—endless walking down the black tunnel, then a blaze of light that almost blinded me. The electrics were on! Some one held me on the transporting car—and then we were in the blessed open.

Out of our crew, I learned later, only nine of the nineteen were alive. I quit as soon as I awoke from the twenty-hour sleep that exhausted Nature demanded. If I live for a millennium I'll never forget that eleven-hour session in that Stygian tunnel!

Three Flights Up

A young officer of the law refuses a bribe and runs up against the strong-arm methods that follow.

By **Goodwin Bradford**

IN the criminal courts of New York City there is an interval of a few days between the conviction of a prisoner and his sentence. During that time the Probation Bureau has the prisoner investigated to determine if he has been the victim of circumstances and so should have the leniency of the court extended him.

I was one of the young men who worked as a cross between a newspaper reporter and a detective in gathering all the possible data on the life of a prisoner and the circumstances surrounding the crime with which he was charged. It was then my duty to write a report in which I presented my findings. This report was examined and its final verdict decided upon by the heads of the probation department.

In meting out the sentence the court was influenced by the report. After an investigator had worked with the bureau awhile and his judgment had been tested and proved sound, it was rarely that his opinion of the case was questioned. In this way an investigator held a position of authority and influence in his theoretically unimportant position. Serious crimes were out of his scope, but when a person is faced with from one to five years in the penitentiary, it is important to that person. So to these prisoners and their friends and families our authority seemed very significant.

I had heard older investigators speak of bribery attempts they had encountered. So far my cases had been too petty to warrant anyone being interested enough to try to bribe me. I had a succession of petty thieves, of "lush workers,"—those low-type criminals who hang around wharves and roll drunken sailors,—of disorderly conduct, and what-not.

Collecting data on these people sent me to the lowest dives in New York. The two-cent flop-houses on the Bowery, the sinister-looking speak-easies and water-front saloons, were less unpleasant to me than the dwellings in New York's East Side. The halls were always either without any light, except some pale, dirty reflection from a sunless street, or else a dim glow, invariably of some sickly color. An evil smell hung inside like a vapor.

There were never any mail-boxes or name-plates. One must grope through the dreary halls, knocking on doors without name or number. These doors were never opened. A hostile voice inquired: "Who is it?" You'd tell them who you were and ask if the person you wanted to see lived there. If they didn't, the voice would answer, "No," refuse any helpful information, and you climbed the dismal stairs until you found the person you were seeking.

Then—my judgment having been proven to some extent, I suppose—I was given the case of a man whom we may call Joe Conroy. He had been convicted of larceny in an involved case concerning alleged crooked deals on several automobiles, and was liable to from two to five years in Sing Sing. I first interviewed him in the Tombs and got the impression of him as a weak, shiftless type. He had expensive tastes, as I could tell from his clothes and habits, and my experience with those types is, that their tastes grow more expensive and their crimes grow in proportion. They are a definite menace and eventually become very smooth criminals, if they are clever, or units in organized gangs, from which the next step is violence. All the material I could gather about Joe Conroy's history, verified this impression. The last person I had to interview was his brother, the only family he had.

Contrary to most cases, his brother looked me up and invited me to his house on a certain day at five-thirty, saying he would be home from work at that time. His house was in the dreaded neighborhood, although not on one of the worst streets, nor was the tenement of the worst sort. However, it had the usual narrow hall, dimly lighted by a greenish glow from somewhere, and minus name-plates. I found Henry Conroy on the third floor.

He had a two-room flat which immediately surprised me by its neatness and comfort, and lack of the sordid cheapness usually found in such a place. Henry Conroy was about thirty years of age, dark like his brother, and gave the impression of being very sturdily built. I am about average height and weight and while he was only slightly taller than I, he must have weighed thirty pounds more—with great shoulders, and thick, hairy wrists. His eyes looked straight at me and I felt he was a man who went for what he wanted. He was neatly dressed, and his manner and voice were in no way objectionable. He smiled in a pleasant way and invited me to take an easy chair.

"I have some very nice wine. Wouldn't you like a glass before dinner?" he said.

I felt suspicious of his friendliness, and refused. He insisted, saying that he had a lot to tell me, and we might as well enjoy ourselves. It was wine, he said, that couldn't be got everywhere; and he smiled.

"All right, thanks," I said. "Not very much."

He poured me a full glass of what was really delicious muscatel, and offered me a cigarette. He sat facing me, and in a calm conversational voice told me that his sister had lived here with the two brothers until two months ago

when she had been married and moved away. Their mother had died several years earlier and the sister had been like a mother. The boys had missed her, and Joe had gotten into the habit of going with shady characters.

In his impulsive way Joe had been involved in the automobile thefts, but Henry was convinced that he had had small part in it. He thought a parole would pull the boy out of it, after this scare, and he would take the responsibility for keeping him straight. I said:

"Well, Mr. Conroy, your brother has been arrested twice before; once he wasn't convicted and once he got a suspended sentence. This may not be the first offense."

"But it *is* a first offense," he said with steel creeping in his voice. Then he caught himself, and said in a more pleasant voice than before: "In those cases he was suspected only because of his companions. His weakness made it easy for them to make him the goat. But the court found that he wasn't guilty."

I couldn't very well say, "The court was unable to prove his guilt," so I got up and thanked him for the wine, and for his hospitality, and started for the door.

HENRY CONROY stepped forward. His manner was of determined, deliberate pleasantness, under which I felt all that animal strength rising, and I was conscious of a sinister element in the man. He said:

"Well, just to show my appreciation for whatever work you do to be sure and get the right details on Joe, I'm going to send you a case of this wine."

I thanked him, but refused, saying: "I'll do everything I can, as I always do, and the company pays me for that."

"Maybe you don't want to accept anything when you know you're going to try to send him up."

"Not at all," I said, not liking this. "I just don't accept presents from strangers."

"Well, you wouldn't be any stranger to me if you gave my brother an even break."

I was irritated now and answered sharply: "I'm going to give your brother an even break; I give every prisoner an even break."

"That doesn't mean a damn' thing," he said. His voice was cold now. "What I mean is, are you going to give my brother a good report—recommend them to go easy?"

"I can't promise anything. I don't know what my report is going to be until I'm in possession of all the facts."

"I see," he said. His face grew hard as he nodded slowly. "In possession of all the facts . . . . I guess I went about this the wrong way. A case of muscatel is not enough. All right, I'll lay my cards on the table. How much do you want?"

"You have gone about this the wrong way," I said angrily. "There's absolutely no question of anything like that. You've just made a big mistake. Forget it."

"I'm not forgetting anything. How'd you feel if *your* kid brother was facing Sing Sing for a stretch? Maybe you wouldn't care. But I do. If I make a mistake, I'm making it right now. This means a lot to me. I'm willing to pay you to recommend they go easy—or if you don't, by God, I'll see that you get yours!"

His face was knotted into rugged lines and his narrowed eyes were savage. His body was tensed and I could feel that he was in the mood to go to desperate lengths to gain his end. The dangerous quality I had sensed in the man now came to the surface. I had been uncomfortable before, but now I was frightened. I tried to bluff, and said with all the authority I could put in my voice:

"You'll do nothing but hurt your case acting like this. What would the court think if I told them about this?"

I was standing with my side against the door, with one hand on the knob. He grabbed my arm and pulled it from the door, spinning me around to face him. He shouted at me, his face distorted like a beast:

"*This* is a sample of what I'll do if you tell this!" And before I knew what was happening his fist struck my jaw and knocked my head against the door. I started trembling from the shock of the double blow. I could feel the color leave my face as I stared at him in fascinated horror.

"And this is a sample of what I'll do if you don't come through!" he shouted again.

He jerked his hand up in line with his shoulder, and opened his hand like a claw. I wasn't conscious of any clear thought, but my foot shot back and braced against the door. As his hand lunged forward, I pushed myself with all my weight toward him, stretching out my hands to his face. As his hand smote my windpipe I felt my own hands strike his face. The force of my shove with my whole body behind it, sent him toppling backward. He stumbled against a chair, trying to gain his balance.

But already I had jerked the door open and was running down the hall. As I whirled around the steps, I heard him open the door and shout:

"Stop him! Stop the ——!"

Then he was running down the hall as I reached the bottom of the steps. As I turned around the banister into the second floor hall, a door at the end of the hall and at the head of the next flight of stairs was flung open. A burly brute of a man stood framed in the doorway.

"Stop him!" Henry Conroy yelled as he dashed down the stairs.

I was halfway to the head of the next stairs and to the open doorway when I saw the huge fellow move forward. I didn't stop to reason. In the stress of the moment I didn't know what those two men might not do. I didn't want the gorillalike arms of this menacing figure to grapple me. All this passed through my mind in a flash, and I had taken no more than two steps nearer him when I grasped the railing with both hands and leaped. My speed sent me hurtling over the railing to the steps below.

I tried to twist my body as I landed. I must have struck between the fifth and seventh step, and I struck on the edge of one. I tripped and stumbled, grasping at the banister. I fell to one shoulder and somersaulted over, landing heavily and painfully on my side, full length.

FOR what seemed an age I lay stunned. I heard steps thudding on the stairs. I dragged myself up but when I started to run I only staggered forward. Hands gripped me from behind, but with all my bruised body I leaped forward out of the doorway. The hands still held but the great hulk was drawn out on the sidewalk with me.

It was dusk, but under a corner street lamp I espied a cop at the same minute Henry Conroy plunged beside me. I yelled "Help!" at the top of my lungs. The policeman turned as I tried to struggle away. Something crashed into my head and I fell into darkness. I came to in the hallway with a lot of men and women crowded around me, more curious than anything else.

The policeman was holding both Conroy and the gorilla. I preferred charges of assault and battery against Conroy and although I never told why he attacked me, I told enough so that, in addition to a heavy fine, he was put under a peace warrant.

