There IS a Shangri-La!—see page 6

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

25c
MARCH

"PIPELINE TO ARABIA"

Blood and oil mix in a thrilling story of adventure in the desert

Who wrote what in this month's Bluebook

Purely Personal

We never read a story like John Langdon's "Hermit on Bikini" (pages 55-60) that we don't wonder how in blazes an author first gets the idea for such a weird and fascinating yarn, a story we feel pretty sure will haunt readers for many nights to come. So we wrote out to San Francisco and asked Langdon for the word.

"Perhaps a sight or two of Bikini," he answered. "before it made the headlines: three days in a typhoon around Okinawa; an evening at Saipan, just after sunset, when the water actually glowed with the same peculiar greenish radiance I've described in the story; the luminous blobs floating up out of the fog-bound night outside the Farallone Islands, and a panic and near-riot on a blacked-out troopship in a torpedo junction near Brisbane, Australia—and, well, that's it."

Sure is. Read the story and see for yourself.

* * *

Frank Bennett, a Kansas boy who writes under the name of Ben Frank, as anyone who turns to pages 50-51 can plainly see, reports that the idea for "Quincy's Call" came to him one rainy night in the Ozarks, when he was down that way on a fishing trip.

"Sleeping in a leaky cabin, with the wind sighing sadly through the trees," author Bennett writes, "we were awakened by the ghost of Eli Quincy. Or something. And the story just had to be written.

"And, by the way, sportsmen will be interested to know that, the day after Eli's ghost came calling, the fishing was wonderful."

Anglers will be happy to know they were real fish, too. No ghosts.

* * *

Stories about spies and counterspies have a never-ending fascination for readers, and we can't think of a better man to write them than Lt. Col. Oreste Pinto, whose "Would You Call Him Friend or Enemy?" (pages 42-49) is but one thrilling chapter from Col. Pinto's new book, "Friend or Foe?"

Briefly, virtually all of Col. Pinto's active military career (he's in the Royal Dutch Army) has been spent in the field of counter-intelligence. Starting in 1914, he worked actively through both World Wars, serving in Belgium, Germany, Holland, France, Italy and Great Britain.

Married to an Englishwoman, Col. Pinto's greatest service in WW II was performed in England, where his job was to screen refugees from the Nazis to be sure the Germans didn't use this means to infiltrate Allied ranks. That this is not the snap job it sounds, Col. Pinto points out all too well, in this, the account of one of his most difficult and perplexing cases.

* * *

It was about as inevitable that Robert Aldrich ("You Learn the Hard Way," pages 37-41) should become a writer as it is that a Barrymore become an actor; for Bob's mother is Bess Streeter Aldrich, whose by-line has been hitting the top magazines for many years. Bob, who is now 33, went to the University of Nebraska; did a hitch on the United Press, in Washington; tried the Army for two years, went back to the UP, then to the Omaha *World-Herald*, where he stayed three years. Deciding a literary-type mother wasn't helping him sell much on his own, he quit the newspaper business and began to study fiction at the University of Oklahoma (which, by the way, is turning out quite a few pretty dandy writers!). Now living in New York and working actively at his writing chores, Bob says he prefers being in Mexico, where he aspires to sit under a tree in Taxco and play the guitar.

Which is better than loafing.

* * *

"When I was a boy," Hascal Giles, author of "Hanging Spree" (pages 28-32) says, "my Uncle George, a lively little

man with a full white beard and twinkling eyes, used to tell us of his youth as a prospector in the Southwest. He would hold us spellbound with his wild tales, and, at the end, he'd say, 'And you know the best part of that story, sonny? It never happened at all—I made it up.'

"I'm like my Uncle George. I find a great deal of drama in events that *almost* happened, just as the necktie party which didn't quite come off in 'Hanging Spree.'"

Hascal claims to owe his writing career to having won the 149th prize in a short-story contest sponsored by a writers' magazine. He's been hitting for the distance ever since. See page 28.

COMING UP

Judging by the reaction to *Bluebook's* pro and con essays on hunting in the December issue, absolutely *no one* is impartial on the subject of stalking game; readers either are violently for or violently against this pastime, and in spades.

Which is why next month's *Bluebook*, a really jim-dandy issue, will come up with the last word in hunting techniques, an all-around article on tracking game with bow and arrow. Now, before you sneer, you'd better know that there's a hard core of sportsmen who use no other weapon but the bow, and they've brought down all kinds of game, up to and including the black bear. But that's not all —in addition to giving you some pretty adventurous yarns about bow hunters, this peachy little article also will tell you *how to do the thing yourself*, a handy thing to know with autumn only six months away. So plan to be around next month.

* * *

We also fought off fourteen other editors, armed with large satchels of money, to snag for you the astonishing account of explorer Bill ongenecker's safari nto Africa's pygmy country to get the dope on the legend that these little people are ruled by a white king who once played end for Harvard. How Mr. Longenecker made out is partially revealed by the title of his piece, "I Lived with the White King of the Pygmies." What isn't revealed, and won't be until our April issue, is the amazing background to this fantastic story, a story so unbelievable you'd swear we made it up.

Only we have pictures to prove it.

* * *

We're also working on a true account of one of the most fantastic cases in the annals of the Northwest Mounted Police; we have a biting report on how the Russians are trying to communize the humor business; we've got crack reporter Will Oursler at work on how to sell gold bricks (it's still being done!); there'll be an amusing yarn about how one Southern town handled the Ku Klux Klan, and we naturally will have our usual superlative round-up of rugged, masculine short stories. Obviously, it goes without saying that there'll be a swell book-lengther (about ocean-going tugs, log rafts and violence), a novelette or so, and anything else that we can cram into this issue.

* * *

Can you think of a bigger buy for a quarter?

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

March, 1953 MAGAZINE Vol. 96, No. 5

PHILLIPS WYMAN, *Publisher*

• MAXWELL HAMILTON •
Editor

LEN ROMAGNA, *Art Editor*

SUMNER PLUNKETT, *Assistant Editor*

SHORT STORIES

NOVELETTE

ARTICLES

NOVELS

SPECIAL FEATURES

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

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PRO and CON

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Shoe Fly

To the Editor:

Regarding Joseph Lawrence's complaint ("Baby Needs a New Pair Of Shoes," December *Bluebook*), in which he objects to shoe clerks who try to measure his feet every time he comes into their shops, he'll have no trouble if he follows this formula:

Depending on his age, he should say he's buying the shoes for his grandfather, his father, his son, his grandson, or his cousin in Spokane. That way he'll simply be able to state the size he wants, get the shoes, and walk out.

I haven't been "fitted" in a shoe store in ten years.

George Sanford.

St. Petersburg, Fla.

To the Editor:

When you go into a shoe store, you are entitled to buy any size shoe you want. If the man gives you the size and style you ask for, over your objections to having a fitting, he is under no obligation to you in regard to the fit or the merchandise; you release him of all further obligation.

But, in the long run, your shoe man should be on the same professional level as your dentist or doctor, and he should not be changed every time you buy a pair of shoes. The man who can do the best job for you is the man who owns his store, who can call you by your first name, who knows the various troubles your par icular feet are subject to, and whose very business depends on the fact that he knows these things.

Go ahead and get mail-order shoes, Mr. Lawrence. But don't blame the mail-order people when the shoes start to pinch!

G. W. Cooke.

Buffalo Shoe Retailers' Assoc.,
Buffalo, N. Y.

To the Editor:

The man's a dude. Who wears shoes anyhow?

Luke Bister.

Oxford, Miss.

"Sorry, Mac—my wife's using that phone."

The Man Maynard

To the Editor:

I ain't meanin' to get into one of these written arguments, since I ain't much at writing, but this here artical on hunting sure has got up my dander. Now I guess this Mr. Maynard meant well ("You Call *This* Sport?", December *Bluebook*), but I'm thinking he's out on the wrong limb with an awfully big saw.

You know, around home here some of the fellers play a game where they chase after a little white ball most of the day, and they keep beating it with a club every chance they get. Now I don't go much for something like that; matter of fact, I'd ruther work, but these here fellers seem to get a pretty big kick out of it, so I'll be durned if I'm gonna go whoopin' around town telling folks it ain't sport. That there word sport is just one mighty big one, and it all depends on how you read it, I guess. I kinda figure that if you enjoy something, it's sport.

Wade M. McCormick.

Collinsville, Ill.

To the Editor:

Maynard has missed the mark completely. Certainly, *killing* is not sport, and no sportsman considers it such. But the experiences in ident to this one unpleasant aspect of the sport hold thrills completely lacking in other sports. Maynard has confused mortal combat with the hunt. He has somehow confused sitting at a hot typewriter, with a hot dog in one hand and a bottle of pop in the other, at a racetrack or football arena, with the simple pleasures of luring a trout to net.

If Maynard's editor caught him trying to write about football or baseball without a rule book in his pocket, he'd be job-hunting. As a practicing sportswriter, he still has some practicing to do . . . in the field and along the stream.

(As the writer of an outdoor newspaper column for fourteen years, I feel entitled to an opinion on the subject.)

Keith C. Schuyler.

Berwick, Pa.

To the Editor:

Hurrah for John Maynard. . . .

W. C. Billingsley.

Little Rock, Ark.

To the Editor:

. . . Maynard weeps about his cat getting a charge of buckshot . . . Does he also complain about the grouse, pheasant and other game that cats kill every year? Sure, I kill such game, too, but I pay for a license. Does Maynard's cat?

Lt. R. H. Hanson.

U. S. Air Force.

To the Editor:

. . . I suppose we'll have to concede that hunting is not a sport in the sense that two men climb into a ring and hammer each other into punch-drunk insensibility.

We can't, of course, compare our little vagaries with that sterling character-builder, pro wrestling, and it certainly lacks the legalized mayhem of pro hockey. . . .

C. A. McLaggan.
San Francisco, Cal.

To the Editor:

. . . My gripe is . . . against the complete lack of knowledge and facts, and the sarcastic approach used in attempting to give one side of a debate. . . .

If *Bluebook* is going to fill its pages with . . . such articles, it soon wil lose its appeal. . . .

Robert R. Leavitt.
Lafayette, Ind.

To the Editor:

A fine story. Well done, John Maynard!

C. Fox.
Nor olk, Va.

Thanks to the above and to the many others who contributed their comments on "Hunting--Sport or Slaughter?"

We hope, however, that our readers will remember that BLUEBOOK *presented* both *sides of the argument, feeling both camps would agree that the other side had its right to an opinion. We regret it if the impression prevailed that we favored one disputant over another.* —ED.

Blood Count

To the Editor:

In "Paternity Rackete s Can Sue You" (November *Bluebook*), the chart showing how a man can prove, by blood tests, that he is not the father of a child was confusing, if not inaccurate.

The following chart, taken from actual tests, tells it better:

Matings	*Children Possible*	*Children Not Possible*
O X O	O	A, B, AB
O X A	O, A	B, AB
O X B	O, B	A, AB
A X A	A, O	B, AB
A X B	O, A, B, AB	None
B X B	B, O	A, AB
O X AB	A, B	O, AB
A X AB	A, B, AB	O
B X AB	A, B, AB	O
AB X AB	A, B, AB	O

Norman Lazarus, MT.
Central Laboratories, Inc.,
Cincinnati, O.

Barnacle Business

To the Editor:

Regarding "Barnacles for Bill" (December *Bluebook*), in my four years in the Navy, I helped sandblast those pesky things off bottoms in a few drydocks. Now I'm sailing the Great Lakes, on fresh water, and our boats are free of barnacles.

Whether true or not, I don't know, but one of the local old-timers, who also has spent time on salt water, says that, if they'd run barnacle-ridden ships into fresh wat , the barnacles al would drop off in a few days. And the fact that our ships here don't have them makes this sound like the solution. What do you think?

Robert E. Williams.
S.S. *Fayette Brown,*
Detroit, Mich.

What we think, Bob, is that it sounds like a smart idea. Only how do we get the Queen Mary *onto Lake Bide-Awhile?* —ED.

Struck Out

To the Editor:

In "Melancholy Moment" (December *Bluebook*), you state that Emil Yde came into the ball game with the bases loaded, didn't pitch a bal , and was charged with the defeat.

How come? The rules of baseball say that the incoming pitcher is not charged with or responsible for any runners already on base.

L. O. Long.
Roanoke, Va.

To the Editor:

In my rule book, Yde couldn't possibly be charged with the loss.

James T. Rattenne.
U. S. Navy.

To the Editor:

As a former sportswriter and baseball scorer, I'd have given the loss to the pitcher responsible for the man on third.

Ralph Griffith.
Knoxville Journal,
Knoxville, Tenn.

To the Editor:

How could the loss be charged to Yde?

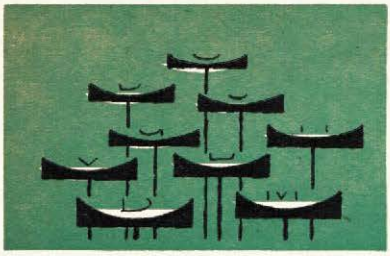
John J. Papsun.
Macon, Ga.

To the Editor:

Yde wuz robbed!

Bil Lange.
Chester, Pa.

The guy who balked here was the assistant editor who bought this gem in the first place; he's been shipped back to the Three-Eye League for further seasoning. —ED.



Thinking Out Loud

One of the difficulties of being an editor—all right, let's be happy this month and say the *only* difficulty—is that you find so few people who are inclined to believe every word you say and print. You get any kind of a crackling good story, and readers—if they believe any of it at all—are inclined to think you probably exaggerated it just a touch to make it sound good to your subscribers.

We got to thinking of this last December when Ike made his quick trip to Korea. Reading about the secrecy with which the trip was surrounded, we began wondering what would be said to a writer who sent us a story that told how the President-elect of the United States "sneaked out the back door of his home before dawn," drove to a lonely street corner where he picked up a sinister, dark-coated figure who turned out to be the Secretary of Defense, and how, some hours later, the party was winging over the Pacific on a mission in the best traditions of the cloak-and-dagger, paper-backed mysteries.

Then, too, suppose we ran a story about an American GI who went abroad and lived secretly for two years, while he underwent a series of operations that changed him from a man to a woman. You think the readers would fall for that one? Hah! The first thing they'd do is complain to the boss because we're running sex in the book again. Then they'd write us a Dear-Sir-You-Cur letter saying, "Listen, fathead, when I wanta read science fiction, I'll buy a science-fiction magazine," etc., etc.

As to what they'd say if we came up with a yarn about a horse who is a private eye (you mean you didn't see *that* one in the papers?) we leave to your imagination.

* * *

All of which is by way of saying that, while we turn down an occasional true story—and good ones, too—because we can't imagine anyone's believing them, we have a couple of yarns in this issue which also are pretty tough to swallow but which nevertheless are solid fact.

One of these eye-poppers is General Victor Gordon's "There *Is* a Shangri-La," which those with keen eyesight will find begins on pages 6-7. Up to now, Shangri-La has come to mean a paradise as fictional as James Hilton described it to be when he created the spot in the first place. Now, though, the General gives the facts on a *real* Shangri-La down in the banana country, a territory rich in gold, as fertile as the Garden of Eden, and as unexploited as the summit of Mt. Everest. It's all there for the taking, *if* you can take it.