Even with the peace warrant on him, I was nervous for many months when I went through that section. In fact, it wasn't until I left that job that I was completely comfortable, and even now have a queer feeling when I walk down dark, unfrequented streets. But that was six years ago, and I look much older with a mustache and more weight—and probably that harrowing experience did not make me look any younger.

Ivan the Terrible

A gigantic Russian runs amok when not allowed to indulge in the gentle art of wife-beating.

By **F. J. Morris**

IVAN was the most powerful man I've ever seen. He must have stood six feet five inches in his socks and he weighed all of two hundred and fifty pounds of solid sinew and muscle. His shoulders were like the yoke of an ox, and he had the strength of an ox. He could labor all day at the heaviest jobs with never a slackening in his slow, monotonous movements.

He never said much, and his dark eyes, shadowed by shaggy lashes, seemed always to be brooding on something beyond. His coarse-skinned face was stolid and sullen. It seems that his parents had been Russian peasants and had brought him and his sister to New York in 1920, when he was about eighteen. Ivan pushed north, becoming a general hired man on Horace Brenham's farm. He was allowed the use of a ramshackle old house that many years before had been the farmhouse, and there he lived all alone, except for Saturday nights when his sister and brother-in-law brought their friends and family in from the city. One of these girls Ivan married. She was a pretty girl with the rough edges of the peasant rubbed off her.

Horace Brenham's farm was one which my friend Paul Coppard bought when he started building a colony of cabins for a summer retreat. Ivan became Paul's general hired man. In the second summer, when only about seven cabins had been completed, I took one atop a knoll, at the bottom of which, probably a hundred feet distant, was Paul's house. At the bottom on the other side, hidden by trees, was Ivan's.

During the summer I gathered that something was wrong in Ivan's household. Once when I stopped by their house I saw a large red mark on his wife's face, and you could have cut the tension with a knife. . . .

Ivan had never become adjusted to this country. He remembered the great stretches of land in his native country, the simple life of the peasant and the elemental passions which were natural among them. He did not want to come to America. New York had been a horror to him which he never forgot. All this was aggravated by his wife, who had become partially Americanized, and besides looking on him as a stupid fellow, refused to be made a chattel as is the ordinary peasant woman. In his slow, brutish brain Ivan felt rather than thought he was not having a natural expression for himself; he was bottled up; and doubtless his wife seemed in some way the cause of all his stifling oppression. It was the Saturday-night parties that convinced me of this. Their friends from the city came to the country for week-ends in the summer.

After dinner, as the slow summer dusk was settling over the countryside, I could hear loud voices, booming laughter, and shouts coming from Ivan's house. I could hear the parties getting under way. By the time dusk deepened into darkness, they had built a huge bonfire. Looking down from my cabin, I could see the leaping flames and the blurred shadows of figures crossing in front of it. Then they would sing. I shall never forget their rich, passionate voices soaring across those summer nights. It seemed the only sound in the world. It had the surge of the primitive, of barren stretches of land, of an uninhibited natural man and woman who were part of the sun and rain, of winter winds and deep snows and autumn harvest.

At these times Ivan was a new person. The brooding was gone from his eyes, the sullenness from his face. His face shone with an inner light; his eyes were passionate pools; and his voice like a waterfall boomed above the others. Ivan was one with nature.

When fall came, the parties of the Russians ended. It was cold then and in the city there were movies and heated houses. On those Saturday nights, I would hear Ivan bellowing alone. He was drinking vodka that no one knows how he got. One night I heard his wife scream, and from her cries I knew he was beating her.

I was horror-stricken at the idea but hardly knew what to do. She gave one loud yell which was like a curse. Then I dimly heard a choked scream, and all was silent. The next day I told Paul, and he shrugged. "It's their business," he said. "Probably get your throat slit by *her* if you go bothering with them!" I strolled casually down there Sunday, and there seemed to be nothing wrong—only he looked at her with brooding hate, and she at him with contempt. He had not conquered.

During the following half dozen Saturdays the same thing occurred three or four times. The last Saturday in November was to end my stay in the country. It was cold in the flimsily built cabins, even with a huge log fire. No one else was in the colony but Paul Coppard and his wife, who were intending to stay until the first of the year.

I had spent the afternoon walking through the hills. I stopped for a chat with Ivan and his wife and told them I wouldn't be back again until spring. I had dinner at Paul's cabin with him and his wife and we sat around until about ten o'clock; then I went to my cabin. There was no fire there, so I began to hurry to bed.

I had just lit my oil lamp and was pulling off my overcoat when I thought I heard a scream. Although I had hardened myself to remain inactive during the Russians' domestic scenes, I recoiled as I always did. For some reason my actions were halted, my coat held on my arms. I felt that the scream had a quality of fear in it.

I rushed to the door and threw it open, dropping my coat on the way. I heard a sob that cut through the quiet night. Then a cry: "Mr. Coppard! Mr. Coppard!"

There was something of primitive terror in that shriek

that curdled my blood. All alone, in the silent immensity of those country hills, I was hearing a woman murdered. It was so horrible, that for a moment I was frozen where I stood. My horrified mind was conscious of another heart-rending sob, and then a shriek that rose high and shrill, of a woman in mortal agony: "Ah, Mr. Cop-pard! *Help!*"

I ran to the edge of the knoll and shouted for Paul at the top of my lungs. I can see him silhouetted against his lighted doorway, shouting, "What is it?" And I shouted back: "Hurry! Ivan is murdering his wife!"

Without waiting for his overcoat, and it was lucky he didn't, he came running up the hill with sweeping strides. We ran down the other side of the hill together and he needed ask no questions. We could hear her agonized sobs and, as we grew closer, the heavy thump of blows.

Paul stood six feet tall; he wasn't heavy, but he was rangy, and working a great deal out-of-doors had given him a wiry strength and the same perfect physical co-ördination he had achieved in playing football and basket-ball at college. I have never seen him afraid of anyone, and now he didn't hesitate to throw his shoulder against the flimsy door. He stumbled into the room.

IT was a scene such as I can never erase from my memory. In the low-ceilinged dirty room, that served as kitchen, dining-room, and living-room, Ivan's wife lay huddled on the floor. Ivan was standing over her with a long thick rope with several rude knots in it.

He turned slowly and faced us. His dull eyes held an insane gleam, and his whole attitude was of a great bear at bay. "Put that rope down!" Paul snapped.

Ivan stared at Paul with his insane look. He didn't move. After a second he growled, "Get out." He didn't realize his position to Paul, or what he was doing; he was a madman interrupted in the kill. He repeated in a voice devoid of all human tone, *"Get out."*

"Come to, you fool! Do you want to go to jail?"

Ivan saw he was being balked. He advanced slowly, and raised his rope threateningly. "Get out," he said.

"If you don't put that rope down—"

Ivan swung it. It hurled through the air with tremendous force. Paul threw up his arm in front of his face. The force of the blow slashed against his arm and the end coiled around his back with a loud smack. Paul was shocked into immobility for a moment by the pain and Ivan jerked back his rope to swing again.

I knew I was helpless against the enraged giant. All I could hope to do was to hold that rope until Paul could regain his control. I leaped past him and gripped the back-swinging rope with both hands. Ivan jerked it viciously, hurling me off balance, reeling through the air. He jerked it again, and I was pulled heavily to the floor, still clinging to the rope.

I had one swift vision of his enormous shoe being raised, and then I heard a sharp crack. I saw the foot shoot upward and over me, and I jumped quickly to my feet. Ivan staggered against the wall, having dropped the rope on the way. Paul had struck with all his force on the point of Ivan's jaw. It would have dropped many a prize-fighter, I am sure. It had caught Ivan when he was standing on one foot, yet the force of that terrific punch had been barely enough to shake him off balance.

What happened next I can't hope to describe, because in memory it is a nightmare. Ivan rushed at Paul. I remember Paul dodging the rush, and clipping Ivan again on the jaw. I remember Ivan hitting Paul a mighty blow that swept Paul off balance, and Ivan leaping in with arms outspread to crush him. I remember feeling the futility of my assistance as I leaped on Ivan's broad back, as on solid rock, and tried to fasten my fingers on his windpipe. I remember also being shaken off and hurled across the room. I must have repeated that half a dozen times. I was dimly aware that Paul was fighting for his life. I recall his deathly pale face, the set of his lips, his blue eyes steady and as expressionless as steel.

I remember Ivan threshing about silently, his eyes terrible. I remember getting up slowly from against the wall with an ache in my head and a pain in my arm so bad I could hardly move it. From that wrench I couldn't move my arms for four days, and it was painful for two weeks. I had other bruises on my body and a gash on my thigh that were somewhat painful for several days after—but at that time I wasn't conscious of them.

With some half-forgotten trick, Paul had brought Ivan to his knees with his head nearly touching the floor. It looked like what used to be called a full-nelson. Ivan was heaving and struggling and I could see that Paul would lose his grip any minute. As I pulled myself together Ivan's wife crossed my line of vision, now so concentrated that it saw only that grimly fighting pair. She could scarcely drag herself, but in her hand a long kitchen knife was gripped tightly. I sprang forward. Seeing me coming, she tried to leap too; she staggered instead, the knife upraised over Ivan's head.

Had Paul not been in the way she could have struck. But in that second of getting an opening to Ivan, I reached her and gripped her wrist. My blow thrust her arm down until it was almost level with Ivan's face. He saw the knife. He gave a violent heave, breaking Paul's hold, grabbed her hand right above my grip and brought his other hand around to seize the knife. I relinquished my hold and with both hands grasped his wrist, as big around as a baseball bat. He pulled fiercely; I was jerked off balance, knocking his wife down, and tumbling on top of her. By some miracle I clung to his wrist. She held to the knife. The next jerk he pulled his wrist from my grasp. Had he thought of squeezing her wrist to make her drop the knife instead of jerking his hand away from me the first time, and if he had broken my hold the first time. I would probably not be writing this now.

In that delayed second, Paul rose to his feet and grabbed a heavy kitchen chair. I saw Ivan fumble for the knife, get a firm grip, and raise it while with his other hand he shoved me down. Then the chair crashed on his head. He slumped to the floor, unconscious. We bound him with his rope. By that time he regained consciousness.

PAUL told him we were taking his wife to spend the night at Paul's house, and have Mrs. Coppard give her medical attention. He could probably find a way to get free of his bonds, but if he came near the house during the night we would shoot him. You can believe me, I spent the night with the Coppards!

The next morning Ivan came meekly to the cabin and said he wanted his wife back. The girl was all bandaged up by Mrs. Coppard, but obviously needed the attention of a doctor. She had been beaten to the point of death—but she was willing to go back to Ivan.

Paul said he couldn't have anything like that again, however. He said he was going to send her to New York to her family, when I went. He would pay Ivan off the first of the year, and as soon as the Russian was able to move his personal belongings, he must get off the place.

I took Ivan's wife down to New York with me. She said absolutely nothing. I left her at the tenement where she said her family lived. Ivan moved out a few days later and said he was going to join his wife. That is the last we saw or heard of him. But he certainly gave us the most exciting evening of our lives—and a brand of excitement that I prefer to live without.

Out in China two tigers acquire the man-eating habit and nearly depopulate a village before they are shot.

By **Pete Evans**

The Man-Eaters

THE foreign summer colony in the Liu mountains known as Kuling is fifteen miles south of the Yangtze river at Kiukiang and is a mile above sea level. There are no Chinese houses near except the shops and homes of the chair- and baggage-coolies at the head or eastern end of the valley, and a few woodcutters' huts at the western end just over the ridge. These latter are widely scattered.

There was no great excitement for me as a boy aside from swimming, tennis and baseball, until two years after the revolution—the first one. My family had not been up there a day before the servants brought rumors that there were a pair of man-eating tigers about in the foothills. Nobody took any stock in the tales until a foreigner who had gone on a long hike told us he had seen the remains of a man that had been mauled by a tiger. The only other carnivora about were small leopards and wolves and there were mighty few of them. This poor man had been cutting wood and had jumped down off a low ledge. As fate would have it the tiger was sleeping under that very ledge and it pounced on him instantly. He only had time to give one cry before the beast broke his neck, but that was enough to bring his companions. When the tiger heard them coming he threw the man over his back and started off, but the men followed throwing stones and their sickles until the animal dropped the man and ran off.

As the summer wore on these two tigers—fortunately there was only the one pair—became more bold and one of them stole a child from a lonely hut. The men in our community organized hunts but the brush was so impenetrable that they could not make any headway on foot. Then they started sitting all night in trees with live bait on the ground, but that didn't work. One of these parties heard the two beasts coughing and growling not a hundred yards away, but that was the nearest they ever came. Apparently the only thing that would have drawn them was a baby and that was out of the question for, believe it or not, the Chinese love their babies, whether girl or boy.

That winter, after we had all left, the Government sent soldiers out after the tigers; but the soldiers were worse than we had been—chattering and singing in order that the tiger would not take one of them before they got it.

The next summer we learned that the toll had mounted to two hundred and fifty people—which is a lot even for two tigers. They had become almost incredibly bold—even taking children from villages at dusk, if only a few people were about. The natives of course had no firearms.

That summer we were never allowed out of the valley except in a large well-guarded party, and never after dusk. There were many false rumors and some real. A St. Bernard dog that somebody owned gave a couple of dauntless boasters the scare of their lives one night!

One afternoon toward the end of the summer I went with my family to a tea at a house situated on the top of the low ridge at the western edge of the valley. After most of the others had gone we stayed to see the sunset which was especially beautiful from our friends' porch, for you could watch it sink apparently into the Yangtze through a big break in the range.

What followed so deeply impressed me that I can remember the scene perfectly. There was a peculiar cloud formation over the foothills and those in the shadow were a deep purple while others glowed with all the shades from dark blue to green in the fading light. The picturesqueness of the scene was increased by the soft-wood smoke which drifted up straight in front of us from a woodcutter's hut two hundred feet below, accompanied by the sound of the woodcutter chopping his day's haul into even lengths.

FOR some reason I looked down at him and as I did so a cry escaped me—for just as I looked, a great tawny beast shot out of the brush fifteen feet away from the unsuspecting woodcutter and its outstretched paws struck him on his shoulders. As the poor man fell his agonized scream of pain and mortal fear shattered the silence. We all stood speechless and spellbound, but not so his wife cooking inside the hut. She came rushing out, waving her apron and shouting, but the only effect this had was to make the beast dig his claws more deeply into the poor man's shoulders and snarl at her. She turned and ran back into the house and, for a minute, we were afraid that she had given up. But she wasn't that kind. In a second she reappeared and this time she was carrying the kettle she had apparently just taken from the fire, for it was steaming. Rushing up as close as she dared she flung the boiling water full in the snarling face. The result would have been humorous if it had not been so serious. The tiger gave one leap backward, turning in midair, and tore off through the underbrush, letting out regular cat spits and snarls, and stopping every few bounds to paw at its burning eyes and mouth.

Though it takes some time to tell, not more than thirty seconds had elapsed. We were released from our spell, however, and ran through the house to the road and down to the hut—it would have been impossible to get through the brush. We found the woodcutter unconscious and at first we were afraid he was dead; but there was a doctor with us and he found that the man had only fainted from pain

and fright. His shoulders had been terribly torn by the animal's claws. We carried him up to the house and the doctor gave him first aid; then we made a litter and had him carried up to the hospital, where it was learned that he would never be able to carry anything on his shoulders again.

As soon as the story spread around, people decided to do something and that family now have a nice little shop in the business center—and they swear by instead of at the tiger!

That fall an Englishman out leopard-hunting came on the awful pair suddenly as they basked in the sun. They had become so slow and sick from their unnatural diet of human flesh that he was able to get them both. Needless to say, he has had little trouble from the natives during the recent disturbances.

The Typhoon

In spite of storm warnings a ship captain puts to sea and runs into a real typhoon.

By **Luis McLeod**

FIRST impressions are the longest lived when made by a person in a position to do so from authority and experience. I had crossed the Pacific Ocean without a qualm, passed through the Japan Sea out over the China Sea and for years sailed in the Philippine waters, and had not, until this time, faced that king of the elements—the typhoon. It stands out in my memory today vividly.

We left Cebu on a Saturday morning on the old S. S. *Islas de Filipinas* with a good cargo and a fair number of passengers. The steamer was an old one of Spanish construction and well-worn through long service. The Captain was a Spanish *mestizo,* a short time in the service. The weather was favorable with a spirited wind until the ship neared the island of Romblon about midway between Cebu and Manila. Here the sea turned very rough.

As the elements grew worse with a falling barometer upon our nearing the island of Romblon, the Captain made port there during the late afternoon to gain information from the semaphore station and to observe the weather. This port, located well back, near and west of a low mountain ridge, affords an excellent large harbor of calm water in cases of necessity. Many water craft had preceded us, waiting for the tempest to pass.

A number of the male passengers of our ship, including myself, disembarked with the Captain to gain information about the weather at the Presidencia of the port town. There we were informed that due to the violence of the typhoon, which would pass between Romblon and Manila, it would not be safe for any water-craft to leave harbor before six A. M. the following Sunday.

We returned aboard for supper, believing our ship would remain until Sunday morning as all other steamers in port intended to do. The Captain came aboard later and announced, to our amazement, he would sail that night. The passengers of most influence tried earnestly to dissuade him from that idea, but without success. When it became certain the Captain intended to sail, a wealthy Visayan planter declared he would disembark and catch the next boat for Manila, and he began preparations to that end. The male passengers, including myself, made similar preparations to follow him, whereupon the Captain informed us that no one could leave the ship. Seeing no way of escaping a perilous experience in an uncertain storm, we felt like wild animals caught in a cage. The women passengers, pale with thought of impending danger, began praying, while the men discussed in low angry tones the attitude of the Captain in forcing all into certain peril.

All movable objects on board excepting a few chairs occupied by the women passengers, had been lashed to the stable parts of the ship. Over the engine-room was constructed a long wide flat covering rising some two or three feet above the deck and used as a table. This played an important part in our experience.

The gangplanks had been taken in and seamen were at guard along the side of the steamer next to the pantalan to prevent disembarkation. The passengers, faced with the certainty that the ship would leave the harbor as announced, were trapped in a situation from which there was no escape. That we would go to sea in the teeth of the typhoon was now unquestionable.

The male passengers drew apart instinctively, each individual occupied with care for himself and intent on all preparation possible for personal safety. Each began to conceal about him small articles of the greatest value from his baggage. Life-preservers were experimentally donned.

We looked along the top of the low mountain crest which arose with clifflike abruptness above, sheltering us from the storm; we could see tall coconut trees from fifty to seventy feet high bending to the force of the gale with their long feathery branches extending over and out along the blow of the tempest like so many umbrellas turned inside out by a strong wind.

Upon the ship's nearing the entrance to the harbor, the sea could be seen rising and tossing in great volumes of water from the fury of the storm. Avenues stretched along the base of the huge waves like valleys between small hills.

The wind caught the crests of the waves and violently hurled them off into a fine mist.

Then the force of the hurricane struck the ship and it lurched with a dull grating noise as if heavy iron plates and ship timbers were being moved one over the other under great pressure. The ship paused, then lunged over the top of a wave in a twisting, swishing, downward leap as it pounded through the water. It righted itself in a laborious reverse motion, corkscrewing and soughing to the top of the next wave with groaning ship timbers and deep sounds of rasping iron. Then it appeared to rise from the sea in rapid steplike movements and to leave us suspended in midair as it sank into the sea.