* * *

A second piece you might find faintly incredible is Col. Oreste Pinto's "Friend —or Enemy?" which gets under way on pages 42-43. This is an account of the exhaustive efforts the Counter-Intelligence boys put forth in the last war to be certain that every refugee from Hitler who waded ashore in England actually *was* a genuine refugee, and not a Nazi spy using this means to mingle with the Allies. Telling the story of one actual case, Col. Pinto has woven a fascinating tale, and one which—like all really good yarns—leaves the reader at the end still not certain he has the true solution. In short, a story that makes a man think, but doesn't make him work too hard at it.

* * *

Chap named Abe Greenberg, out in San Francisco, saw our item some months ago about a family named Anderson, who live on a lake in British Columbia and who receive an occasional *Bluebook* when it comes in by dog-sled from the trading-post a hundred miles away. So Abe here, what he did was to sit down and write the Andersons, and forward them a batch of reading matter. He has sent us his reply from Mrs. Andy.

"We are old-timers on Lake Babine," the lady says, "having been here longer than any of the other seven white people —a whole year! We are digging in for our second winter in good spirits because we're much better prepared, with a cozier cabin, a barn and a full roothouse.

"Everything comes up by mail once a month, or in our own boat. Gas and food are our biggest expenses; in winter, fresh food is impossible.

"We're building a fishing and hunting resort. Got four cabins up this past summer, and intend to build the lodge next year. We hire the Indians to do the log work, then my husband puts on the finishing touches.

"The trout fishing here is marvelous, and moose, geese, ducks, bears, wolves and coyotes are plentiful. This winter we plan to trap. There are mink, weasel, marten, muskrat, beaver, otter, lynx and squirrel all around us.

"We lived in Victoria before coming here, and many of our friends there were sure we'd quit after the first winter. But, though we may *seem* insane, we love it.

...AND YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT 'EM

"Oh, turn around, for heaven's sake, Dexter! I can't stand that tortured look in your eyes."

"Last winter I did a bit of figure-skating on the lake—until the snow got too deep—and I'm looking forward to more this year. Our biggest thrills so far, however, have been our four fishing parties and two hunting parties, which meant we were 'in business.' And, considering the fact that the first cabin didn't go up until May, when there still was six feet of snow on the ground, we didn't do too badly."

Reading Mrs. Anderson's letter, we go back to our original thoughts in this statement—that the things real people do often are so much more fascinating and unbelievable than those in fiction.

Or does *everybody* hunt mink and go figure-skating on a frozen lake a hundred miles from civilization?

* * *

Which brings to mind a Man-of-Distinction type of gentleman, a big radio and television executive, who recently made a trip to the nation's capital, as the saying goes, and looked around before his return for a suitable gift for his wife back in New York. He eventually found it in the person of an attractive skunk, which a congressman had owned and which had been tamed for household use, including having been deodorized. The executive accepted the animal, and took it with him in a satchel on his flight back to Manhattan aboard a Navy plane on which he'd been tendered a ride. (Incidentally, he chose to remark to the pilot en route that he was willing to bet this was the first skunk ever to ride as a passenger aboard a Navy plane; to which the pilot replied, "Are you *kidding!*")

Anyway, when the exec trotted out the skunk in his Manhattan apartment, his wife threw up her hands, produced a complete set of hysterics, and demanded that the beast be disposed of at once. (Wives are funny sometimes.) The problem was—what do you do with a skunk, by way of disposal of same, in a big city?

The guy finally hit upon the idea of placing an ad in a small neighborhood newspaper: "For adoption, tame skunk. Friendly, clean, wonderful with children." He felt he'd be lucky if he got one reply.

Well, sir, not to prolong things, the man had more than a *hundred* frantic phone calls within two hours after the ad appeared. And for days people called, from places as remote from Times Square as Boston, Baltimore and Scranton—all of them folks panting to own a skunk.

Which, in as roundabout a way as one can imagine, brings us to Lester David's story on pages 84-88 of this issue, "How to Make a Million Dollars." As Les points out, it's ridiculous to say that no one can get rich any more in this world of taxes and high prices. You can get rich very easily—if you supply a product, for example, for which there is a crying need.

The evidence would seem to indicate that people are crying for skunks. You got one for sale?

MAXWELL HAMILTON

What Next!

C'MON A MY HOUSE . . . In Mt. Clemens, Mich., Daniel Chalfont made it easy for police to catch him when he took a $56 check from a mailbox, indorsed it with the payee's name but absent-mindedly wrote his own address.

SAFETY SAFE . . . In Atlanta, safecrackers who broke into one firm put aside their tools, easily clicked out the combination and got $7.24 from the safe, which has the combination written on the outside. "Saves costly repair bills," says the owner.

PROFANE PARROT . . . In the Colombo, Ceylon, zoo, six new cockatoos are being shown to the public, but the seventh is in solitary confinement until it forgets the salty language learned from its previous owner, a sailor.

NO TICKEE, NO NOTHING . . . In San Francisco, when patrolman John H. Monson jumped into his patrol car to chase some traffic violators, he discovered his book of traffic tags, a flashlight and a night stick had been stolen.

A FIN FOR FLIES . . . At a cattle auction in San Antonio, Doris Lott slapped flies and found herself the owner of a calf for $35, the auctioneer having thought each slap was a bid. When he learned Doris didn't want the calf, the auctioneer sold it for $40 and gave her the $5 difference.

STRICTLY FRESH . . . At the tax collector's office in Mobile, Ala., a hen strolled in and laid an egg.

ENTERPRISE . . . In Davenport, Iowa, a couple who bought their 15-year-old son a lead-soldier molding outfit found that he used it to produce counterfeit nickels to feed the juke boxes.

COLLISION . . . In Los Angeles, a motorist who had left his car in his locked garage was doubtful when informed it had been damaged in a collision, learned another car had crashed through the garage wall.

SLIGHT DELAY . . . In Long Beach, Calif., a tombstone, ordered in 1889 by Juan Flores for his wife's grave but never delivered, finally turned up after having spent 62 years standing in corners at several California railway stations.

OUT OF CONTEXT . . . In Korea, two sergeants from the North Korean army described their official assignments as "screening our division for potential deserters."

RUSSIAN-STYLE . . . In Kufstein, Austria, police were startled when called in to stop a fight at a meeting of an association of dove breeders.

SOLOMON . . . In Fort Worth, Texas, after a deaf mute sued for divorce from his deaf wife, complaining that she "fussed, argued and nagged" at him during their eight years of marriage, Judge Jack Langdon dismissed the case, said the couple had not lived in Fort Worth long enough to meet the residence requirements.

EXPRESS . . . In Australia, a champion homing pigeon was discovered to have won races by hitchhiking on an express train.

Illustrated by HOWARD WILLARD

There is a SHANGRI-LA

By General VICTOR GORDON

It is ready and waiting for men to exploit its incredible fertility and make fortunes from its rare wood. But so far those who tried have vanished—evidently forever.

I HAVE SEEN SHANGRI-LA. I am an old man and the years are gone when I felt a need to impress people with wild exploits and tall tales. In my field ("Revolutions Are My Business," by General Victor Gordon, *Bluebook*, September 1952) a man doesn't live long if he indulges in wishful thinking.

Incredible as this story may seem, every word of it is true--on the conservative side, if anything. The country I call Shangri-La lies north of the Peten Plains on the northern border of Guatemala (see map on page 10). It rises abruptly out of the dense and fetid jungle, a land of rolling hills and fantastic climate and beauty. Giant trees of rare mahogany soar to dizzy heights and the ground is covered with a soft luxuriant grass. The soil is unbelievably rich, and in some places, at least, are fabulous deposits of gold. Over it all lies the blanket of a bewildering mystery.

I walked into this area, spent several weeks there, and walked out as empty-handed as I had come. And with good reason. This is country in which no white man had ever set foot, as far as I know, and returned alive. I realize that this is the kind of statement so often abused by writers describing other places. It may not be true even here, but I have searched for years for information on the subject and found none that could be called authentic. During the almost half a century I lived in Central America, I found nobody who had ever been in that unexplored wilderness.

Early in 1928 I was a member of a company formed in Guatemala to establish an airline from Guatemala City to Coban, the large coffee center on the lower Peten Plains. Because of my experience in the jungles, I was designated to find emergency landing-fields along the air route. This was not an easy job for the airline passed over this unexplored and mysterious wilderness.

It got the name, "The Forbidden Land," from

Stephens, the first white man to explore the Mayan ruins. In his book, "Incidents of Travel in Yucatan," published in 1845, he gave it the name which has stuck ever since. In this book he also raised the question whether the Lost City of the Mayans might not be found in that unknown area. This legend has been batted around by writers, archeologists and students ever since—but the city has not been found.

What is in that land that the Mayas do not want known is still a moot question. I may have found a part of the answer but certainly not all of it. Its intriguing mystery has lured white men into its trap of death for over a century. I was in Guatemala City on that morning of October 4, 1921, when John Philips and Fred Conyers, two young geologists working for the Royal Dutch Shell, left Guatemala City to explore that land for oil. They may have arrived there and they may have found oil. Nobody knows, because they have never been seen since.

In April, 1927, about six months prior to my assignment to find landing-fields, the famous French expedition headed by Pierre Latau of the University of Dijon, France, and Dr. André Boisset of Paris, two internationally known archeologists, left Merida to search for this legendary Lost City. The French Government is still making inquiries of the Mexican and Guatemalan Governments for information about this expedition.

Knowing this, I had no desire to rush foolishly into that certain death. There was one man who could give me permission to enter that country, and although my hope of getting this was remote, I journeyed to the little village of Peto, not far from the ruins of the city of Chichen Itzá in Yucatán, to make the attempt. Two Mayans escorted me to a thatched house two miles from the village. Guards were at the door. Inside was a large and plainly furnished room painted a vivid red, the favorite color of the ancient Mayans.

At the end of the room, squatting on a red plush cushion, was an old man, a typical Mayan—dark, short, broadheaded and muscular. This was General Mayo, the absolute ruler of the 300,000 remnants of a once-famous race now scattered over lower Yucatán, Campeche and northern Guatemala. In his hands he held the power of life or death over every person, native or white, in those jungles. I can't say he is exactly a prototype of the Grand Lama, portrayed so vividly by Sam Jaffe in his novel, "Lost Horizons," which gave to the world the mythical city of Shangri-La. Yet in some ways he is just as fantastic a character and just as ageless as the Grand Lama.

His title is hereditary, passing down from father to son. How far back in the history of the ancient Mayans this line goes is something nobody can answer, due to the Spanish who destroyed all records of the Mayans. Some claim this line comes from Ti-Ho, the last *batah* to rule over the city of Itimza, which was destroyed by the Spanish in 1539 to build the modern city of Merida.

The Mexicans gave the title of "General" to these rulers when they had tried to drive the Mayans from Yucatán and met a brilliant resistance from the chief of these people. The Mexicans marched in from the coast a few miles and the Mayans disappeared into the jungles, where they have been ever since, acknowledging allegiance to only one ruler, whoever happens to be General Mayo at the time.

The General Mayo in 1928 and I were not exactly strangers. For a number of years I had been in the chicle business, and whoever deals in that commodity, which is used for chewing-gum, comes in contact with either General Mayo or his men. His hold on the chicle concession in the jungles is a nice source of income. About six years before, I had been instrumental in making a deal for him with the British in Honduras that enabled him to close some loopholes in his control of chicle.

But I had a much better card up my sleeve than that. The airplane had come to the jungle and it posed a serious problem to General Mayo and his people. Flying into the rim of the jungles around the Forbidden Land, where, incidentally, there is not very much chicle, the planes were carrying shipments out and breaking the tight control the Mayans had always had on it.

My proposition to the General was simple. The only way to fight planes is with planes. A good part of my life has been spent running guns and ammunition, and with the advent of the plane in warfare I added that to my category of supplies for revolutions. So I promised to buy him planes and to see that some of his men were trained to operate them if he would grant me the right to establish landing-fields in that forbidden area.

For a long time the old General pondered my proposition, his round, flat face inscrutable.

Then he said in perfect English: "You are an honest man, General Gordon. If you promise me planes, I will have them. You may go into that country and find your landing-fields. But there will be restrictions, many of them. I think you understand."

Fifteen minutes later my deal with General Mayo was completed. I would handle the purchase of four planes for him and see that his men were trained to fly. In return for this he was to supply me with two native guides and I was to be permitted to enter the Forbidden Land to locate possible landing-fields, stake them out, and then he would have the final say if the fields could be used. This last restriction was obvious in its purpose and I had to accept it.

As I left, he said, "One word of caution, General: I hope you do not see too much in that country of my ancestors. If you do, and you talk, I cannot be responsible for your safety."

That warning wasn't necessary. I know something about the powerful underground the Mayans have. There is little that goes on which the General and his men don't know about. If an expedition lands at Merida or Belize to enter the jungle in search of the Lost City, they will be warned before they get to the Forbidden Land. This warning takes the form of the native guides deserting them, leaving only enough supplies for the party to get back to civilization. If the warning is ignored, as in the case of the French expedition, death awaits the party.

Two weeks later, my surveyor Jimmy Fraber and I jumped off at Oxutzcat, the last outpost, and plunged into the jungle, charting a course 90 degrees south and 18 degrees west. General Mayo had supplied us with two native guides and two jungle donkeys, small and tough and stubborn.

The jungles of Yucatán and Campeche, the Mexican state bordering Yucatán, are not like any other jungles in the world. Much of it is marshland, below sea level, and it grows a tall tough swamp grass that is almost impossible to cut. The only trees that rise to any height are the chicle, and practically all of them have scars where the natives have opened up wounds to bleed the sticky substance.

The strangest feature of this jungle is that there is little water. All rivers run underground, some as deep as twenty feet. So your supply of water is always an important item. The only sources are the *chultunes,* small reservoirs for rainwater, carved out of the white limestone a thousand or more years ago by the Mayans, and the *cenotes,* the openings to the underground rivers. When these fail, you have to fall back on *bejuccio,* a reddish liana vine as thick as a man's thigh, covered with black spots and usually found climbing a chicle tree. When you cut it, you get a meager supply of red liquid that serves as water.

The most depressing thing about those jungles is the feeling you have of walking through a vast cemetery haunted by ghosts thousands of years old. Every day you see some evidence of the great Mayan civilization—the jungle-covered mounds you know are small temples, and idols that stare out at you with gruesome faces.

You get to thinking about the mystery of the Mayans and, being in the jungle where once their cities stood, the strange enigma strikes you harder than in a classroom. You realize that once these jungles were fertile fields of corn and maize and vegetables, raised by farmers to feed the teeming populations of the great cities where culture and intellectual development had reached a great height.

Then suddenly this civilization disappeared from the earth, as if by magic, leaving the cities with their beautiful architecture and the fertile fields to be swallowed up by the hungry jungle. There are many explanations for this phenomenon, but all are in the realm of speculation and nobody knows for certain what happened. I never gave much credence to the theory that the Spaniards wiped out the race. Cortez and his conquerors were few in number and, while they did capture Chichen Itzá and a few coastal cities, they never got far into the jungles where the great mass of the Mayans lived.