AS the intensity of the steamer's motion increased with the growing violence of the tempest, the men passengers, reverting more to a civilized complex, hurriedly secured life-preservers, adjusted them on the women passengers and then fitted others to themselves. From the time the ship drove into the typhoon it had been impossible to occupy a chair but momentarily. The women passengers by grouping together had been able to keep their chairs from overturning, but they slid along the flooring made slippery from the continual breaking of waves over the deck of the ship. Although paulins had been lowered around the sides of the ship and tightly warped down, this did not keep out the water forced by the waves through every opening. To escape the flooded deck, the male passengers had mounted the table platform, but with the turning and lurching of the ship they could only remain there by holding onto the iron rods extending upward through its top. The motion of the ship swung us in a circle around those rods with increasing speed and violence as the hurricane grew fiercer, and we continued revolving there like a merry-go-round throughout the storm.

This state of affairs kept up with variations for the worse until about four A.M., when the hurricane arose to its maximum force. The wind moaned, shrieked and howled like demons out of hell. The gigantic waves pounded themselves with a booming of heavy cannonading and came off in a bubbling, gurgling, swishing wash as fearful as the gasp of a spirit from Hades. The ship was beaten and buffeted and jammed and tossed and slammed about by the wind and waves like a cork in a basin of water—then of a sudden it ceased all motion with a groaning trembling crouching sensation, as if its keel had struck and it had squatted for a giant's leap into space. The next moment there came a deafening blast like the gates of hell had blown up on the starboard side of the ship, with the ripping of the paulin from the bow to the stern of the vessel, and a mountainous wave deluged the deck, engulfing the whole ship in a great curved envelope of water.

Women passengers who had gathered together bobbed up and down, then wringing their hands in hysterical shrieking prayers made for the stairway of the bridge of the ship with two Catholic nuns in the lead still screaming. Some of them reached the way and escaped danger; others were caught by the inrushing water and thrown onto the stairs one on top of the other, the impact suffocating their screams. Some, wailing and yelling, tried to escape beneath the stairway and were caught by the water, whirled and twisted around and flattened against the cabin of the boat or were swirled across the railing of the ship into the paulin on the larboard side of the vessel.

Two male passengers on the table next to the women, seeing the danger, leaped to their assistance and rescued the two on the ship's railing in a semiconscious condition. They swayed through the water with them to safety. Other men passengers nearest the women under the stairway rushed in and dragged them out to a less dangerous place.

One of the men passengers near the ship's side, fairly caught by the volume of water, was thrown onto the end of the table—washed off stunned, with his ribs broken—and saved from drowning by passengers near him. Another man, hurled past the table to the opposite side of the deck where his head struck an iron railing of the ship, was rescued senseless by two passengers as he was being wedged in between the paulin and the ship's railing by the pressure of the water. A woman passenger mounted on the table and holding onto an iron rod, lost her grip and slid in a rolling tumble toward the side of the ship when two men grabbed her and drew her to safety.

A sailor working near the bow of the vessel was carried overboard by the rushing water. An alarm was given; another sailor at the stern of the ship in the act of throwing a life-preserver to the man in the water, was tossed into the sea by a large wave. The rescuer clung to the end of a rope attached to the ship and was later hauled aboard.

As the water receded from the deck to about a two-foot depth, the two nuns and the other women fell to their knees in piteous wailing prayers with the sea-water swirling around their waists as it surged about the deck for an outlet. As the ship eased over in a drunken stagger to the pressure of the sea, we saw that much of the iron deck railing had broken loose.

The rain now fell in torrents as though the sky had opened up in a deluge and the wind drove it with the velocity of arrows which, striking one's body, stung with the impact of flattened shot. The copper arrow on the half-circle of the stabilizing indicator moved backward and forward in full swing over 180 degrees. We thought the ship had struck and would soon go to pieces. We gave up all hope of staying aboard and made ready to plunge into the sea and trust all to our individual fate. Panic reigned among us and passengers, hurrying for the ship's side to hurl themselves into the sea, were caught and held back by others for a last desperate chance at life.

UNEXPECTED release came through a perceptible ease in the wind. The last travail of the ship proved to be the supreme effort of the storm; with it waned the destructive force. Thereafter no equally heavy sea arose against us and the ship slowly recovered its resistance. But the wind continued high with the rain and strong great waves which turned and twisted and tossed and beat the vessel in a dizzy manner for some two hours more. When the storm gave evidence of finally abating and the waves became less furious, we found the ship side-on near the entrance to the harbor. We had made no progress whatever through the night during those long hours of struggling in the torments of death with the tempest! The Captain manifested great pride in his skillful seamanship and informed us that after leaving the harbor he was forced to turn head-on to the typhoon and to drive the ship at full steam ahead to keep from being carried out to sea and onto one of the numerous islands of the archipelago.

The ship presented a scene of devastation. The large refrigerator holding provisions had been destroyed and our food supply was short during the rest of the voyage but this gave us only slight concern. We rejoiced over our providential escape, swearing by the gods above and the demons under the sea never again in typhoon weather to brave the waters of the Philippines. If anyone doubts this tale, let him try a typhoon for the thrill of his life.

On Page Four of this issue will be found full details of our prize offer for stories of Real Experiences.

WALTO W. PUTTA

The author of this thrilling fact story a few years ago took the schooner Iskum to Siberia to trade for furs. Already he has told you of his perilous escapes from storm and ice-floe, and of his virtual captivity by Soviet representatives. Here he gives us the exciting climax of his final dramatic escape.

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

Pirates of the Frozen Seas

IT was a long stretch from five o'clock to twelve that eventful day of July twenty-fourth, for our enforced guests in the storeroom remained below deck all that time. It was one of our periods of greatest suspense, for we could do nothing during this time but wait, with the realization upon us that the success of our entire adventure rested upon what we did in the first few minutes at the end of our waiting.

Alex was at the wheel and I was up in the crow's-nest scanning the sea for a sight of the Red launch, when, at about noon, the oversized lieutenant stuck his black fur cap up out of the forward companionway. He looked all around. The weather was calm, the sea smooth, and no land appeared in any direction, even Geka Point having faded into the mist which hung over the horizon. He glanced back down the companionway and said something to Dimitri, below, after which he started slowly to pick his way over the deck-load toward the pilot-house. He was not carrying his rifle.

I came down to meet him, my nerves tightening as I felt the moment for final action at hand. I saw Jumbo on the alert, and knew he would have Jack in readiness. Diem, Felkel, and Dave Tripple were still asleep. How could I take time to go and call anybody now?

"Prekrasnaya pagoda!" I said, using my customary greeting to the Russian, which meant, "Fine morning!"

I then invited him, by word and by gesture, into the pilot-house to take a look at our position on the chart, which was somewhat distorted on account of the horizon-haze. He refused, however, to put more than one foot inside the door, although this still left floor-space for the other. I began to play for time, for I had not yet seen Jumbo and Jack Oliver go forward. I was outside the pilot-house myself, but I exhibited the chart, describing circles on it with my dividers and making marks calculated to hold the lieutenant's attention. Then I moved as if to step into the pilot-house behind him. This gave me a view of Jack Oliver standing at the head of the forward companionway. He held a rifle in his left arm, and was resting another one over the lashings of our Cape Cod dory.

Jumbo and Jack had already done their job.

The lieutenant also saw this sight which thrilled me, but before he could register his astonishment I had gone to bat. I slipped onto his right wrist the handcuff I had ready in my pocket, while Alex, leaving the ship to its own sweet will, came over and caught his left arm in a strangle-hold.

The huge fellow remained so passive and bewildered at first that we thought he was going to give up without a struggle. Then he suddenly let out a cry piteous beyond words, as of one whose life is being taken from him, while both his arms flew out. We had him in the pilot-house by this time, which gave us some advantage, but the struggle which followed was fierce indeed. Alex, rather small in stature, hit the ceiling as the guard's big left arm lifted him; but he hung on tenaciously, while I clung to the open half of the handcuff. Our problem was to bring those two powerful hands close enough together to let the cuff snap over the other sinewy wrist. Bending, twisting, pushing and pulling got us nowhere, so I resorted to old-fashioned fighting methods, and with my right hand began jabbing uppercuts at the Russian's broad jaw. His face, swaying slowly back and forth, offered an easy target. I refrained from putting much force behind the first two blows, as I have a good deal of confidence in the effectiveness of my punch.

But our lieutenant was a difficult proposition. His big arms continued to whirl like a windmill-sweep, with poor Alex, wrapped around the left one, taking bumps at every swing. I braced myself and delivered what I believed would be a knockout, but it still made no impression. I realized that this was a man of extraordinary resistance. Still I never once thought of the serving-mallets and fids we had placed at convenient points for use in this crisis; I went wild, using only my fists. I crashed him in the face, blow after blow, until I had tired myself out, before his arms stopped their gyrating and dropped limp at his sides. I snapped the open handcuff over his left wrist. At last we had him captive.

He began easing himself down on his knees, slowly and majestically, like a camel preparing for his master to mount. On lower down went his head, until it touched the floor. He began mumbling words, some of which I could understand individually, but which made no sense to me taken together: *"Capitan, neate wadda* (Captain, not water)."

Puzzling over this, I heard some one out on the poop deck using the most appalling language that has ever struck my ears throughout a long seafaring career. I looked out

of the door. Little Allen had lowered the Red flag and was stamping on it, his stiff leg thumping down with the force and regularity of a pile-driver. I am sure his accompanying oration omitted none of the cuss-words in the English language, while his utterances in Eskimo, flavored with oaths in which *"r"* is the most featured sound, were enough to make one's spine rattle.

Mr. Diem, who had also appeared, brought out the United States ensign, and stood patiently waiting for Allen's ceremony to be over. He did not want to hurry him, being apparently in full sympathy with the performance. Presently Allen grew calm again, having expressed the concentrated hatred of years of oppression. He reached for the Stars and Stripes from Diem, and ran them up where the Red symbol of anarchy had been. It was a dramatic scene, and one more filled with significance than any of us could have expressed. We were American sailors once more, on an American ship!

The remarkable thing about little Allen was that he had been able to conceal his sentiments completely from us up to this point. So disciplined was he that we had wondered time and again whether or not he was just a Soviet spy ready to turn us over to the authorities when he got enough on us. And all the while this rage against all the Red flag stands for was bottled up in him! Force, intimidation, brute violence go far in the government of human actions —but what a volcano that outward control rests on!

BY this time Jumbo and Jack Oliver had brought their captive up to the deck. Dimitri, pale as death, seemed unable to stand; I pushed him into my room and seated him beside his handcuffed superior. I was still disgusted with myself for having been unable to knock out the big lieutenant with one direct blow, as I had expected to do. Dimitri's ghostlike appearance filled me with additional contempt. It made me understand why police officers sometimes beat up their prisoners. Savage as it may seem, my controlling desire was to beat up these two men. I deliberately slapped the pale soldier on the cheek but the blow only made the skin whiter yet, with the mark of my fingers showing in the pallor.

Alex, standing behind me, grunted disapproval—soft-hearted Alex, forty years at sea without ever having laid a strong hand on anybody. He had not once struck the lieutenant during our struggle, merely hanging on to his arm like a barnacle.

Gradually I returned to reason. After all, what had these two young men in the uniform of the Soviet army done? Merely obeyed the orders of their superiors. From the time they were thirteen years old they had seen only war, nothing but war, for they had served in the army from the time they were sixteen. Aside from obeying orders, what did they know? When they found out I was highest authority aboard the *Iskum,* they would obey my directions as readily as they had those of their military commandant.

The more I saw of these samples of the Bolshevik army, the more I became convinced that the organization they represented was not a group of men who could think for themselves, capable of acting on their own initiative, but were mere parts of a big machine which could be set in operation only by orders from above. These two must have been aware of our intention to make an escape from Anadir, and yet they had been unable to think out any plan to thwart us.

I decided on an experiment, to which the crew gave ready agreement. Through Allen I told the soldiers that we now looked upon them merely as members of the *Iskum's* crew, and that we would treat them accordingly in every particular, on the one condition that they behave properly and accept all my orders as captain of the ship.

They consented to the condition with signs of relief and gladness, and we at once went to work to take off the lieutenant's handcuffs, the locks to which proved obstinate. We had to saw the things off at last. Dave Tripple and Felkel came on deck sometime about now. I noticed Dave wore a queer expression, but was so occupied with other matters that I had no chance to talk with him at the time. The lieutenant was no more than free of his handcuffs than he got down on his knees again on the deck and began groaning out plaintive prayers in Russian. Again all I could understand was, *"Capitan, neate wadda!"*

It rather upset me. I shouted for Allen.

"For pity's sake, tell me what this man is trying to say!"

"'Please, Captain, don't throw me into the water!'—that's all he says," explained Allen.

I tried to set our prisoner's mind at rest on this point, but the look in his eyes did not indicate that he got my meaning.

By this time we were fairly sure we would not be followed, with the *Baychimo* on the beach, and the cruising radius of the Red launch, together with its unseaworthiness, limiting its range to the waters of the bay—but we took the precaution of scanning the horizon, and I set our course straight toward the boundary-line between the United States and Russia, now two hundred miles away at the nearest point. It would be time enough to turn northward to Nome or southward to Dutch Harbor, whichever way we decided to go, after we were safe in American waters.

We then took out of our cargo-hold a case of .30-.30 rifles and some ammunition. With each of us equipped with a loaded gun, we were now ready for followers if they wanted to come. Only after that did we feel free to settle down and listen to Jumbo and Oliver tell the story of their part in our final coup.

Everything, it seemed, had worked out according to plan with them. Jumbo had gone down first to the forward compartment and begun turning over the stores of food, all the time edging nearer the alert guard, but waiting for the final move until Jack Oliver had joined him. He found himself in a strategic position, however, before Jack entered the room, and so leaped at the soldier's throat, taking him completely by surprise and pinning him down. Dimitri was by no means a weakling, though not so powerful as his lieutenant. The attack terrorized him, however, and when Jack came jumping along and pointed one of his own big German rifles at him, he gave in without opposition. Jumbo had certainly done his part well—one crack from that rifle and it would have been curtains for him and after him, probably all the rest of us, with our plans for the get-away dying right there.

WE now had time to think, both about the possible reception waiting for us ahead, and the people and conditions we had left behind us. I wished we might have taken Mr. Lampe off with us. Never would I forget his music that day I thought the chief of police had shot Ivan Ivanov.

But some of the Americans might come away on the *Baychimo.* We would stop at Gambell again, and report conditions for the *Bear.* I was also very sorry we had found no chance to take over Coffin's fine lot of furs he had been anxious to sell to us. My own two pretty white foxskins—I mourned them too, left in the storeroom of the Bolshevik Government-house. We speculated about that dense smoke we had seen on the spit in front of the village just as the *Baychimo* appeared to be starting in pursuit of us. We had heard it whispered about the town that the people who had furs to sell meant to burn them up rather than let the Government take them at just half the trading

price. If that was what the smoke meant, the villagers had certainly staged a demonstration of protest, and one that must have smelled pretty nearly to heaven. What a loss to us, as well! We had nothing to show for all our trip but expense and failure. What would the *Iskum's* owners say, and what were we in for with the United States Customs people, who had not sanctioned our voyage?

Still, our new-found liberty was enough all by itself to send our spirits up. Around us stretched the smooth surface of the Bering Sea, with nothing to break it but an iceberg here and there on which an occasional bull walrus grunted signals of warning to his harem. To tell the truth, I was so happy just to be free on this wide ocean, with a sound deck under my feet, that I could have kissed a walrus and enjoyed it! Let the cares and worries waiting us at home stay where they were till we got there. Here and now, everybody aboard ought to rejoice to the utmost.

Jumbo leaped at the soldier's throat, taking him by surprise.

At least, that was what I thought about it, but the crew did not make it quite unanimous. Two disappointed and downhearted members were going around with the gloomiest faces I had seen yet. One of these was our Boy Scout, and it was the first time he had sulked on the whole voyage.

"Dave," I said as I saw him reeving himself up through the engine-room hatch, his expression the very mask of disappointment, "what ails you? Aren't you glad we are out of there? Just think—we're free, on the wide ocean, at liberty to go anywhere we see fit!"

Dave returned my look accusingly.

"You promised to call me before you took the guards, but you didn't."

So that was it. I was sorry he had missed the excitement, but it couldn't be helped.

"I had no chance," I told him. "Things happened too fast. You didn't expect me to let that big fellow loose to run down and wake you up, did you?"

He thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt.

"This is what I had for you," he said sadly.

He drew out a .38-caliber automatic pistol.

Then I did sit up.

"Why in the world," I scolded, "didn't you give it to me before?"

"I wanted to surprise you," he answered, in a tone that plumbed the full depth of boyish disappointment. Such a wonderful surprise, to help us all out of our troubles, and no chance to spring it! It was nothing less than a tragedy to him.

"Well, well, that certainly is too bad. I wish I had had it. Where did you get it, anyway?"

"It's the one Mr. Burgh thought he had dropped overboard. I had a chance to get it just before we got to Anadir, and I hid it in one of my sealskin mittens. When he was hunting it, and when they searched the ship for other firearms, I just took the mittens out of the drawer, and when they quit, I put them back."

"Well, I don't know how you ever managed to get hold of it in the first place," I returned, "but I will say the credit goes to you of retaining a loaded gun after all the rest of us had been forced to give ours up."

My private opinion was that Dave had meant to stage some hero-act, by getting the drop on the big lieutenant and saving my life, perhaps, at the strategic moment. Too bad I had spoiled it all!

The other dejected member of the crew was little Allen.

"How long are you going to keep these Russians?" he asked me, in a voice which indicated I had been guilty of a serious oversight.

"What's wrong, Allen?" I questioned in reply.

"Well," he repeated, "when are you going to throw them overboard?"

"Overboard? Why, I haven't even thought of such a thing. Why do you want to throw them overboard?"

"If you went back to Anadir, they would shoot you there, right away," he argued.

"What's that got to do with it? Just because they would do something wrong is no reason I should."

He walked away in obvious disgust, mumbling to himself, but in a little while came back again.

"You are going a long distance away, and you don't need to care what happens, but I got to stay right at Indian Point. If these soldiers tell the *commandante* I jumped on the Red flag, they will kill me. But if you throw them overboard out here, nobody but you and Mr. Diem will ever know, and you won't tell, will you?"

So that was the secret of his trouble! No, our problem had not been quite Allen's problem. Unfortunate son of a white man by an Eskimo mother, with his heart of gold, reared in the cold Arctic by methods more cold and unkind than the Arctic itself! Something must be done for him.

From his speech, Allen feared only what Diem or I might tell on him, as that would be official. But how he did fear that! I informed Diem of the situation, and we decided to ask Allen if he would like to make Saint Lawrence Island—under the American flag—his home, instead of Siberia. He was overjoyed at the mere suggestion. Mr. Diem then proceeded to write a letter in his behalf to the commander of the *Bear*, explaining the boy's plight and asking that he be allowed to remain at Gambell.

OUR course in direct line to the American boundary, and thence north to Gambell, took us over three hundred miles, but we covered it in two days. In the interval I was pleased to find that I had made one more correct calculation. Our former guards took all orders from me eagerly, and made themselves as useful on board as was possible to men drilled to army service.

In my opinion, the man who makes the best kind of assistant on a vessel of the *Iskum's* type is the one who has enough initiative to think and act for himself, but who at the same time has a desire to coöperate. The Russian soldiers had the latter qualification, but not the former. They had to be told every move to make.