The natives tell you that a great tidal wave swept across the land, taking the population away with it, except for those who lived on high ground where the wave didn't reach. This means the land I have called Shangri-La, and it could have much to do with the reasons for its being forbidden territory. These modern Mayans have another story, which also has come down through the centuries. They say that many thousands of years ago there was a land to the east, beyond the waters, where there were cities as great as theirs. A storm came and lasted many days, and when it had passed the great land had sunk into the sea. Since nobody has ever been able to locate the Lost Atlantis, this story should give you a chance to enjoy a wild flight into fantasy.

As for the tidal wave, it could have happened—if you want to stretch credulity. Nobody has ever been able to explain the mysterious underground rivers of these jungles. Then there are the great caves found everywhere. These, too, were carved out of the limestone by water. Small knoll-like hills rise out of the jungles, some as high as forty or eighty feet. On these you often find a mark about thirty feet up caused by erosion. I have seen the same thing on Pacific islands where a tidal wave had passed.

So you can take this story about the tidal wave or you can leave it. I can only add that I have always found, in all parts of the world, a certain basic truth to native legends that have been handed down from father to son over the centuries.

We made rapid progress through the jungles. The two native guides seemed to know the land like a book —where the secret paths were through the swamp grass and the trails that let us skirt the dense jungle growth. Despite the lack of large animals, and the eerie silence of the jungle, there is plenty of excitement in it. On our third night out, Jimmy and I got our first taste of it.

We were awakened by the wild screeching of one of the donkeys. We leaped out of our *hamacas* and ran out of our tent. There was a full moon and we saw the two guides near the donkey which was lying on the ground, kicking feebly. One of the guides was holding a large ugly creature with pointed wings. The face of this creature was a ghastly thing to see, like that of some terrifying ogre.

It was a *tzolz-kik*, the giant blood-sucking bat vampire. If anybody ever tries to tell you there isn't such a thing as a blood-sucking vampire, tell him to go down to the Mayan jungles and he will learn differently. This vampire bat is the great scourge of every native village. It never attacks a human or wild animal; its prey are the cattle, the pigs, and sometimes the dogs of the villages. So great is the danger to livestock that natives have a specially built house to keep their pigs and cattle safe from this blood-loving creature. Its strike is usually fatal to a domestic animal. The long teeth pierce the jugular vein, and while the vampire bat can't absorb all the blood in a pig or a donkey, the wound is still open after the vampire has had its fill and the animal quickly bleeds to death. This had happened to our donkey, which had given its last feeble kick and was dead.

The greatest terror to me in those jungles is the *tamogiff*, the yellow-jawed snake whose bite is almost instant death. It is so small that you have trouble seeing it. At night you sleep in a *hamaca*, a combination bed and hammock that keeps you off the ground and safe from this yellow-jawed death.

When we left camp that morning we had only one donkey left, but about noon I looked back and there were two. This gave Jimmy and me our first inkling of the complete coverage General Mayo and his men have in that jungle. We had passed no villages and now were far out of the area where you find them, but in some mysterious manner a new donkey had been supplied our guides to take the place of the animal that had died.

On the fifth day we had a flurry of excitement. Two Indians appeared out of the thick undergrowth. They were carrying long-bladed machete knives, and each had an old-fashioned Craig rifle under his arm. I reached for my revolver. My first impression was that we had run into a band of *subveldos*, the gangsters of the jungle who prey on chicle-hunters and white men. But our two guides yelled at them, and it was apparent that they were friends and had been expected.

It soon developed that they were to be our new guides. Our previous ones disappeared without a word and without taking any supplies. Where they went or how they hoped to get back to civilization without food was just another one of those mysteries about General Mayo and his men.

We continued our rapid pace through the jungle. As the days passed, I began to notice certain things about the path we were following. The ground was packed hard under our feet; little vegetation grew on it, and I realized we were following a trail many years old. Not once did we detour from our original bearings of 90 degrees south, 18 degrees west.

Four days later we had another change of guides, and from then on this happened at each four-day interval. I didn't know the purpose and didn't bother to ask about it. General Mayo was running this show and he usually ran things his own way.

On the twenty-first day we walked out of the jungle and into the open, and in the distance loomed the outlines of the Forbidden Land. I had seen it from the air, a strange wilderness of mystery I never expected to see any closer. But standing there—gazing at the skyline of the giant mahogany trees, knowing that within a few hours I would be inside this land from which white men never returned—I experienced a real thrill. That, for me, after my years as a soldier of fortune, was really something. Yet as I stood there I never dreamed that I was to find a real modern-day Shangri-La.

My delightful reverie was broken abruptly when I saw we were surrounded by a dozen or more Indians who had come out of nowhere. Their leader was an old man who gave every indication that he could move swiftly with all the agility of youth. The other Indians didn't look any different from those I knew so well in the jungles. They were short, heavy-set, with unusually broad shoulders—a trait of all Mayans—and with typical round, flat faces. They wore home-spun trousers and shirts that were little different from the usual run of Indian clothes.

Only one of the twelve had an old-fashioned Craig rifle, the type discarded in the Spanish-American War. All had *hul-che* spears, which you still see in the jungles. This spear provides an interesting sidelight on the Mayans. The ancient Mayans used it almost exclusively, and because it is the same type found among the Eskimos, students of the Mayans contend this is definite evidence the race originally came from Asia, crossed the Bering Straits, and stopped in Alaska, where they picked up this spear.

The leader didn't carry a spear like the others. His weapon was a club-like cane that he handled with considerable dexterity.

I spoke in Spanish. "We are here on the orders of General Mayo."

"Ah, señor,"—the old man spoke perfect Spanish—"the white man is here on the orders of General Mayo. But there are two white men."

My attempt to explain that Jimmy was my surveyor failed to impress the leader.

He repeated, "There was to be one white man, and now there are two."

I KNEW it was futile to argue with him. He was waving the clublike cane and talking to the Indians. So I suggested, "Suppose you contact General Mayo."

When I said that I reconciled myself to a wait of several weeks, for General Mayo was back in the village of Peto, almost three hundred miles from where we stood. The idea calmed the old man down.

He said, "You will remain here as our prisoner until General Mayo gives us orders."

Camp was made and it wasn't long until there were at least forty Indians standing around Jimmy and me. They wore the same clothes as the others, and all had the *hul-che* spear. A few had the old Craig rifles. Darkness fell and Jimmy and I were around the campfire, conscious of the scores of eyes peering suspiciously at us from the darkness. I knew our position wasn't a happy one. If there was any mix-up in the signals from General Mayo, these Indians would quickly take things into their own hands.

The next day the feeling around the camp seemed to get more tense. I didn't see the leader, but Indians were forming a circle to prevent us from escaping. At noon two of them marched up to our tent with bowls filled with a combination of vegetables and meat, a common dish among the Indians in Yucatán and Guatemala. With these were several pieces of *bulina*, a bean bread to be found anywhere in Central America.

We were hungry and ate the vegetables and meat with relish and munched the bean bread. Then two other Indians brought us a large earthen jar, filled with *penola*, a whisky made out of burnt corn and which has the kick of two mules. Jimmy and I, not wanting to stage a drunk at that period, drank sparingly.

Two mornings later, just before daybreak, we were awakened by shouting outside the tent. When we ran out we saw the old leader with Indians crowding excitedly around him. On first glance it had all the earmarks of a predawn execution. Then the old man walked toward us, bowed, and said, "The General says it is well for the two white men to go into our country. But you know his terms and must abide by them."

My brain was trying to do some fast figuring. Only seventy-two hours had passed and yet the Indians had contacted General Mayo three hundred miles away and received an answer! Frankly, I don't know the answer to that riddle. It seems physically impossible for them to have done that unless the General has an amazing series of jungle signals.

I have always held one theory about these jungles, but I must qualify it by saying it is purely my own idea. Those underground rivers flow in all directions, honeycombing the jungle like subways in a city. I know very little about them, for a white man would never venture below-ground; yet the speed the Indians travel indicates some rapid-transit system, and I have always believed the underground rivers were used with the Indians in skiffs that could go up-current with almost the same ease as downstream.

Yet even this would hardly explain their speed in contacting General Mayo. I have a feeling that a combination of underground rivers and signals was used. However, as I say, this is only my theory and certainly not a statement of fact.

With the orders of General Mayo received, most of the Indians disappeared, and when we started for the promised land we had only the elderly leader and five Indians as an escort. We hadn't gone far when we got our first look in two weeks at large animals. Deer peered at us from behind trees, and herds of wild boar grunted and scampered away in the brush. A beautifully-feathered *ocellate*, the wild turkey, rose from the ground with a whirring of wings.

The trees became larger and the dense jungle underbrush gave way to wide-open spaces under the trees, covered with a green and soft grass. Then we were in the mythical land, walking up a hill. On top we stopped, and Jimmy and I breathed deeply of the fresh and exhilarating air. As I looked around I was certain I was in some fairyland taken from a child's book.

I thought I knew every flower in Central America, but I was gazing at hundreds I had never seen before. Wild orchids climbed gayly on the trunks of the magnificent trees, adding their beauty to the scene.

We walked about five miles through this fairyland and came to a stone building that looked as if it might be a Mayan temple. We were taken inside. There was nothing there to indicate a temple of worship. A stone table sat at one end, and three Mayans

were around it. They seemed a little taller than our guards and they wore better clothes.

The old man with the cane motioned for us to go to the table. On it was spread a map with Mayan markings. One of the three men, the leader, said in Spanish, "Here are your instructions. You can go to the northern end of this area and look for an airfield. You can do the same on the south. But you will not be allowed to go into the interior. We will not bother you unless you disobey that order."

THAT was all. The men folded up the map and filed out of the building. Jimmy and I stood around, wondering what we were supposed to do next. The old man with the cane followed the three others out, and Jimmy and I were alone.

"I guess they meant what they said," I told Jimmy. "We're on our own and we better get started."

We went out to where we had left our donkeys and supplies. About a mile from the building we made camp. Jimmy got his maps out and did some figuring. He announced we were about seven miles into the Forbidden Land, and judging from the instructions we received, we had to set a course 60 degrees north and 40 degrees west. Then Jimmy took his rifle and started out for game. A few minutes later he killed a deer. This was the first fresh meat we had had

since starting our journey, and we gorged ourselves on it.

The next morning, after a night of refreshing sleep in the new air, we started out. The sun was shining, giving forth a pleasant warmth, and as we walked through the open spaces under the trees, I wondered what a Californian would have to say about this perfect climate. As far as we knew, we were alone. Walking over the green grass, and having no underbrush to impede our progress, we covered a lot of ground that day.

It was late on the afternoon of the sixth day that we came on the first of the mysterious trails that cover that country. They all lead into the interior at a degree that makes them look like the spokes of a great wheel. This first one naturally interested us. Jimmy started down it. He didn't get very far. Two Mayans stepped out from behind trees and Jimmy beat a hasty retreat.

"I think," was his terse comment, "that maybe we aren't alone."

We saw no other Mayans for the next five days. We passed more of these trails leading to the interior, but we didn't stop to investigate. It was apparent we were getting to the northern tip of that country. The trees were just as tall and the grass just as luxuriant, but the streams we passed, with their crystal-clear water, were becoming more shallow, showing we were coming to the headwaters.

Night was falling on the fifth day, and we decided to camp near one of the clear streams. We never got our tent off the mule. About half a dozen Mayans came running toward us, motioning and yelling for us to move on. We didn't stop to argue, but after we had made camp several miles from the stream, I got an overpowering desire to investigate it. In the back of my head was the theory that I might find there an answer to the mystery that has puzzled every trader of Yucatán, Campeche and Guatemala for years.

So when dawn broke the next morning, Jimmy and I were on our bellies crawling toward that stream. I was under no illusion about this being a crazy and foolhardy thing to do. It had been obvious that the Mayans didn't want us near those waters, but I was banking on an old and well-known superstition among the Indians of Central America about the dawn. This is one time of day they didn't like to be out in the open.

When we got to the creek, I rose up slightly—to learn quickly that that superstition didn't apply in this land. Two Mayan guards were pacing up and down on the bank across from us. I went back on my belly with a thump, waited five or ten minutes, then risked another look. The guards were gone. It was a dangerous chance, but I took it: If we were discovered, we probably would end up as had the other white men who had ventured into this mysterious and forbidden land.

Jimmy was at my side as I crawled, and we got to the edge with the rocks hiding us pretty well from view. We stared in the water and our eyes popped. There lying at the bottom of the creek, as visible as if they were in the palms of your hands, were gold nuggets, large and small, embedded among the rocks. And almost within an arm's reach were sandbars. It would be erroneous to say they were pure gold, but from experience I can say that they would have assayed a high grade of gold dust. I should know, because for years I bought this same dust from Mayan Indians. Every trader in the jungles has done the same thing, and what always mystified everybody was the source of this gold. There is none in the jungle areas, but Mayan Indians sell it to anybody able to buy.

Jimmy and I didn't loiter there and we didn't reach for any of the gold sand. We got back to our camp, hoping we hadn't been seen. We waited for some time, expecting the Mayans to close in on us, but nothing happened. These gold nuggets and the gold sand fitted into an even greater mystery, one connected with the ancient Mayans. Gold was their favorite metal and most of their idols had been made out of it, yet as I said before, no gold has ever been found in the jungles where their cities and fields were located.

UNDOUBTEDLY Jimmy and I had found the secret gold of the ancient Mayans, and this discovery explained one of the reasons why General Mayo never permitted any white men in this area. Also it was apparent that all the Mayans were not as honest as General Mayo wanted. The gold we traders bought had undoubtedly been smuggled out of this country.

A week later Jimmy and I located a clearing for our landing-field. It was a natural location, with a clearance for any plane coming in for a landing. I had been careful to pick a site far from any stream, knowing General Mayo would taboo one near the gold.

We had finished staking out the field and getting our bearings for its exact location, when the old man with the cane came out of the forest, followed by ten Indians.

He marched solemnly up to us, bowed, and said: "Señor, you have finished one half of your work. General Mayo will pass on this location. You are now to go south for your second location. Then you will leave our country."

I bowed in return and made some gracious answer. The old man and his Indians disappeared. Jimmy and I started to retrace our steps to get to the southern tip of the country. On our return trip we received evidence of the high fertility of that soil. Indians appeared, carrying baskets of vegetables, the largest I had ever seen. The beans were incredible, and the squash looked like huge pumpkins. These vegetables were welcomed, because we were getting low on rice, one of the foods eaten on a trip through the jungles.

The temptation to follow one of those trails that led to the interior was great, but I didn't fall for it. I was there to establish landing-fields, and going to the end of one of those trails, to the center of a great wheel, was a far more difficult thing than crawling to the bank of a creek and peering into the water.

What mystery lies at the end of these trails? Frankly, I don't know any more than I have told you in this story. I have my own theories, just as you probably have yours by now. Is there a Lost City of the Mayans? Again I can only say I don't know. One fact is indisputable: Some strange mystery is in that vast and unknown interior. Some day somebody may penetrate to the center of this great wheel and learn the answer.

After three weeks' traveling, Jimmy and I found the site for our second landing-field. Again the old man with the cane appeared. This time he and his Indians escorted us to the jungle.