Moreover, the big lieutenant continued the practice of going on his knees before me every little while and pleading with me not to throw him overboard. No matter how often or how earnestly I assured him I would not take such action, and had at no time had the slightest desire to do so, I could not convince him of the fact. I decided he had been so thoroughly schooled to the Russian method of promising one thing and doing the opposite that his mind could not respond to anything else. We learned that six of his own brothers had been shot by the Whites after having been promised amnesty, and treachery such as that would give an impressionable boy a mental slant that would last a lifetime. I tried to make him understand that the captain of an American trading-schooner was not like a political or a military authority in Russia—that if he said he would do a certain thing in a certain way on a given date, he would carry out his promise to the letter unless prevented by something he couldn't help. The big fellow would listen and smile dubiously, trying to please me by following all I said, but a few hours later would be plumping down on his knees to me again.

Dimitri was totally different. Jumbo said that in the very act of being captured, he had asked only, "Where is my partner?" But beyond that he uttered no plea and no complaint. When taken into the presence of his superior officer he merely sat down beside him, his face deathly pale, and waited for what he believed inevitable. Hatred of the whole capitalistic system having been pounded into him from his youth, he had participated as a matter of course in the murderous class-conflicts within his own race. In such a case as this in his own country, he knew the only possible outcome was death—to both of them. Was not America the world's foremost capitalistic country? Had America any sympathy with the Bolsheviki? How then could he and his Red companion hope for clemency?

His logic was conclusive, from his own point of view. But his thought-processes were not limited to the single deep grooves set in the lieutenant's brain. When we told him Americans did not officially murder men for a difference of political opinion, he listened with the light of comprehension in his eyes. The removal of the handcuffs from the lieutenant's wrists, and the freedom of the ship accorded both under the simple terms we had made clear to them through our interpreter, completely convinced him that Americans were not so black as they had been painted. Within an hour after his capture he began to whistle and sing like a carefree boy.

Feeling that both these young men would have a dread similar to Allen's of a return to their own shores, fearful that their lives would be the price of their having let the *Iskum* escape, we asked them whether they would like to go on with us to the United States and stay there. Both grew elated at the prospect, and so Mr. Diem and I again went into conference, making plans for their admittance to our own country. This, we felt, was the kind of peaceable conquest in which America has always led the world.

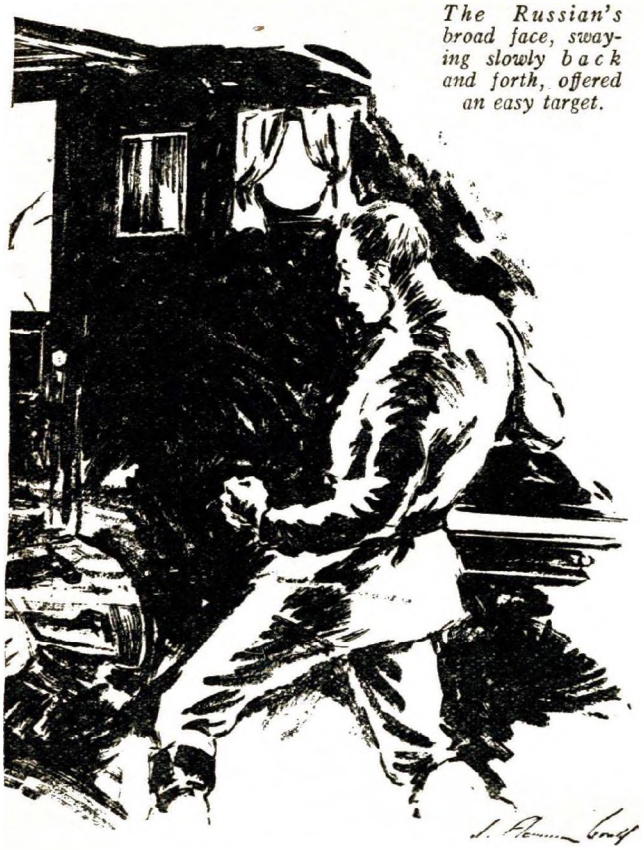
Reaching Gambell on the twenty-sixth of July, we went ashore to communicate with the authorities and leave further letters for the cutter *Bear*. We reported the Americans at Anadir, and also the Phœnix Northern traders at Senevine and Kalyuchin, Mr. Parsons at the former, and Mr. Johnson with his wife and baby at the latter, a post on the north shore of the Siberian mainland, within the Arctic Circle.

Then we said good-by to our faithful little interpreter Allen. He shook hands with me last, while tears rolled down his cheeks. He had much that he wanted to say, and I had too, but neither of us was able to put it in words. We had dared capture and resultant death together. For us he had violated all his former obligations and thrown off his traditional allegiances. Through our escape, we had been enabled to open up a new life to him, where a future promised tangible reward for his fine qualities of industry and loyalty.

I wanted to go straight home from here. Now that the strain of responsibility was over, except in my own field of navigation, I was willing to end the experience as soon as possible. Dutch Harbor was the place I wanted to steer for, where we would say good-by to the Bering Sea and reënter the Gulf of Alaska. However, the popular vote was to take in some of the northward ports, so I yielded.

CHAPTER XIII

PEACEFULLY we plodded toward Nome on our last hundred-mile-lap, the sun shining brightly on a vast blue sea with the threat of ice now far removed. Mr. Felkel had waked up to the joys of the adventurous career,



The Russian's broad face, swaying slowly back and forth, offered an easy target.

now that we had succeeded in snatching our ship as well as our lives out of the clutches of the Reds. He felt the trader instinct stirring in him again, urging us to attempt just a bit of business on our own. Despite our knowledge that both the furs and the guns of the natives had been confiscated by the Russians along all these coasts, he suggested that we go to Senevine and Kalyuchin ahead of the *Bear,* and bring out not only our traders but their accumulated furs.

For the first time during the voyage, even-tempered Mr. Diem grew angry.

"Certainly not!" he said emphatically. "Our lives are of more value than all the company's property in Siberia."

I backed him up.

"The success of such a venture would be very doubtful," I pointed out, "as Bolshevik guards are stationed at all these trading-posts, and the approach of a vessel to any point on the Arctic coast is heralded for miles around. We had better leave that job to the *Bear.*"

I was downhearted, however, over our inability to carry out the one great idea which had been at the back of my mind from the time we first determined on this summer's trip—our plan to touch at the point on Wrangel Island where report said the possible survivors of the Stefansson party were waiting in the hope of rescue. It seemed a more bitter fate than ever to me, in the light of my own recent experience, to fight off cold and hunger month after month in the frozen North while praying for a friendly ship to come by and bring one back to life and freedom. But Wrangel Island lay four hundred miles away, in the Arctic ocean of perpetual ice, and the expense of such a journey alone, with no trading opportunities possible, prohibited the venture. And perhaps Captain Hanson, of the *Donaldson,* had already reached the survivors by this time. We would at least hope that was the case.

July twenty-eight saw us safely in Nome. The first person to welcome us on shore was Captain Ross, of the life-saving station, and his first question was:

"Did you see the *Baychimo* on the beach at Anadir? We have a wireless message saying she is aground, and the *Bear* is now on the way to pull her off."

That relieved our minds of anxiety for Lampe and the others. Inquiry also brought the information that while the *Donaldson* had not as yet gone to Wrangel Island after the Stefansson people, she had nearly completed preparations for the voyage.

We had now to send out various messages to our owners, and our families, and to wait here for further orders. I wrote a full report of our experience for the Customs-house, which Mr. Diem put in typewritten form. Mr. Reed, the local officer, was kind and considerate toward us in every respect, saying we had violated no customs laws, but that we would have to be responsible for our prisoners and hold them on board until he received instructions from Washington regarding them. He let the representative of the International News Service see my report, and through him it was soon sent out all over the world. This brought us all much into the public eye, with the result that we were photographed, and even featured in a moving picture, though I do not know what happened to the last. I never saw it or heard of it again. Later on I received letters from old friends in a number of distant ports inquiring what I had been up to.

We took our two Russians with us when we first went ashore, but on Mr. Reed's order returned them to the *Iskum,* where all of us lived during our entire period in port. While in the town, however, they were much made over by the miners, many of whom were Reds, but in my opinion—and I considered myself a judge by this time—neither real communists nor real Americans!

I had promised Jumbo and Jack Oliver that they, as the actual captors of the two guards, were to fall heir to the two army rifles we took from them, as they had earned them by taking the first chances. They were delighted, both being fanciers of firearms, with a background of military training, but were filled with disgust when they found the rusty condition of the weapons—another instance of the slovenliness of Soviet soldiery. They worked on them for hours, whenever they had odd moments.

"Wonderful souvenirs!" they assured me gratefully, while I struggled against the sin of envy each time I looked at the guns in their newly oiled and polished state.

The day after our arrival a wire came to me from Colonel Ashton, in Tacoma, commending my course of action as entirely justifiable.

This assurance that the Phœnix Northern Trading Company approved our action and was prepared to say so officially was a great satisfaction to me.

Then came a wire from Washington:

"Send Red guards to Siberia in full uniform and arms."

What a bitter tragedy this was to Jumbo and Oliver—just after the guns were all clean and shining! Jumbo's loss of his own shotgun through seizure by the Reds just after its rescue from the bottom of the Bering Sea had been blow enough, but this hit him in the same spot, only harder. My envy turned to sympathy. But "orders is orders," and we accordingly turned the guards over to Uncle Sam's local representatives, with a deposit from Mr. Diem to cover the cost of returning them to their own shores.

Their removal from on board was a relief to us all, for they were an unassimilable element in our little cosmos. Oliver benefited particularly by the change, for the Russians had become used to his cooking, and now ate with such increasing heartiness as to make alarming inroads on

our supplies. His indignation over the loss of his rifle was considerably tempered by the loss of his two boarders.