As we left that enchanted land and walked into the fetid and heavy air of the jungle, I took one final look at the Shangri-La I had found and had to leave so abruptly.

The aftermath of that adventure saw Jimmy, my surveyor, killed in a plane crash near Merida one month after we had returned, leaving me as the only person knowing that secret. Why have I never told it before? The answer should be obvious. For years I dreamed of returning to that Shangri-La, but that dream was never realized. Now I am old and such an adventure is impossible.

The landing-fields we established were never used. Like so many of the business deals in Central America, this one blew up because of internal politics. I did carry out my agreement with General Mayo and bought him four planes. He made the payment in gold, the same type Jimmy and I saw in the bottom of that mountain stream.

Today great airliners fly over my Shangri-La, but none of the passengers dream of the beauties and the fascination of the country far below them.

But Shangri-La is there. I know because I saw it. •

Illustrated by BOB MAGNUSEN

ESCAPE

Manuel had no choice. If he reported Carnahan to the police his own past would be revealed. Yet shielding the man meant the end of his life with Rosita.

By PHILIP KETCHUM

MANUEL BROUGHT THE CAR back to Latham's garage after a brief road test. He turned off the motor, climbed out and said to the man who was waiting, "There you are, Mr. Quandt. We've got all the bugs out of her this time."

"I doubt it," said Mr. Quandt sourly. He got into the car, started the motor, and listened critically to it.

Bill Latham came up and leaned against the car door. "Sounds sweet, doesn't it?" he said after a moment. "And it'll go on sounding sweet. There's no better mechanic around here than Manuel."

Mr. Quandt still looked unconvinced. "I'll try it out," he said finally; he put the car in gear and drove off.

Latham stared after him, scowling. "Some men," he declared, "can never be satisfied. If Ed Quandt can't hear something wrong with that motor, he'll *imagine* he hears something. He'll be back in a day or so, Manuel. Want to bet on it?"

"Not me, Bill," said Manuel, grinning. "When I bet with you, I lose."

It was after five o'clock. Manuel's work-day was over, so he went to the back of the garage, scrubbed his face, hands and arms, climbed out of his jumper, and pulled on a pair of levis and an old Army shirt. He was slender, not very tall, and had just turned 24. He had shining dark hair and dark eyes, and a skin almost chocolate in color. He usually stood very straight, a habit which came from four years spent in the Army. And he owed other things to his Army service. It was in the Army that he had received his training as a mechanic. It was in the Army that he had met Sam Latham, who had talked him into coming to Estero Bay and had persuaded the elder Latham to give him a job. And here at Estero Bay, he had met Rosita.

MANUEL ran a comb through his hair, then headed for the door. He waved a farewell to Bill Latham, then angled across the street and cut through a vacant lot toward the Strand, which fronted on the bay and the ocean. It was a little out of his way to go home along the Strand and he was always in a hurry to get home, but he never missed going home this way. The six-block walk along the ocean front to Custer Street, where he turned off, was something to look forward to. The sight of the waves breaking against the jetty and the white foam they threw up, the sharp, cool smell of the ocean air, and the deep blue color of the restless water touched some responsive chord in his body. Manuel had three loves: First, of course, came Rosita; second, his job; and third, the ocean.

"But sometimes, Manuel," Rosita had complained just the other day, "I think the ocean comes first."

Manuel stopped when he came to Custer Street. He looked back toward the harbor where there were several fishing boats tied up, and quite a number of smaller craft. One of these, with an outboard motor, belonged jointly to Manuel and to Sam Latham. On weekends they fished --sometimes, when the sea was not too rough, as far as ten miles out. Rosita often went along and sometimes Sam would bring a girl. Sam wasn't married yet. And often in the early morning, or in the evening, they would cruise out beyond the breakwater after halibut or cod. They might try it tonight, Manuel decided. It looked as if it would be a clear evening. He turned and hurried up Custer Street.

The house Manuel and Rosita had found, when they had been married last Christmas, was three blocks from the ocean. It was a small four-room frame house set on a wide lot, with garden space at the side and behind it. On quiet nights—and most nights in Estero Bay were quiet—they could hear the distant pounding of the surf after they had gone to bed. It was a sound like the whistling of the wind in a storm, but still a comforting sound to those who understood it.

Almost running now, to make up for the time he had lost, Manuel turned in through the gate and up to the door. He pulled it open and called, "Rosita! Rosita, it's me! I—"

He had time to say no more. Rosita was there, waiting just inside the door, and his arms went around her in a bearlike hug which lifted her from her feet. She was a little thing, this girl he had married, but there was a surprising and wiry strength in her body, and a depth of passion to match his own. She could melt against him as though she belonged there, her muscles seeming to move in unison with his. But tonight, after that first tight clutch, she seemed to strain away, and when she whispered his name there was a note in her voice he had never heard before—a frightened note. And what she said was startling: "Manuel! Manuel! Tell him to go."

Manuel stiffened. Over Rosita's shoulder he saw a movement in the corner of the room, saw a man standing there, a tall, wide-shouldered man. A man who was grinning at him, but whose grin was ugly, and could never be anything else. An icy shiver raced up and down Manuel's back. He knew the man, recognized him instantly, but couldn't believe the evidence of his own mind. This was Estero Bay, not Philadelphia. This man didn't belong here, couldn't have found him here! No one in Philadelphia knew where he had gone.

But the man in the corner of the room was very real. He was no shadow, no ghost. His lips moved and his rasping voice filled the silence.

"Hello, Manny. Surprised to see me?"

Manuel pushed Rosita aside, but still held her hand—held it tightly. Fear made him shaky. Here, suddenly, and with no warning at all, he was confronted by something he thought he had escaped forever. He hadn't anticipated anything like this. He had nothing to lean on, nothing to cling to but Rosita's hand.

"What do you want, Carnahan?" he heard himself asking. "Why have you come here?"

"I thought you'd at least be glad to see an old friend," said Carnahan.

"Tell him to go," said Rosita sharply, and speaking in Spanish. "He is a pig. I will not have him here."

"What has he done?" asked Manuel, also in Spanish.

"To me?" said Rosita. "Nothing—or I would have cut his throat! But all the time he looks at me with those pig eyes and I will not have it. Tell him to go, Manuel."

CARNAHAN stepped forward. One of his hands was buried deep in his coat pocket. It held a gun, Manuel knew. Carnahan had always carried a gun.

"Cut out that spig talk," he said sharply. "Say what you've got to say so I can understand it."

"Spanish is a beautiful tongue, Carnahan," said Manuel. "Rosita and I do not want to forget it. You have not told me why you came here."

"But I can tell you something else," said Carnahan. "The police in Philadelphia are still looking for the man who drove the getaway car the night a certain liquor store was held up a year ago. The police have a long memory, Manuel."

"I didn't know it was a getaway car," said Manuel quickly.

"But would the police believe you?"

They wouldn't. Manuel had grown up in Philadelphia. Before he was 16 he had been running with a juvenile gang and had started building the record the police would still have on file. It was a record of petty offenses. There was nothing really serious in it, but the mere fact of the record would serve to damn him in the eyes of the police. His word that he hadn't known he was driving a getaway car on the night of the holdup wouldn't sound like the truth. And Carnahan could tie him in with the job—could, and would, if there was any reason to.

"The police would like to know where you are," said Carnahan. "Shall I tell them?"

Manuel was still holding Rosita's hand. "This is one of the men I told you about," he said in Spanish. "He is evil. He can cause us trouble."

Carnahan jerked his gun from his pocket. "Cut out that foreign lingo," he grated. "Let's have it in English."

Manuel looked at the gun. He knew Carnahan might use it, but he didn't think he would use it right away. He didn't think the man had come here to kill him. There was no reason he should have, and Carnahan didn't do things without reason. He was a cold-blooded, calculating animal, dangerous but not foolishly reckless. There was a plan behind every-

thing he did, usually a carefully-thought-out plan.

"Rosita and I speak Spanish when we talk to each other," said Manuel. "When we speak to you, we will speak in English."

The ugly look on Carnahan's face stayed there. His eyes, hard and black, were fixed on Manuel. But after a moment there was a wavering in them, a giving-way, as though Carnahan didn't want to force an issue, right now. And sensing that, Manuel felt steadier. His breathing grew more even. The rapid beating of his heart slowed down. He glanced at Rosita. Her body was still rigid, but the blazing anger which had been in her face a moment before was gone.

The ugly look on Carnahan's face stayed there. Manuel knew he might use the gun, but he sensed a wavering in the man, as if he didn't want to force the issue. Manuel glanced at Rosita.

She was 21—a college girl. When Manuel met her, he had been afraid of her superior knowledge and of what he had been told about her aristocratic background. But he had learned things about Rosita. She could fit into a crowd of illiterate Mexican fishermen at the bay as neatly as she filled her position of secretary to Mr. Fuller, at the bank. She had definite political and social opinions, but you would never guess it to see her at the beach in a swim suit. It was a mistake for anyone to think he could get the best of Rosita in an argument, or beat her in a race across the bay. In water, she was like a fish, as quick and as graceful. A short and slender girl with deep brown eyes, and hair like the midnight sky, she usually had a flashing smile.

But not right now. Right now, her lips were tight and she was watching Carnahan closely, and frowning. Remembering, probably, what Manuel had told her about his boyhood in Philadelphia, and the months he had spent there after his discharge from the Army, and about the trouble he had had—trouble that he had never thought would follow him to Estero Bay.

"You still haven't told me what you want," said Manuel, turning toward Carnahan.

Carnahan glanced at his gun. He looked up. He said, "Manny, I'm going to stay here two or three days. Maybe longer. You're to tell no one I'm here, for if the police find out about me, they'll find out about you, too. Understand? It's as simple as that."

As simple as that. Manuel bit his lips. He didn't trust himself to look at Rosita. He couldn't ask her to put up with Carnahan, but if he didn't, his life here was over and Rosita would be lost to him forever. He couldn't expect to hold her after a term in jail, and that's what it would mean if Carnahan talked.

"Manuel," Rosita was saying now. "Manuel!"

He nodded, but still couldn't look at her.

"Manuel, we will do as he says."

They had dinner in the kitchen, Carnahan sitting across from them and gorging himself, though neither Manuel or Rosita could eat very much. It was Carnahan who did most of the talking, telling how a friend of his had driven through Estero Bay, had seen and recognized Manuel at the garage, and had asked questions about him in town.

"And it all fit in," said Carnahan, grinning, and glancing at his suitcase which he had brought from the front room to the kitchen. "It fit in perfectly, you being here and having a home and a new wife, and Estero Bay being quite close to Hamilton City."

Manuel scowled at the suitcase. Carnahan hadn't said what was in it, but it was significant that he wasn't letting it out of his sight. . . .

It was evening, and then morning, and at 7:30, Manuel and Rosita left the house together. As they closed the door, Carnahan's words followed them. "You've got a nice thing here, kids, a nice thing. Don't mess it up; don't spoil it."

Manuel made no answer and neither did Rosita. They turned toward the Strand, both silent. They had talked with each other last night after going to bed, and again this morning, but the things they had said had been inconclusive. They had found no easy way out. Nor would they find one; Manuel was certain of that.

"He's so sure of us," he muttered. "So sure of what we'll do."

Rosita reached for his hand and squeezed it. "We will do what we have to do," she answered. . . .

Manuel and Rosita followed the course of the Strand to a point beyond the pier and the harbor, and there, at a high lookout, found seats on an old stone wall. This was a favorite place of theirs, a place where they came often.

"It would be nice to be out fishing," said Manuel.

"And to go swimming this afternoon," Rosita nodded.

"Then tonight to have a beach fire and a picnic lunch, wienies and beer."

"And Sam there with his latest girl and his guitar."

Manuel shook his head. This wasn't the way to talk. A problem faced

them, a real problem. He took a quick, sideward glance at Rosita. A tear had squeezed from her blinking eyes and had started rolling down her cheek. She brushed it away. She was staring out at the ocean and she was probably thinking just as he, that they were talking of the wrong things. He took a deep breath.

"Rosita, should I see Art Hudson?"

"No!"

The girl's answer was instant, and sharp, and she jerked around to face him, her body rigid.

"I know Art pretty well," said Manuel. "I could explain things to him. He's not only the marshal—he's been a friend."

But Rosita shook her head. "They would send you back to Philadelphia."

"It might not be for long."

"I couldn't stand even a day of it."

MANUEL stared out to the ocean. The small boat he had seen when they had first reached the Strand looked bigger now. It was coming in.

"It's wrong, I know, to hide a man like Carnahan," Rosita was saying. "It's not the brave or noble thing to do. But I don't *feel* like being brave or noble. I want to be cowardly, Manuel. We can take it, for a few days. We can put up with anything."

She had reached for his hand. Her grip was like steel, gripping his fingers so that he almost winced. He made no answer, but he was thinking: "I got Rosita into this. And I've got to get her out. The only question to determine is *how*? What is the best way? What would be gained if I went to the marshal?"

"It'll only be for a day or so," said Rosita. "Maybe Carnahan will leave tomorrow. Maybe he'll be gone when we get home from work."

Manuel was still staring out at the ocean. "It's Emilio," he said after a moment. "Emilio Santos."

"Where?" asked Rosita.

"Out there, coming in in his boat. He goes out each night about 9 and sets his line on the four-mile bank, marking it with floats. At dawn he goes back and pulls it in. Sometimes he makes a pretty good haul."

"But about Art Hudson? You won't do anything today, Manuel? If we're making a mistake, it's my fault."

"The fault was mine," said Manuel. "It was made long ago."

"But you won't see Art?"

It was easy to shake his head—too easy. But what should he have done? Manuel didn't know. He moved closer to Rosita and slipped his arm around her waist, and then with her head on his shoulder he watched Emilio's boat riding the swells in toward the bay. . . .

Shortly after Manuel got to the garage, he found the answer as to what was in Carnahan's suitcase. The day before, according to Bill Latham, the Hamilton City Bank had been held up by an unidentified man who had escaped with close to $50,000, most of it in small bills. A guard, whom he had shot as he fled, had died instantly. A State-wide and nation-wide search had been instituted for the hold-up man, but he seemed to have dropped from sight. The police had a good description of him. The description fitted Carnahan.

But to Manuel, the description wasn't necessary. Carnahan had mentioned Hamilton City, and how convenient it was to Estero Bay. Carnahan was admittedly hiding from the police. And he kept always a careful watch on the suitcase he had brought with him.

Manuel was busy the rest of the morning, but his mind wasn't on what he was doing. Here, in a way, was a repeat performance of what had happened in Philadelphia. The hold-up of the bank wouldn't have been successful, Carnahan might not have escaped, if he hadn't had a quick place to hide. And he, Manuel, was providing that place. This made him a definite accomplice in what Carnahan had done. It made Rosita an accomplice, too; it dragged her in. And he couldn't take that—he couldn't!

At 11:30, taking an early lunch hour, Manuel headed up Main Street in the direction of Pfeiffer's Malt Shop. But he didn't stop there as he usually did, to have lunch with Rosita. Instead, he continued on to the marshal's office in the middle of the next block. But Art Hudson wasn't in, the door was locked, and on it a note directed that messages be left at the adjoining hardware store. This was a fairly routine practice for Hudson. Estero Bay was a small place. It didn't require much in the way of police work. What was required Art handled alone, and when he had to leave his office there was no one else to keep it open.

Frank Sanderson, who ran the hardware store, didn't know exactly where Art had gone or when he would get back. "I think he's off on some chase in connection with the bank hold-up in Hamilton City, yesterday," he suggested. "What's on your mind, Manuel? Did someone get away with your favorite wrench?"

"I just wanted to see him," said Manuel slowly. "If he comes back will you tell him that?"

"You bet I will," said Sanderson. "I'll shoot him right over to the garage."

But the afternoon passed and Art Hudson didn't show up. After work, Manuel stopped at the marshal's office again. It was still locked. The same note was on the door. Manuel checked again with Sanderson, who was just locking up.

"Yep, he was here in the middle of the afternoon," said Sanderson. "I told him you wanted to see him, but he was with some of the highway patrol boys, and was busy. He said he'd see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, then," said Manuel. He was frowning—but it would have to be that way. If he telephoned the police, now, they would close in on Carnahan tonight; and if he knew Carnahan, there would be shooting, and Rosita might be hurt. If he and Rosita failed to go home, Carnahan might leave before the police could get here. The best course open to him now was to wait another day, and let the police take Carnahan when no one else was in the house.

Rosita was waiting for him on the Strand where they had agreed to meet. There was a direct and accusing look in her eyes.

"I know where you went this noon," she said bluntly. "I saw you pass the bank."

"But Art Hudson wasn't in. He's going to see me tomorrow."

"He's been working with the State Police. Manuel, will you really have to see him tomorrow?"

"I'll have to," said Manuel. "Carnahan killed a man. If we protect him, help him to escape, we are as guilty as he is."

"And if he tells what he knows about you—"

"Then he'll tell, Rosita."

THERE were sudden tears in the girl's eyes. She turned to face the ocean; she was rigid, her hands clenched at her sides. The strong afternoon wind lifted her hair from her shoulders. Manuel stepped up behind her and put his arms around her. What difference did it make if anyone was looking?

"We've nothing else to do, Rosita," he whispered. "Can't you see it? We're not like Carnahan."

"*You're* not," said the girl. "And I thought I was the strong one!"

"And you are. Manuel Guiterrez, himself, would never have the courage to go to Art Hudson. But Manuel, the husband of Rosita, could do nothing else."

The girl leaned back against him, her hair blowing across his face. The waves beyond the jetty were white-capped and rough. The fishing fleet had returned to the harbor. There were no boats in sight on the open sea. But after dark and after the wind had calmed, a few men like Emilio Santos would put out to set their lines.

"We'd better be getting home," said Manuel. "If we're too late, Carnahan won't like it."

But Rosita shook her head; for an instant she showed a flash of spirit. "Who cares what Carnahan likes?"

Manuel chuckled. The tension he had been feeling all day was suddenly gone.

It was a scowling and suspicious Carnahan who greeted them when they got home. "Where you been the last hour?" he growled. "You said you got off work at five."

"We took a walk by the bay," said Manuel. "We often do."

"Maybe you had some things to talk over, huh? Me, for instance?"

Manuel shrugged his shoulders. The air in the room was stale with the smell of smoke. The ashtrays were filled with cigarette butts. Last night's paper was scattered on the floor. Rosita opened a window, then started straightening up the room, and as she worked Carnahan followed her with his eyes—pig eyes, hungry eyes. . . . Manuel's hands clenched tightly at his sides. He breathed easier when Rosita turned toward the kitchen.

"I suppose you heard all about me today, huh?" said Carnahan, and in his voice was a note of triumph, a gloating over what he had done.

"I heard of the robbery of the bank," said Manuel, aware of a lifting anger. "I heard of the guard who was killed."

"The fool went for his gun."

"Wasn't that his job?"

Carnahan's laugh was ugly. He drew his gun and leveled it at Manuel. "All right. Tell me this. What would you have done?"

Manuel stood rigid, regretting too late that he had needled this man. He should have played it safe, kept his mouth shut. He heard the kitchen door open, heard Rosita come in, heard the gasp as she caught her breath.

Carnahan looked that way. "Come here, Rosy," he half shouted. "I should have kept you home today."

His face was flushed, now. Temper was riding him. He had been cooped up alone all day with an exploding ego. He needed another taste of the power he had found in his gun.

"Come here, Rosy," he cried again. "Come in a hurry—or I'll let Manny have it."

There was an instant of silence, and then Rosita's answer, high, strained, unsure: "No, Mr. Carnahan. You will not shoot my husband. You want to get away with your suitcase of money."

She had said the right thing. Carnahan glanced at his suitcase, then looked at her, and after a moment nodded his head, the tension going out of his body.

"So we put it off," he said slowly. "How soon will it be dark?"

"By eight o'clock."

WORDLY WISE

TO PETER OUT

VIGOROUS American speech expresses the failure of a movement or a supply of resources by saying it *peters out.* There have been a few attempts to explain the odd saying by tracing it to a man named Peter who failed in an important undertaking. Actually, the phrase developed as a result of circumstances that stretched across at least six centuries.

Naturalists of medieval Spain were intrigued to find a district in which many stones were covered with a white crust. It had a salty taste, and no known uses. So it came to be called *sal petre* (salt of stone) and this term was Anglicized to "saltpetre."

Roger Bacon experimented with the queer stuff in the 13th Century. He found that when sulphur and charcoal were added to saltpetre, an explosive mixture resulted. In 1313, the German monk Berthod Schwartz devised a method of firing missiles with the mixture, which came to be known as "gunpowder."

Taking color from the charcoal used in making it, black gunpowder came into wide use as an explosive. It had no serious rivals until late in the 19th Century. So it was this mixture that early American miners used in many operations. Some called it "saltpetre," but many casually referred to the explosive as "peter." After it was used regularly for some time, peter was likely to exhaust a seam of coal or a vein of gold. So when a mine began to yield poor returns, the pioneer would say that it was beginning to be petered out. In local use a few years earlier, the colorful phrase was fixed in speech during the Gold Rush.

—Webb B. Garrison

"And Manny has a boat. I know, for I checked up on that before I planned the bank job."

Manuel wiped his hand across his forehead. He was perspiring. He didn't know what was coming now, but a sense of impending disaster had gripped him.

"I used your telephone this morning," Carnahan was saying. "Everything is set for tonight. An hour after dark, a fishing-boat will be passing here, heading south. Just an innocent-looking fishing-boat. You will put me aboard her, Manny. She'll be waiting for a mile or so outside the harbor."

MANUEL said nothing. He felt an immediate relief in the knowledge that Carnahan was leaving, but a moment later he realized that now his plans for tomorrow would never work out. Tomorrow Carnahan would be gone, and Manuel would have helped him escape.

"You'll take me out there and put me aboard," said Carnahan. "But no funny stuff, Manny, no funny stuff. And just to be sure you play it straight, Rosy will go with us."

And that was the way of it. Shortly after dark they left the house and walked toward the harbor, Manuel and Rosita leading the way, Carnahan following. He had refused to consider leaving Rosita behind, and although he still insisted that all he expected was to be put aboard the boat which would be waiting outside the harbor, Manuel wondered if he didn't have something else in mind.

To Carnahan, he and Rosita were danger points. They could put the police on his trail. A smart man wouldn't go off and leave them to talk, even if he thought he might have scared them into silence. Two shots fired in the night, far out from shore, would never be heard. Death would be waiting at the end of the boat ride. Manuel could sense it.

There was no one at the dock where their boat was tied. Manuel got the motor from the locked shed where it was kept. He carried it to the boat, fitted it into place, and checked the fuel. Rosita and Carnahan waited, Carnahan showing his impatience by constantly urging him to hurry. The wind hadn't died down; it was still blowing strongly. Outside the bay, Manuel knew, the sea would be choppy and rough.

"Let's get going," said Carnahan. "Let's get out of here."

"We're ready," said Manuel.

He held up a hand to Rosita to help her into the boat. She was wearing levis and a leather jacket. She had tied a scarf over her hair. As she dropped down beside him, she whispered swiftly, and in Spanish, "Manuel, he doesn't mean that we shall return."

"I know," said Manuel. And then to Carnahan, "All right, hand me the suitcase."

"I'll take care of the suitcase myself," said Carnahan.

He almost fell getting into the boat, but caught his balance quickly and sat down, holding the suitcase between his knees and staring toward Manuel and Rosita, in the stern.

"Get this thing started," he said harshly.

"I'll cast off," said Rosita.

She moved past Carnahan, unlocked the chain which held the boat in its anchorage, then came back to the stern. Manuel started the motor and they moved smoothly into the channel.

"How long will it take to get out there?" asked Carnahan.

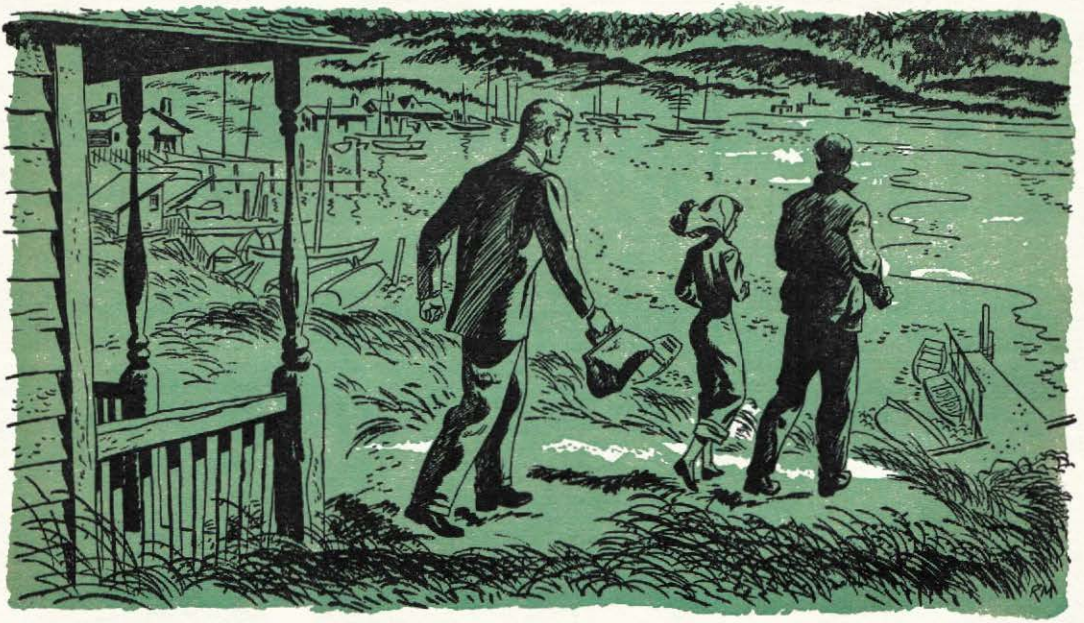
"Maybe half an hour," said Manuel. "It depends on how far we have to go."

"The boat will be in close," said Carnahan. "It's not too dark a night. We'll find it. Watch for some blinking lights. Say, this is the life, isn't it?"

They were protected from the wind as they moved through the channel, and the water was smooth. Manuel grinned. Carnahan was in for a surprise. It wouldn't be like this when they were on the open sea. Water, breaking over the prow, would drench him, and the wind would make the water seem cold as ice.

Rosita huddled close. "Manuel," she whispered, "Manuel, what will we do?"

"I don't know," said Manuel. "You may be wrong."



Shortly after dark they left the house, Manuel and Rosita leading the way, Carnahan following. A smart man wouldn't go off and leave them, Manuel knew, and two shots fired in the night, far from shore, would never be heard. Death would be waiting at the end of the boat ride.

"But I'm not."

And of course she wasn't. Manuel took a deep breath. They had reached the end of the channel and the water was suddenly rougher. Spray dashed over the prow of the boat. Carnahan's voice lifted in alarm.

"Hey, Manny! Watch what you're doing!"

Manuel hit another swell, not quite straight. More water spilled into the boat. He suddenly was grinning. "You can forget that suitcase for a while, Carnahan," he shouted. "Grab a bucket and start bailing. You, too, Rosita."

Carnahan was gripping the seat with both hands. Manuel couldn't see his face but he could imagine the frightened look which was there. Carnahan's gun was of little use to him, now. It couldn't command the waves to be still or the boat to run smoothly. It couldn't chase away the water now slopping around his feet. "I'll give him a ride," said Manuel to himself. "I'll give him a ride he'll never forget."

Manuel hit another swell aslant and a wall of water lifted over the side. Rosita, on her knees bailing, looked around at him and nodded, just as though she guessed what was in his mind.

"Turn back," Carnahan was screaming. "Turn back, Manny—turn back!"

"Don't you want to make your boat?" asked Manuel. "There she is, out there, blinking her lights. Start bailing, Carnahan."

He hadn't yet seen the boat, but that wasn't important. Carnahan looked around, but at a moment when they were in a trough of the waves and the mountain of white-capped water he saw looming ahead of them must have been terrifying. He reached into his pocket and jerked out his gun. He leveled it at Manuel.

"Turn back, Manny!" he shouted. "This is your last chance. Turn back!"

Manuel took a look over his shoulder. They weren't too far out from shore. A good swimmer could make it easily from here, and as insurance, off to the port side and coming in, he had spotted Emilio Santos, who was returning from having set his fishline. He reached out and touched Rosita.

"Off with your jacket and shoes, Rosita," he said in Spanish. "And then over the side. Head for the shore and watch for Emilio."

"And you, Manuel?"

"Carnahan won't shoot me. Who would steer the boat if he did?"

"But Manuel—"

"There is no time to talk. This is the way, Rosita."

The girl pulled off her shoes. She stood up, took off her jacket and dropped it.

"Sit down!" shouted Carnahan. "Sit down!"

No one made any answer. Rosita stepped to the edge of the boat and for a moment, stood poised there, a slender figure, looking back at Manuel. Then she was gone in a quick, clean dive into the churning water.

Manuel gave the rudder a kick. More water splashed over the side, again drenching Carnahan.

"What did she do that for?" Carnahan yelled.

"To lighten the boat," said Manuel. "Your suitcase goes next. It's water-soaked and heavy. Toss it over, Carnahan, and start bailing, if you want to live."

"Toss fifty thousand dollars into the ocean?" gasped Carnahan. "Are you crazy?"

Manuel shrugged his shoulders. "Suit yourself, Carnahan. Do you want to live?"

Carnahan lifted his gun. "I said turn back."

"We'd never make it. Get rid of that suitcase and start bailing."

Carnahan stared at the gun in his hand, and, watching him, Manuel could guess what he was thinking. In the past, his gun had never failed him. That it should fail him now was impossible.

> Man argues woman may not be trusted too far; woman feels man cannot be trusted too near.
>
> —JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE

"Toss over the suitcase, Carnahan," said Manuel again. "Toss it over and start bailing."

And he meant it. They had shipped too much water to stay afloat very long in such a sea. But Carnahan probably didn't realize that, or maybe Carnahan was still placing his reliance in his gun, for he shoved it forward, squeezing the trigger. A bullet sang past Manuel's head.

"Turn back," shouted Carnahan. "Turn back now, or the next shot—"

"Turn back now?" said Manuel. "Now? Like this?"