At last we were at full liberty again. The *Iskum*, a Lilliputian in comparison with the great steamers that came and went, still rode nattily on the Nome roadstead, about one mile offshore, while Mr. Diem in his official capacity took full charge of the disposal of our cargo. Beyond this we had nothing to do but wait for home-orders.

In a few days the *Bear* came back from her hurry-up trip to Anadir, bringing Mr. Lampe and the members of the Kelly party. Miss Kelly, we then learned, had been fined heavily by the Soviet Government for the effrontery of establishing a sawmill on Russian soil. I do not know the exact amount of the fine, but it was so large that the company's entire capital, and their profits from three years of fur trading, did not cover it. Miss Kelly had to borrow four hundred dollars additional from the Hudson Bay Company, for she would not have been allowed to leave without playing up in full. This was a dampener for even Irish pluck, and while their steamboat was also confiscated, fortunately it was not over their leader's dead body, as she had confidently declared it would be.

Mr. Coffin refused to come away with the other Americans, taking his chance with the *Baychimo*. He was very much disgruntled, it seemed, over the fact that we had not bought his hundred and eighty furs at the competition price, as he would now have to take what he could persuade the Hudson Bay Company to give him. Being such a good friend of Mike's and Dave's, however, he was able to bring enough pressure to bear, so we learned later on, to force the price of his Number One skins up to twenty-five dollars—so his loss was less than it might have been.

IN the wake of the *Bear* came in two more American vessels, the traders *Blue Sea*, under Captain Anderson, with a crew of two, and *Silver Wave*, whose owner and skipper, Jack Hammer, had his wife with him. Another, the *Belinda*, of Nome, under Captain Costello, did not show up. All had been seized on the Siberian coast just as the *Iskum* had been, at widely different points, a fact which proved the Red policy to have been a carefully worked out plot to lure such small defenseless traders into their ports and then take possession of them on one pretext or another. When the *Iskum*, seized for no wrongdoing during all her adventurous Arctic career, but only in pursuance of this cowardly policy of preying on the weak, had succeeded in making her escape, the Red plotters had taken alarm and let the other detained vessels go—rumors of action by Colonel Ashton in Washington also having a salutary effect. The *Silver Wave*, held on the Arctic coast, had had a particularly bad time, as a result of which Mrs. Hammer's hair had turned gray. The crew of four was intact, but many brutal scenes had been witnessed by them, with the expectation that their turn would come next. All this made me doubly glad that we had acted independently and decisively. It made me secure in my conviction that all we had done was amply justified.

I was concerned to know the fate of my good friend Captain Carroll, but to my surprise no one on the *Bear* would admit to having seen the *Baychimo* aground. Mr. Lampe denied it emphatically, and when I pressed the matter with members of the Kelly party, they merely grinned sardonically and repeated: "We did not see the *Baychimo* on the beach." In the face of such unanimous testimony from at least a dozen people, even Alex Nicholson—who had witnessed the scene and discussed it with me at the time—began to doubt his own observations and conclusions. I was not deeply concerned with the point at that time, beyond the assurance that Captain Carroll was hale and hearty, for the *Iskum* was my job, not the *Baychimo*. It is difficult for me to make an outsider understand the strain of anxiety I had been under, while dealing with the lives and safety of my crew on one hand and official red tape and the natural commercial interests of shrewd shipowners on the other—a situation difficult enough for a Philadelphia lawyer, let alone a layman with only three years in grammar school by way of education. Now that I had achieved our get-away without a scratch on any of us, with the United States Customs officers entirely friendly, despite our lack of the customary papers, and the head of our trading-company wiring approval and benedictions, I was in a state of complete peace and happiness.

SINCE then, however, I have turned over this whole situation many times in my mind. I have asked myself whether, for that one time in my life, I was subject to an optical illusion. Were my bearings on the *Baychimo* affected by a mirage? No, I saw that ship swerve to starboard, and her high bow rise above the sandbank with the two anchors up to their hawse pipes. I have only to close my eyes now to see it all again with perfect clearness. I have speculated on the probability that orders had gone out to all at Anadir to suppress the facts of the incident. But would it be possible for so many people even as those on the *Bear* to join in a complete and effective suppression?

Whatever may pass through my mind, I always come back to the same conclusion. If Captain Carroll did beach his ship—as I am persuaded he must have—he did the best thing possible for all parties concerned. It is men like Captain Carroll who keep alive one's faith in humanity.

Another mystery we could not clear up was the cloud of smoke on the sand-spit as we drew away from the village. No one from Anadir would tell whether the fire we had seen meant the burning of furs as a demonstration against the Government check on trading. The Red system of intimidation seemed to have got in some good licks with our own people!

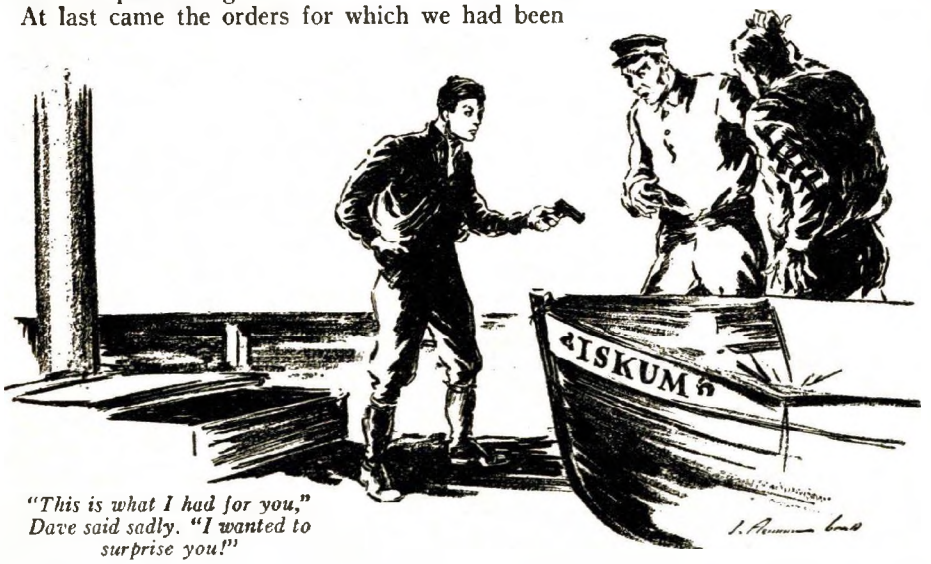
I would have liked to cut short our remaining days at Nome, for I was more than eager to be homeward bound. But we could not discharge our cargo without explicit orders from headquarters, for which Mr. Diem was waiting; so we put in the time taking in such sights as the town afforded. For one thing, we went for an automobile ride with Leonard Seppala, the champion "musher," to visit a modern gold-dredger, and watched the half-million-dollar monster in the act of digging a channel sixty feet deep, traveling over rough land with almost the speed of the *Iskum* in a difficult ice situation, simultaneously separating the gold from the great mass of earth turned up.

A matter which interested us was that regarding our Russian guards. Kept in Nome until suitable arrangements for their deportation could be made, they were much sought by the local Reds, whose effect upon them grew marked. We had felt sorry for them at first for they seemed to want to become American citizens and enjoy the independence which they had learned was the accustomed way of life to all of us on the *Iskum*. But we soon saw they were not the stuff of which loyal citizens are made. They were too undisciplined in the way of intelligent responsibility. Under the influence of their new companions they grew swaggering and belligerent, and gave out exaggerated stories of the treatment they had received aboard our ship. Knowing that they were to go back to Russia, they cooked up a big defense-story which they hoped would save their lives. They even had fake photographs taken showing evidence of man-handling they had been subjected to in their efforts to prevent our escape—bruised and blackened visages, and arms in bandages!

Another matter which depressed me was the return of the *Donaldson*, from its trip to Wrangel Island. She

brought word that the four men of the Stefansson party surviving the year before had died in the interval, with only Ada Blackjack, the Eskimo woman who had been their *mukluk*, or bootmaker (only an Eskimo woman can properly make this indispensable article of Northern footwear) still alive. The previous summer we had been within sight of their place. Never should I cease to regret our casual passing by—four lives the price paid for our failure to trace down the rumor of their presence in that remote inhospitable region.

At last came the orders for which we had been



"This is what I had for you," Dave said sadly. "I wanted to surprise you!"

waiting: "Discharge cargo and start for home." In order to get our goods on shore, we had to carry them through the surf in small boats instead of lighters. The King Islanders' big umiaks, large skin boats, were commodious and safe, and so we employed three of them, supplementing the paddling of the native oarsmen with our power engine in the head boat. The cargo was being landed at Snake River, about a mile from the *Iskum's* anchorage. We had moved in from six fathoms to four fathoms to make discharging easier, but conditions were hazardous, with a rough surf to reckon with, and so we stationed all the crew except Dave Tripple and myself at the receiving end. Conditions grew rougher and rougher as we worked, with a southwesterly wind in force and multiplying the lines of breakers. The last three-boat load had gone through only by nip and tuck, and Dave and I, watching from the deck, realized that the shore-crew could not rejoin us on board.

The wind reached the velocity of a gale, buffeting the ship so severely that we had to give her more chain. But with ninety fathoms of chain out, she still rolled and pitched violently in the shallow, foaming, muddy water. I had to make for shelter somewhere, and Sledge Island, twenty miles west, was the only spot available.