He shoved hard on the rudder and the boat turned and the sea came in on them. Manuel heard Carnahan's high scream and saw him clutch for his suitcase as the water seemed to lift him from the boat. It carried Manuel with it, too. Up, and then down—and it wasn't so cold as it had seemed.

Manuel kicked off his shoes, slid out of his jacket and levis and then surfaced. He saw the boat overturned, a dozen yards away, and near it, Carnahan, struggling to remain afloat. He swam that way.

"Get your clothes off, Carnahan," he shouted. "We'll make it to shore."

He reached for Carnahan's arm, to help him, and sinking in the water beside the man his legs bumped against the suitcase which Carnahan was still holding.

"You'll have to let the money go," said Manuel. "Maybe you'll find another bank you can knock over some day. Maybe—"

Carnahan struck at him, pushed him away, and tried to splash his way to the bobbing boat. He didn't make it; near it, he sank from sight as though something had pulled him down. The suitcase, probably—it could have been nothing else. Manuel dived three times in an effort to find him, but the current was strong and the sea was wide.

Resting, and holding to the overturned boat, Manuel heard Rosita's voice, calling him. He answered her, and a few moments later swam out to meet her.

"You were supposed to be heading in to shore," he said, scowling.

"But I followed the boat," said Rosita. "I wasn't sure what you meant to do. I heard the shot: it frightened me."

"But it missed."

"And Carnahan?"

"He held on to his suitcase when the boat was swamped. I dived to find him, but couldn't."

They were both silent for a moment, resting, holding on to the boat.

"The tide will bring him in," said Manuel finally. "Can we make it, Rosita?"

"I can," said Rosita. "And you always said you were as good a swimmer as I."

"We will have to explain things to Art Hudson."

"I know."

"And if there is some charge against me in Philadelphia—"

"You have many friends here, Manuel, friends who will stand by you. Emilio will know how rough it was tonight on the ocean, and you are not too experienced with a boat. Sam always said you would some day swamp it."

A voice reached them, hailing them in Spanish, and Manuel said instantly, "It's Emilio. He must have heard the shot, seen the boat go over." And then he called, "Here, Emilio! It's Manuel and Rosita."

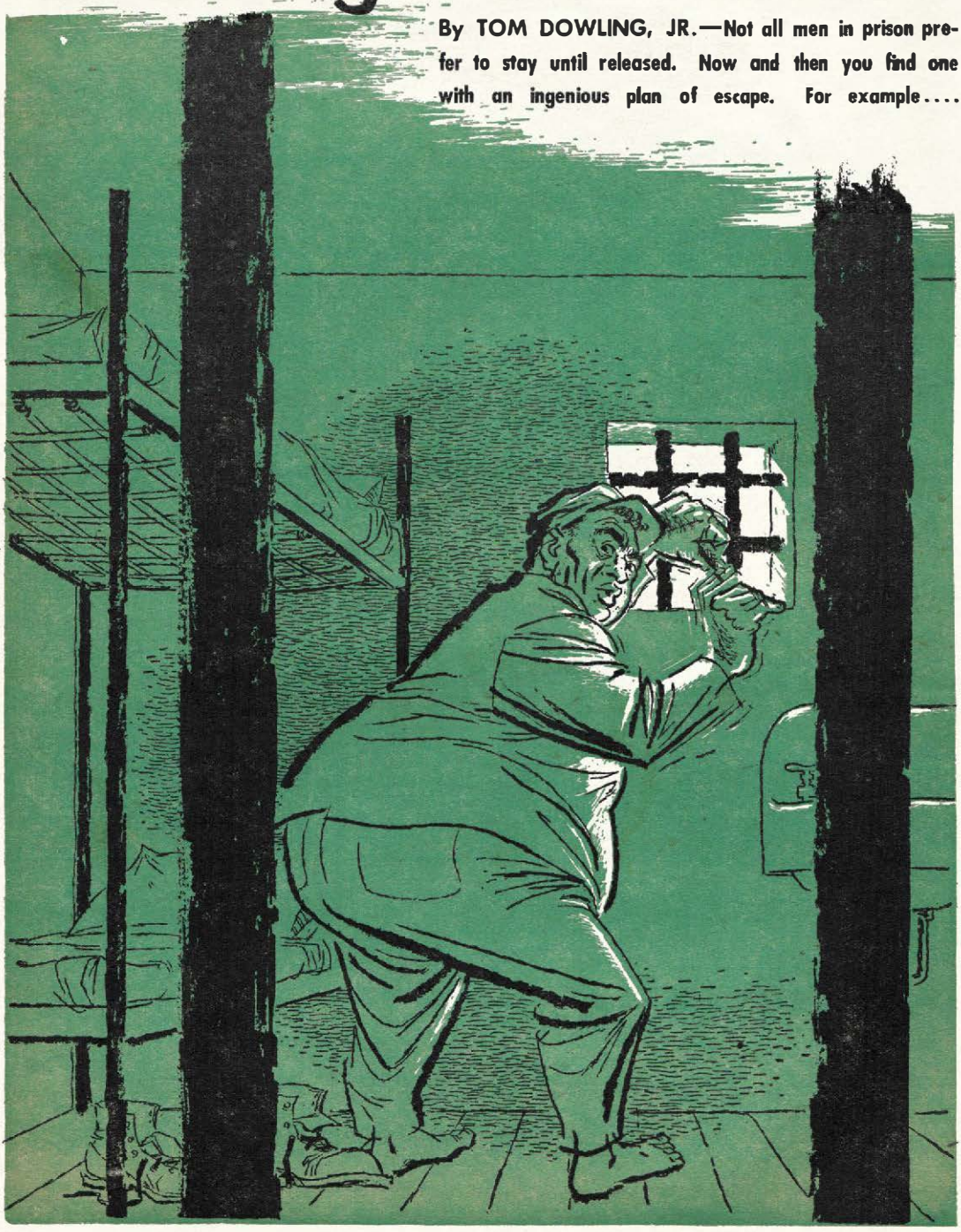
"I don't have much on," said Rosita.

Manuel chuckled and reached for her hand. He said, "Who cares? Emilio wears several long sweaters. You can borrow one. Come on."

They swam together toward the approaching boat. •

They Wanted Out

By TOM DOWLING, JR.—Not all men in prison prefer to stay until released. Now and then you find one with an ingenious plan of escape. For example....



ACCORDING TO PEOPLE in the know—a short word for jail—the one thing most desired by men in prison is not more free time for recreation, extra rations of chocolate bars, inspirational talks by the warden, or visits to the cell-block by movie stars, big-league ballplayers, or itinerant evangelists. What the lads in stir want most is to be lads who are not in stir. They want out.

It has been estimated that the amount of thought expended by inmates of the clink in figuring out ways of getting out of the clink—if put to work harnessing the atom, solving the problems of world peace, or working out a sure-fire system to beat the horses—would total in man-hours the combined cerebration aggregate of Socrates, Einstein, Galileo, Newton and every other scientist and philosopher who got by the third grade, and probably would have produced even greater boons to mankind. But a man doing five years for burglary isn't interested in mankind; he's solely interested in making five years seem like two. Or maybe even one, or less.

Like the chaps several years ago out in Leavenworth, the Federal resort in Kansas. These boys toiled in the prison printshop producing various Government pamphlets and forms. But their thoughts seldom rested for too long a time on new type-faces or the differences between Bodoni Bold and Futura; they concentrated exclusively on the best ways of getting over the wall.

Finally, their great day came. A big shipment of forms was to go from Leavenworth to McNeil Island, off the West Coast, and the box for shipment was to be a large one. When the box left, it did indeed contain forms—human forms; the two prisoners had had a pal nail them into the container.

From the prison, the box went immediately to a freight car, where the two cons felt themselves being bumped around roughly as their little home was secured for travel. But they didn't care; once the train was under way, they had but to push up the top of the box and leap to freedom.

Only there were hitches. First, the dull-witted railway clerks had stuck the box in the car upside down; and the more the boys worked to try to free themselves, the more difficult the task became, when done from an inverted position. Then the heat became apparent. Even though concealed airholes had been drilled in the box, the prisoners (certainly an apt description now) began to perspire, and eventually to gasp. In despair, they pounded for their lives on the walls of the box.

When the armed railway clerks finally had come to the rescue, the escape artists realized why their perspiration had not been caused entirely by concern over their flight—in addition to being upside down, the box had been placed next to the steam pipes! They went back to Leavenworth convinced that the printshop—always known to them before as "the sweatshop"—wasn't such a bad spot after all.

OCCASIONALLY, well-hatched escape plans go awry because of some unforeseen triviality. Take the case of a gent named Moulsin, who had decided he'd had enough of San Quentin for the time being.

Moulsin had observed the actions of a Catholic priest who regularly visited the California pokey, and this, one day, gave him an idea. Carefully, he idled away his spare moments running up a black priest's cassock, complete with beads and similar accouterments, and a day came when he simply walked out of the cellblock, through the prison yards, and out the gate to the priest's car. He was climbing into this vehicle, and already wondering how he'd enjoy Acapulco, when a voice behind him, one he recognized as that of an assistant warden, called, "Wait a minute, Father; there's a phone call for you."

There was nothing for it but to turn around and take the call—back to a cell. He'd had sixty seconds of freedom, and it added years to his sentence. . . .

Not all escape attempts fail; now and then the careful planning of an astute time-server pays off, although it isn't always in the precise manner envisioned by the prisoner.

There was the bright boy, for example, in a Western jailhouse which was situated on an island in a river. To get away, a man first had to figure out a method for getting across the river. This guy did.

For weeks he worked in his cell making a rubber diving suit, using every bit of rubber he could snitch from the prison workshops. To complete his costume, he acquired a hose which he planned to use to bring him air from the surface of the river, and heavy weights which he felt would prevent his bobbing into view by the guards on the walls. At an appointed hour he embarked on his great adventure.

What happened had to be reconstructed later by the prison officials who brought his body up from the bottom. It was presumed, however, that he'd somehow lost his airhose, and, before he could free the heavy weights from his feet, he'd drowned. He did escape from the prison, of course—forever—although not in the exact manner he'd planned.

A few attempted crash-outs have a higher smile-quotient than that one, however. For example, there was the bucko who, because of bad behavior, was put in solitary in a dungeonlike cell that was so old the bars on the window were set in crumbling dust; a hacksaw could cut through their rusted edges in a matter of minutes.

The only hitch was, how to get the saw? For, before they entered their cells each night, these particular prisoners were stripped to the buff and searched thoroughly. Getting a saw past such surveillance could be accomplished only by taping the blade to the soles of one's feet—which is exactly what our man did.

And by morning, the ancient bars had been neatly cut away. Only the prisoner was still in his cell, boneweary, bloody and dispirited. He'd overlooked the fact that, even without bars, the window was too small to accommodate his sizable bulk.

BUT as in the telephone call to the priest, no amount of brainy planning can foresee the slight slip-up that can wreck an escape plan over which a con may have slaved for months. Such was the lot of a trusty who dreamed up a means of departure unique in prison annals.

Because he worked in the warden's home, outside the prison gates, and because he knew of the exhaustive searching procedure that followed an escape, this chap decided not to leave the scene at all. Instead he hid himself in a storage closet in the warden's house, and settled down to wait until the hue and cry of his absence should have died down. There was plenty of canned food in the closet; it wasn't too uncomfortable, and the prisoner knew he could be happy for days if necessary.

And he might have been, at that—if he hadn't inadvertently chosen as one of his meals a can of salmon. The warden's cat lost no time in investigating the aroma that followed, and where there's a warden's cat there's usually a warden. The gentleman ceased to be a trusty as of that moment. •

Pipeline to Arabia

Somewhere the desert was swallowing precious oil, but everywhere Clark turned, he was met by blank stares. The Arabs were as colorful and cruel as the desert itself.—By LEE SHERIDAN

CLARK KERRIS WAS THE SORT OF MEDIUM-SIZED, colorless-eyed, brownish-haired guy who, back home, likes babies and gives his seat to old ladies in the subway. Maybe he'd never be ruthless enough to be a big-shot, and it might take a long time to make him lose his temper. But once you got him angry, he'd be stubborn.

After three months in Qibiq, Clark was getting stubborn. In the dim, sulphur-colored lights of the Djelma Café, his jaw set doggedly; he felt sullen and defeated.

"Clark Kerris?"

The sound of his own name startled him and he turned to look at the other man. "You're Joe Riddell? Good of you to take time to see me. You know why I'm here. The company is making money, but there's more than the normal waste and inefficiency."

"Yeah, I heard," said Riddell, fingering his glass. "You've been trying to straighten out the paperwork at the refinery and shipping end, simplify the forms, get rid of deadwood in the personnel, and so on. How you doin'?"

"I'm nowhere," Clark grunted. "Oh, I've cleaned up and reorganized somewhat, and the costs are down a bit—but the shipments don't go up."

Riddell said nothing. Damn the man, he wasn't helping! Clark swore mentally and plunged ahead. "The original theory in Louisburg was that the refinery and office routines were a bottleneck which reduced the amount of oil being shipped," he said. "They sent me over to clear that up. I've been here three months, and I can't see that there's enough bottleneck in Qibiq to account for the situation."

"So? That's tough."

Clark persisted. "There's a hold-up somewhere. If it isn't in Qibiq, it's got to be either at the wells or in the pipeline," he said evenly.

"There's nothing wrong in the pipeline." Riddell's heavy face darkened. "Every bit of oil coming out of the wells is coming to Qibiq."

"Then do you think the well production is lower than it should be?"

"How the hell should I know?" Riddell said loudly. "It's not my business what Hayter does with the wells—and it isn't yours, either."

"Yes," Clark admitted, "but if the thing doesn't clear up, they'll send someone to *make* it his business. I figured it would save time if you and Hayter would start checking up now."

Riddell thrust out his jaw with a scowl. "There's nothing wrong with the pipeline," he repeated harshly. "Maybe Hayter isn't getting full production—and maybe you haven't done the job in the refinery. Don't try to throw the blame on us."

"I'm not throwing blame," Clark said quietly. "If there's something wrong, you'll want to know it and start correcting it."

Riddell finished his drink, banged the glass on the bar and slid down from his stool with finality. "Just Mother's little helper?" he sneered. "I don't need your help, Kerris. I don't need interference, either. You keep out of what doesn't concern you, or I'll be making some reports to headquarters, too."

When the café door had banged shut behind Riddell, Clark found his hands were shaking. A wave of desperate longing for Marge and the kids shot through him. If only he were back in Louisburg, and this were the Shamrock Room instead of a filthy rathole of an Arabian bar!

"Stop being a bloody fool and give it up," Clark told himself. The one big chance he was ever likely to get was a flop. He might as well accept that, and get used to it. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself. So you're not a genius, but the longer this goes on, the harder it'll be to explain to the home office. Go home before you get to needing these drinks."

In the office next day, he took a deep breath and rang for his secretary, Noami—a native, but college-trained.

"Take a letter," he said, "to Mr. Gannon, Executive Vice-President of Gold-Arabian Oil, in Louisburg. Dear Mr. Gannon: I should greatly appreciate your arranging for my recall as soon as possible. While the situation has not been entirely cleared up in Qibiq, I feel that no purpose can be served by my remaining here longer . . ."

There was a startled gasp of protest from Noami. "You are going home? But the job is not finished."

Clark shrugged unhappily. "I can't do anything more, Noami. It's a dead end. Is no sooner get one thing straightened out, than another thing turns up. It's as if someone is deliberately trying to make me fail."

"If I were a man and suspected that someone was working against me," said Noami, "I would go to any lengths to prove it and to make him stop."

"What can I do?" Clark objected. "I haven't any authority to interfere with the oil wells or pipeline divisions."

"Authority!" she said scornfully. "Does a man need authority to fight for his honor?"

"All right," Clark said. "What should I do?"

"I should go and see for myself," she replied calmly. "I should say I was going home and that I would like to see the oil wells, just as a vacation. But there is no law that a man may not use his eyes while he is on vacation. Then I would travel back to Qibiq along the route of the pipeline, and while I observed the scenery, I should also keep a sharp eye on everything that is going on down there. That is what *I* should do."

"How?" he asked, interested despite himself. "I'd need company approval for a car to travel back along the pipeline, and you know Joe Riddell wouldn't give it."

"You can fly out to the oilfield with the next cargo plane," she said. "Then you could come back with a group of traveling Arabs. And if their travels take them along the pipeline—well, that is only because it makes a good landmark in the desert. . . ."

For the first time in two days, Clark grinned. "You're quite a girl," he said. "I'd do better to send *you*, Noami."

She smiled back softly, and it wasn't the first time he'd noticed how pretty she was. "That is not a woman's job," she said with the barest hint of reproof. "However, perhaps you are not the type to travel easily with camels and Arabs. Perhaps it is better you stay here until you are recalled, and then go home by a safe comfortable plane to your wife and children."

Clark looked at the calm superior expression of his secretary with growing annoyance. So she thought he hadn't the guts to go? "All right," he said crisply. "I *do* want to do it. You go ahead and arrange it."

Smoothly she stood up, the folds of her spotless white silk dress sliding gently into place. With an impish smile, she bowed formally. "It shall be done, sir."

Moving silently, rhythmically as she always did, Noami came back an hour later to say there was a cargo plane going out with repair parts and mechanics the next day, and also that there would be a caravan coming back. That would leave him with twenty-four hours at the Al Duadi oilfield.

"In that time, much can be accomplished," she said evenly.

Clark's spirits rose at the thought of action, but not for long. He waited several hours for his telephone call to Al Duadi, finally had to stand over the switchboard operator until it went through, only to find that Frank Hayter, the division manager, wasn't in the office. The connection was weak and the assistant at Al Duadi seemed unusually stupid.

As if that wasn't enough, the cargo plane developed trouble and the take-off was delayed for a swearing, sweating interval while mechanics and pilot worked on the engine.

Looking down at the barren sands drifting colorlessly in the hot winds, Clark thought hopefully that he was on the right track at last. If all of Hayter's help were as stupid as the fellow on the telephone, that would slow things up, and if the general inefficiency extended everywhere that would account for something more.

There was no sign of Hayter at the Al Duadi airport. A polite Arab in white burnoose presented himself as Yusef Bem Halifa. Mr. Hayter was away—Yusef's hand waved vaguely toward the well rigs—and it was he, Yusef, who would have the inestimable privilege of conducting Mr. Kerris about the field.

It was only after some hours of inspecting wells, company houses, the pipeline and offices, that Clark realized he was learning nothing. The riggers, roustabouts and tool-pushers seemed straightforward and competent, but when Clark spoke to them, they were terse and uncommunicative.

And for all Yusef's apparent command of heavily accented English, he became deaf and uncomprehending to any question on well production. Clark had a growing sense that while the field seemed to be functioning at capacity, there was something wrong.

"We will now visit Well No. 7," said Yusef, when they had seen Wells 1 through 6. Firmly he gestured to the waiting jeep.

With equal firmness, Clark replied, "I have no interest in Well No. 7. Where is Mr. Hayter?"

"But I have said—he is out of the office." Yusef registered surprise.

"So I see. Where is he?" Clark said. "He knew I was coming."

"Well—" Yusef hesitated, nonplused at Clark's tone of command.

"Answer me!" Clark roared. "Where is Mr. Hayter?"

Yusef's eyes shifted. "I—don't know. He is often away. It is understandable; the desert is—difficult—for white men."

Striding into the shabby building, Clark opened door after door, scanning the indifferent workers, until he reached an empty office which was unmistakably Hayter's. Yusef attempted to bar the way. "You cannot go in!"

"Get out of my way!" Clark grunted. "Find Hayter's secretary, or someone who speaks English."

Locking the door, he examined desk and bookshelves. In a bottom drawer

Illustration by W. DAVID SHAW

of the desk Clark found a photograph of a beautiful dark-eyed, dark-haired girl with a merry smile. Mrs. Hayter, no doubt. But why wasn't the picture framed and on the desk?

A locked file cabinet stood in the corner. Playing a hunch, Clark fumbled for his key ring, tried the key to his Louisburg files. As the drawers moved under his hand, he wondered wryly what the hell he was looking for. In a minute he knew.

The files contained nothing but a gun, some dirty file folders of ancient memoranda, a few crumpled magazines on petroleum production and refining, and a small bar in the bottom drawer—several full bottles and far too many empties.

Where were the accounts, the production figures, the private and confidential letters of instruction which should be in Hayter's file? With growing alarm, Clark studied the office. It looked as though no one had used it in months.

In the outer offices he found a couple of American typists who stared at him sullenly. He asked:

"Where is Mr. Hayter?"

The girls looked at each other. "I suppose he's home, tanked as usual," one said scornfully.

"Where does he live?"

"The white stucco house, just beyond the dorm," she said, suddenly cowed by the voice of authority.

HAYTER'S house was blank and unwelcoming, shuttered against the cruel heat of late afternoon sun. Yusef opened the door and barred Clark's way with frightened determination.

"Mr. Hayter is not here," he whined. "You cannot come in. I am responsible and I do not permit—"

"Shut up!" Clark said through his teeth. "And get out."

Swiftly, he reached for the oily little Arab, caught him by the scruff of the neck, whirled him around and applying the full force of his leather boot, sent Yusef flying, and as the man scrambled to disentangle himself from his burnoose, Clark went in and slammed the door. All of a sudden he felt good all over.

Dropping the dispatch-case on a table, he went looking for his involuntary host—because whether Hayter liked it or not, Clark meant to stay the night. For one thing, Noami's arrangements for his knitting up with the caravan were based on the assumption that Clark would be the division manager's guest as a matter of course. And after his short acquaintance with Al Duadi, Clark wasn't anxious to miss his chance of getting away.

The house was dusty and unkempt. In a back room Clark found Hayter lying—tanked to the gills. He must once have been rather a good-looking fellow, but now he was unshaven, bleary and red-eyed. Clark's nose wrinkled with disgust as he got the fetid odor of clothing and stale liquor. Leaning over the bed, he shook Hayter's shoulder vigorously, but the man only moaned, "Kay—"

There was water in a pitcher. Clark doused his handkerchief and laid it on Hayter's forehead and eyes. With a scream, the division manager rolled away, tearing the wet rag from his face, pummeling the bed and babbling, "No, no! El Bima, no! Oh, God—Kay!"

Clark wondered if Hayter were having d.t.'s. Kay was obviously the wife, but what was El Bima? Anyway, it was hopeless to talk to Hayter unless he was sober. Clark went in search of the kitchen and black coffee.

When he came back, Hayter was dead.

He lay spread-eagled on the messy bed, his eyes slightly staring and a queer bluish appearance to his face. Clark stood still, the tray of steaming coffee in his hands, his mind working furiously.

Every instinct said, "Get out of here," but Yusef knew Clark had been there, and this would be the perfect opportunity for him to retaliate.

There was a whisper of sound behind him. Clark whirled, expecting to see Yusef's triumphant face—but it was a stranger. Unusually tall for an Arab, the keen sunburned face shadowed by his tarboosh, a native stood politely in the doorway. He bowed deeply. "Salaam aleikum, effendi," he said. "I seek Mr. Kerris."

"I am he."

The man bowed again. "Ali Oulaida is my name," he said. "It is my poor caravan you wish to join, effendi, unworthy as it is?"

Clark felt a surge of relief. "That's right," he said. "Thank goodness you're here. There has been an—accident." Stepping aside to set down the tray of coffee, Hayter's body was revealed. Ali drew in his breath, and bent over the bed.

"He is dead," he announced, drawing back.

"I know that," Clark said impatiently. "The thing is, how do I report it and to whom?"

Ali looked at him thoughtfully. "This man has been smothered," he remarked casually. "See the eyes, the blue skin. Someone has sent him to make his peace with Allah.... My caravan is ready, effendi. Reports might be made more effectively in Qibiq."

Clark hesitated. "I don't like to leave the poor devil like that!"

"There will be—unpleasant complications, effendi," Ali urged, and as if on cue, the front doorbell rang loudly. "Come," said Ali, grasping Clark's arm firmly. "Through the garden."

The garden was no more than a few palm trees and a bird-bath, with a couple of chairs under an awning. Darkness was coming—in the East, darkness comes swiftly. Propelled by Ali's strong hands, Clark slid into the garden, past the chairs, to the gate in the stucco wall.

Behind them, lights flashed on in Hayter's house, there were rushing feet and cries. Clark fancied he heard Yusef's voice, "There he is! After him!". The words were Arabic, but the tone unmistakable.

In the space of a moment, the gate was open, and with a deadly *whir!* a sliver of metal flashed an inch above their heads and buried itself quivering in the wood. Without a second glance, Ali pulled the gate with its message of death shut behind them and they ran.

BEHIND them was pursuit, but Ali turned and twisted, behind the company store, through the garden of the dormitory, darting away to the edge of the servants' quarters.

Clark had a confused impression of camels crouched in a neat semicircle; of a fire, with dark hooded figures about it, and of Ali whipping them into furious activity with a few brief words of command.

Instantly the fire was buried in sand, the camels were unfolding their spindly legs with protesting snorts, and Clark was stripped of jacket and pants, enveloped in folds of cotton, and hoisted to a saddle which swayed perilously beneath him.

Then the caravan moved sedately out of Al Duadi in a line of innumerable camels—later Clark found there were nearly thirty of them. At the edge of the oilfield town they were stopped by a watchman, who exchanged pleasantries with the riders.

Clark held his breath as the man said something hoarsely to him, but Ali intervened swiftly. Clark surmised with a chuckle that Ali must have said, "This one is speechless, having lost his tongue at an early age," because the watchman regarded Clark with the greatest sympathy. Finally the caravan moved on. The lights of Al Duadi receded, were lost in the sands of the desert. For three hours they swayed and lurched in silence. At last there was a word of command. The caravan halted and the riders slid from their saddles. Clark's camel knelt with a sickening forward lurch, and for a moment he thought he was too stiff to move.

Ali's strong arms pulled him up and off, braced him as he staggered on the sand. "You are all right, effendi?"

"Sure—a little numb, that's all. Thank you for your help, Ali."

"It is written that one shall protect the stranger as his brother," Ali said

smoothly. "We shall leave at dawn, so it is best to sleep now." . . .

Clark couldn't figure it out, but in his new mood of reckless adventure, he was content to sit in his saddle the next morning and lurch along, scanning the pipeline as he went.

The pipeline was uninteresting. It looked like a huge black worm, with very few turnings, held in a cradle of black metal legs. Here and there, sand had started to drift against it, but for the most part it was free and clean.

It was late in the second day when the caravan approached a section where the sand had drifted completely over it. Clark thought this was to be expected; and already there seemed to be a crew of native workers, probably getting ready to free the pipeline.

But as the caravan sauntered up to the group of workers, Clark suddenly knew with a deadly certainty that these Arabs were not clearing away the sand. In fact, the sand which had drifted over the pipeline appeared tunnel-shaped, and seemed to extend back at right angles from the main line. It looked almost like a submerged pipeline.

Clark looked at Ali, but the caravan leader merely shrugged and said warningly, "It is wiser to say nothing, effendi."

So Clark continued to sway and toss in his saddle, but his mind worked furiously. Half of him said, "Let it alone. Go home and tell the home office about it." And the other half said, "They'll suspect, now that Hayter's dead, and they'll disconnect the pipeline and bury it—if it *is* a pipeline. And you'll never know, if you don't go and look."

He thought of Riddell and the sense of wariness and fear behind the man's bluster . . . and after the fire was out, and the caravan was asleep, Clark pulled himself cautiously erect and felt for the flashlight he'd saved along with his cigarettes from his discarded suit.

The camel was mercifully silent as he pulled it up and clambered to the saddle. He turned to the pipeline and guiding himself by the beam of his flashlight, he started back in the direction of Al Duadi. He could only guess at how far he would have to go, but at last he decided he was close enough to start walking.

Tethering the camel to one of the pipeline supports, he struck out bravely, feeling his way along the pipeline and using his light as little as possible. At last he saw the mound of drifted sand. Cautiously he reconnoitered, but the desert seemed empty, soundless.

Sinking to his knees, he crept forward slowly, brushed at the sand, and in a few seconds felt metal. So his surmise was right—a constant portion of oil was being diverted into a side pipe!

His triumph was short. Stifling folds of cloth fell around his head, his hands were seized and bound, and almost before he knew what had happened, he felt himself thrown across a saddle, and was jolting rapidly across the soft sand.

Helpless as a bundle of soiled clothes, the cords bit into his wrists, every muscle protested, and he lost all sense of time in the agony of hitting against the stiff edge of the saddle.

When he was lifted down and released, he was in a desert oasis. The cloth was jerked from his head, the cords untied from his wrists, and a dirty Arab grabbed his arm, pushing him forward to a tent.

"Ah, the curious Mr. Kerris!" said a smooth voice.

In the light of a number of flares, Clark faced a man in Arab dress, standing behind a businesslike desk at the rear of the huge tent. His English was fluent, but the accent was wrong. Despite the darkly sunburned face and white burnoose, Clark knew the man wasn't an Arab.

"And who are you?" he asked flatly.

"I have many names," the man said easily. "You may call me El Bima."

"You killed Hayter."

"Yes. Oh, not personally," El Bima smiled deprecatingly. "I had it done—a sad necessity, which I fear you must have on your conscience, Mr. Kerris. If you had not insisted against all attempts to discourage you in visiting Al Duadi and speaking with Mr. Hayter, he would now be alive."

"That depends on what you call alive," Clark remarked.

El Bima smiled, a sinister lift of one corner of his mouth. "You have humor," he said regretfully. "It is too bad that you also have curiosity, Mr. Kerris." He sighed dramatically. "I tried to save you, but no—you would not be saved. If you had not insisted on calling Al Duadi, even to the point of standing over my telephone operator—"

"*Yours?*" Clark said involuntarily.

"But yes," El Bima assured him easily. "You do not quite understand, Mr. Kerris. Your Gold-Arabian Oil Company is allowed momentarily to take out some oil—this is only justice since they established the wells and the pipeline and so forth. But it is only a matter of a short time before we shall take over. Meanwhile, my organization is busy learning how to operate efficiently in preparation for that great day of deliverance."