Dave got the engine started, but the seas were by now sweeping over the decks so heavily as to make it dangerous to go forward. We certainly had our hands full. The ship, lightened of her cargo, with only her fuel tanks half-full, rolled in a way to dislodge all the drawers in the engine room and roll out their valuable contents of tools belonging to our chief engineer, who was now restlessly walking the beach behind us hoping for a drop in the wind. We made the twenty miles, however, and anchored safely in the lee of Sledge Island. I had not known how serious Dave felt our predicament to be until I saw him then, taking long leaps across the deck by way of expressing happy relief. He quickly formed plans for a trip ashore, curiosity driving him to an exploration of what we knew was unoccupied land. But as the wind kept too strong to let us attempt to row the heavy Cape Cod dory, we busied ourselves with picking up with a magnet the great mass of Jumbo's tools, which had gone to the bottom of the bilge. I never before knew an engineer could have so many tools —pincers, punches, squares, calipers, pliers, files, and the like, seemingly without end. None but the former owner of a big machine-shop could have assembled such an assortment. We finally quit, thinking we had recovered plenty to satisfy any owner, and on the abatement of the gale three days later, returned to Nome. As soon as Jumbo came aboard, however, and investigated the engine-room, he set up a howl about the way we had treated him. He declared that most of his tools were missing, and the rest ruined with salt water.

All this had carried us along into August, and it was now time for Dave Tripple to hurry home for the opening of school. As the *Iskum* was not yet ready to start, Dave left us, taking passage on the *Buford*, on its return southward. Incidentally, he became the hero of the passenger list, the darling of the ladies especially, as he was a most engaging youngster, and one who had shown himself the stuff of which real men are made.

When ready to make our own return trip, we lost another of our original crew, Mr. Felkel, whom we left in Nome to take charge of trading goods remaining unsold.

Six hundred miles of uneventful travel brought us to the Aleutian Islands. We put in at Dutch Harbor, where Mr. Diem met a man named Larsen who had a large bin of codfish in a local warehouse which he wanted carried south. We took on the cargo—loaded the *Iskum* with that codfish. Personally, I would have preferred a load of furs, although furs in their raw state are not what could strictly be called fragrant.

The codfish smell, strangely enough, seemed to have a preference for the warmth of the engine-room over any other part of the ship. There, mingled with the gases from various oils, it created an atmosphere which we assured Jumbo was that of a French perfume factory, though he was unable to realize this, never having visited another place of such precious vapors. He occupied his mind, however, with the recovery of the rest of his lost tools from the depths of the bilge.

In addition to the codfish-cargo in our hold, we took on empty oil drums to fill our deck-space. Alex did the lashing of these to the ship, using five-eighth-inch wire such as had carried away when we were moored to Russian Spit and the iceberg struck us. I will say, however, that if you want a thing to stay with the ship, just let Alex Nicholson lash it.

By the first of September we were ready to start on our fifteen-hundred-mile jaunt to Queen Charlotte Sound, which I hoped to make before the equinoctial storms began on the Gulf of Alaska.

FOR our first three days out the weather, though dark and cloudy, remained moderate. On the third day we encountered a very long swell, which, while slight at first, grew higher and higher, until when the *Iskum* was in the trough, our farthest horizon was the crest of an on-

coming roller. Never before had I seen a swell like this. It recalled to my mind the report of the captain of the Japanese passenger vessel *Tenyo Maru,* in 1921, of waves off the Aleutian Islands over one hundred feet in height. Ascending into the crow's-nest, I estimated the height of these long swells as from forty to fifty feet. Apparently, the equinoctial disturbances were to be early this season. On our fourth day, when about half the distance to our destination, we met strong winds varying between south and west and within only a few hours, these had become a gale.

Our long swell continuing, the wind created a cross-sea on top, which at times the *Iskum* seemed destined not to outride. She would go down as if in an elevator, and then would be hit by a sea that seemed to strike straight up at her bottom. Water poured in on all sides. The decks were loaded with it. A foot of it went slushing about in my cabin, although the door was shut and the location was on top of the poop-deck, the highest part of the vessel. Our heavy condition created one of our big problems. I kept hoping every minute that the lashings of those oil drums on the deck would carry away, and so lighten us, but Alex had done his work too well. To attempt now to go among the drums and loosen the wires would have been nothing short of suicide. So they kept on banging against one another and the deck-rail, thumping frightfully on the deck every time the ship suddenly halted on her downward plunge and leaped up to the top of the water again.

I held the ship on her course, as this kept the sea pretty well on her starboard quarter. Under her forestaysail and the engine she made satisfactory headway at that, but our fear was that on one of those times when she had filled her deck with water and then started on her rush upward, she would emerge bottomside up!

Throughout the days of storm we attempted no cooking, of course. Then, on our ninth day out, we entered Johnstone Straits, between Vancouver Island and various less important ones along the mainland, and found rest from the wind. What hunger was ours then—we stormed the galley, and before Jack Oliver had a chance to cook a thing, went into his supply of oysters, clams, and corned beef, each seizing a can of something and going around eating from it!

Even here in Johnstone Straits, however, we had not lost that long swell which had made most of our trouble. It kept me puzzled all the way home, and I never did understand it until I read in a Seattle newspaper of damage done on the Alaska coast by tidal waves caused by the earthquake of September first that year, in Japan.

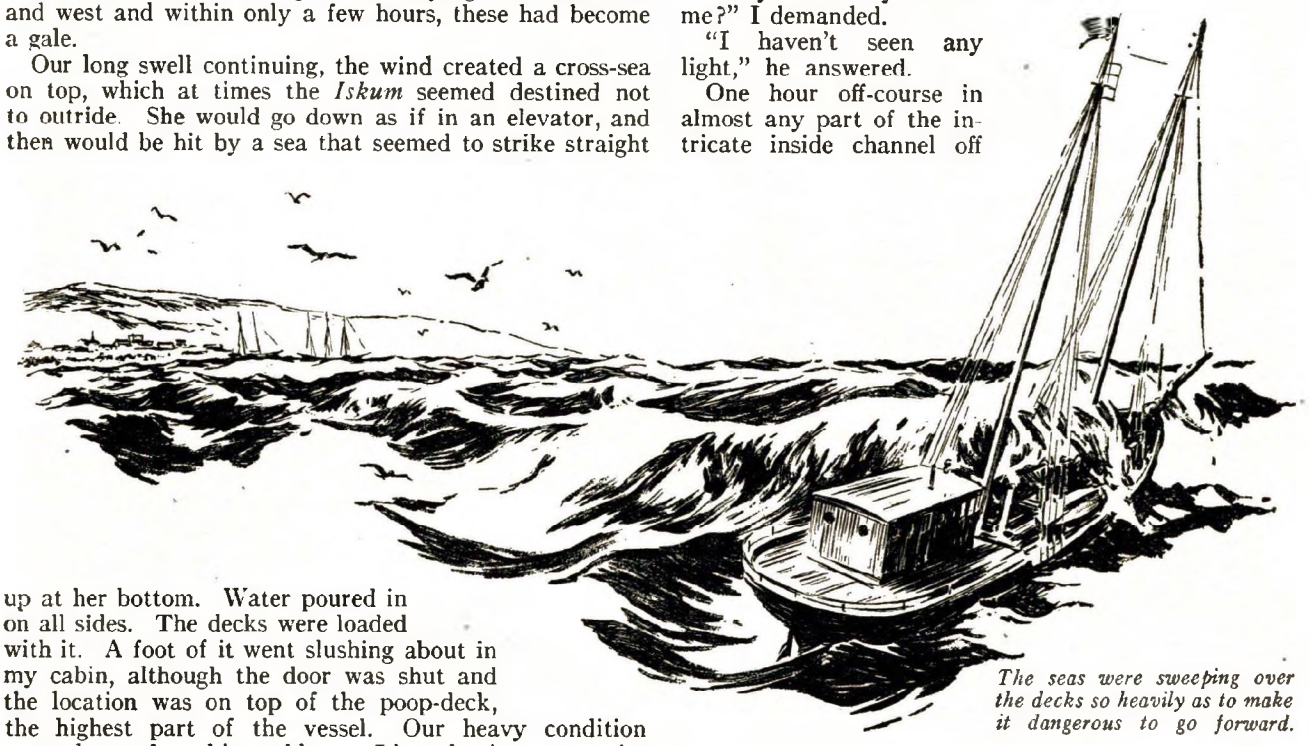
"So that was it!" I thought then. "I knew it was no ordinary kind of sea. But the *Iskum* rode it!"

I was tired out from bucking the storm, and from making a landfall by the aid of meager and unsatisfactory observations on a reef-strewn coast such as borders these straits. I put the *Iskum* on the course from Noble Island light to Masterman Island light, and lay down, telling Alex to call me when the latter light was abeam—a run of an hour. Two hours later I woke and got up, to find Alex standing unconcernedly at the wheel.

"Why didn't you call me?" I demanded.

"I haven't seen any light," he answered.

One hour off-course in almost any part of the intricate inside channel off British Columbia is almost certain to put a ship on the rocks, but at this particular point we had, fortunately, wandered to the north side of Malcolm Island instead of the south side, as I had intended, which made one more hair's-breadth escape to the *Iskum's* credit. Later I learned that the Masterman Island light was out of order at the time, which exonerated Alex. Since that experience I have made it my rule to specify an hour as well as a point for being called, no matter how obvious and unmistakable the points may seem to be.



The seas were sweeping over the decks so heavily as to make it dangerous to go forward.

Two days later, on September twelfth, four months from the day we left Tacoma, the *Iskum* moored to the Fisheries pier at Seattle—and on September twenty-second we brought her to the identical spot whence we had sailed forth on May the twelfth on our highly educational voyage. True to her name, the *Iskum* had gone and come back, which was the most that could have been asked of her, gallant little ship that she was. As for her crew, we could claim far less than that one-hundred-per-cent achievement. We had seen another pipe-dream of easy riches "busted" flat. We had spent a summer and a lot of money flirting with death and destruction in a variety of forms. But we had made a highly important commercial discovery, and one which would save money for other people if they were only willing to profit by our expensive experience. We had learned, beyond argument or theory, that the man of small capital, however endowed he may be with pluck, initiative, and willingness to work, is *persona non grata* in that rich, but mysterious and treacherous, region patrolled by Red guards and dedicated to a doctrine of false economics.

THE END.

Missing Page

BEWARE OF IRRITATION