"I see. And if you mean to take over completely, just why is it necessary to tap the pipeline now?" Clark asked evenly.

El Bima shrugged. "Naturally, we may meet with some resistance on the part of some who do not understand the great objectives ahead," he murmured. "But as I said, you would telephone to Al Duadi, and although the plane was damaged, it was unfortunately repairable. Yusef, too, did his best to prevent you from learning the sad truth about Mr. Hayter's condition, but you still persisted in

"Now then, Miss Applegate, I suppose you're wondering why I didn't fire you, too!"

knowing about everything, Mr. Kerris."

"What happened to Mrs. Hayter?"

"She went home some months ago. It was sad, but one could not blame the poor lady. It was no life for her, when Mr. Hayter discovered the joys of alcohol."

"And I suppose you have undermined Mr. Riddell in the same fashion?" Clark inquired with curling lips.

"Mr. Riddell, on the contrary, did not need to have his mind distracted," El Bima returned. "He quite understood our aims and is in complete sympathy. All that was needed was to assure him of sufficient income for retirement. So you see, Mr. Kerris, it is sad that you were determined to satisfy your curiosity. Naturally we could hardly permit you to inform your company of our plans for the future."

Outwardly calm, Clark felt his stomach contract in icy coldness. "I see," he said steadily. "Just what had you in mind?"

El Bima sighed again. "It will be simple. You will become just another unfortunate desert traveler who has somehow wandered away from the caravan."

Clark clenched his fists and debated his chances of reaching the man before he could be shot, while El Bima studied his glossy fingernails with care. Suddenly, behind El Bima the point of a knife tore through the canvas tent, slicing downward in one clean motion, and Ali stepped calmly into the tent.

At the sound, El Bima stiffened and turned involuntarily, reaching swiftly into a desk drawer, but in the instant's deflection of his attention, Clark seized one of the flaming torches and threw it with deadly accuracy at El Bima's head. In a second, the man was a screaming mass of flame.

"You have done well," Ali said. "Now come, we have no time to lose."

It seemed already too late as they stepped through the slit in the tent to the darkness of the oasis. The camp was thoroughly aroused. Crouching behind the tent, they could see rushing figures, both pursued and pursuers. Ali had brought his fellow caravan members.

A man ran past them, then fell silently to earth, a knife quivering in his back. Behind the tent was a flaming beacon, the heat already making their shelter uncomfortable.

"They will make for the camels," Ali said. "We must prevent any escape." More swiftly than Clark could follow, Ali had melted into the melee of shouting men.

Clark moved warily forward, away from the burning tent. It was impossible to tell which of these white-robed figures was friend or foe; doubly impossible since Clark understood little Arabic. To be addressed in Arabic and to fail in replying would mean certain death. His only thought now was to reach the outskirts of the oasis somewhere, and to wait for Ali to find him when the battle was over.

Bending low and scuttling from palm tree to tent to the shadow of a stone well, Clark made his way blindly, keeping the fight behind him. Suddenly he collided with a dark shape. It was metal and large and round. Clark caught his breath in excitement.

Here was some at least of the oil on which El Bima counted so heavily. With shaking fingers, Clark felt in the folds of his bedraggled burnoose and found a packet of matches. There was plenty of seepage. Calculating his distance as best he could, Clark gathered himself for flight, deliberately lit a match and touched it to a barrel. As the tiny flame licked hungrily about the sealed top, he lighted three more matches recklessly, tossed them into other barrels. Then he turned and fled.

Behind him the crackle grew to an ominous roar, a thundering, and glancing over his shoulder as he stumbled over the sand, Clark saw that he had wrought better than he hoped. The barrels were piled one on another, and the cache extended as far as the eye could see, the flames dancing greedily from one to another.

The lurid glare lit up the entire oasis, the camels running loose and bewildered, the shouting, struggling natives. . . . Clark panted on and on, away from the devastation to come.

"Kerris!" It was Ali, astride his camel. "Where are you?"

"Here!" said Clark, putting what little was left of his breath into the cry.

"Give me your hand," Ali said. He wheeled his camel alongside and pulled Clark bodily onto the camel.

Holding Clark firmly with one arm, Ali cupped his free hand to his mouth. *"Allah-alloo-allee,"* he bellowed, and from the smoking wreckage of the oasis came the answering faint, *"Allah-alloo-allee,"* from the rest of the caravan. As they raced away over the sand, other camels with members of the caravan appeared from one side or another and joined the procession, until at last, as they neared the pipeline and the support where Clark's camel was tethered, there was a violent roar behind them.

Silently they reined in, looked back. Sheets of flame shot high into the sky, followed by another explosion, and another, mingled with the far-away screams of El Bima's henchmen. Ali threw back his head suddenly and laughed—a joyous satisfied howl of almost barbaric glee. . . .

It was the following night when the caravan reached Qibiq. For some hours Clark had worried about the niceties of rewarding Ali. It was evident the Arab was no ordinary caravaneer, and how can you pay a man who has twice saved your life?

Something of this he attempted to say as they guided their camels into the town. Ali merely smiled. "It is true that one cannot offer money to a man who has saved your life," he agreed. "Neither does a man take money from the employer of his sister."

"Sister?" Clark repeated. "You mean—Noami?"

"You did not know?" Ali sounded amused. "She is Noami Oulaida, but perhaps she would not have spoken of me. We have not always agreed in our methods of helping our country. But in this one thing, she knew that I too, sought El Bima. She will be waiting, now, anxious to know how we fared. It will give her pleasure if you would honor our poor home."

Full darkness had fallen when Clark reached Bet Oulaida on the outskirts of Qibiq. It was a stucco house surrounded by a high wall, indistinguishable from its neighbors until he stepped into the garden. There in the jasmine-perfumed night air, Noami came to meet him.

She had put off the strictly tailored European garb of her office hours, and wore native dress. In the softly swinging full skirt, the dancing bangles on her wrists and the gold embroidered sleeves covering her shoulders, she was the epitome of the East and all the mystery of woman.

"And so," she said softly, "you went to see for yourself. My brother has told me of your bravery and what you have done for Arabia."

"Did he tell you, also," Clark smiled, "that he twice saved my life? It is I who owe you more than I can repay. How shall I ever thank you, Noami?"

For a long moment she was silent while the perfume of her hair tickled his nose pleasurably. When she raised her head, there was an indescribable sadness to her face in the faint moonlight. "There is no way," she said slowly. "You will go back to the one to whom your heart turns. Perhaps one day you will come again to Qibiq, and bring your family with you . . . . and there will never be a way for you to thank me"—her voice faltered, dropped to a murmur—"as I should like you to thank me."

Clark had no words, but out of his new confidence, he put his arms about her gently, drew her close and kissed her. •

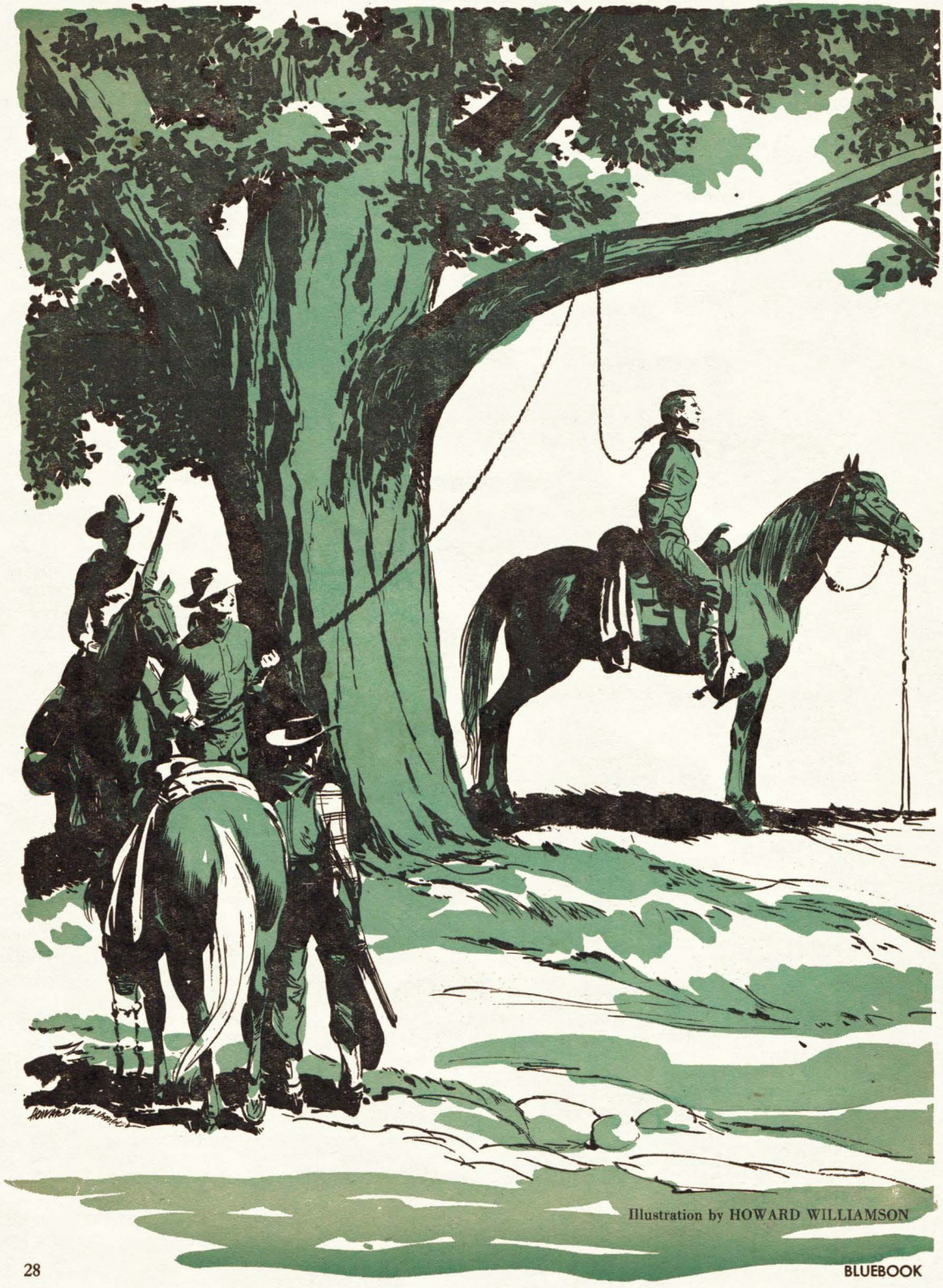
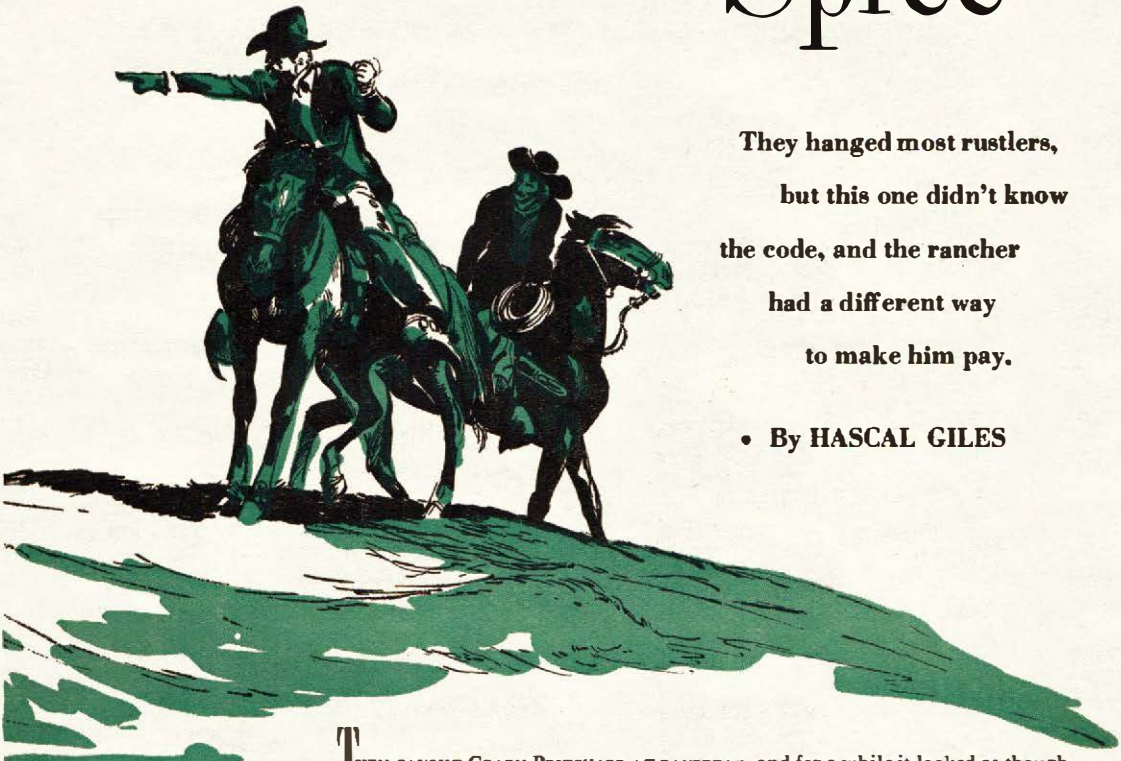


Illustration by HOWARD WILLIAMSON

Hanging Spree

They hanged most rustlers, but this one didn't know the code, and the rancher had a different way to make him pay.

• By HASCAL GILES



THEY CAUGHT GRADY PRITCHARD AT DAYBREAK, and for a while it looked as though they were going to hang him on the spot. The posse had been riding all night, and finally had picked up Pritchard's trail in a sandy stretch of badlands ten miles south of the Rocking Chair Ranch. The only watering-place for miles was Mustang Springs, so they holed up there and waited for him. When Grady crept through the brush at dawn to wash the sleep out of his eyes, he found himself looking into six drawn guns backed by hard and accusing faces.

"Fetch a rope boys," Lige Sampson said out of a corner of his mouth. He looked over Pritchard's wiry frame from head to foot, spotting the missing heel on the man's right boot. "We sure ain't made no mistake," he said. Sampson reached into the pocket of his jeans and tossed a torn chunk of leather at Pritchard's feet.

A roar of agreement rose from the other men, and one of them turned back toward the horses to get a lass' rope.

Pritchard was surprisingly calm, considering the spot he was in. "Mistake about what, gents?" he asked quietly. The expression in his pale blue eyes did not match the control in his voice. He was looking from face to face, his tongue wetting his lips at intervals. A fine spray of sweat began to show through the sandy stubble of beard on his thin face. "If you're goin' this far to keep me from claiming a share of graze in this country, I've got some folks back in Kaintuck who'll take it to be a powerful big mistake. They sure can carry a grudge, them uncles of mine."

Sampson spat a stream of tobacco juice at a lizard and snorted. He recited the case against Pritchard in a bored tone.

SOMEBODY had stolen eight head of prime beef from the Rocking Chair Ranch the previous afternoon, and Sampson was the first to miss them. From sign picked up around the grazing-ground, Sampson figured it to be a one-man job, and reasoned that the rustler might return to slip off with another small bunch of cattle. His hunch had been right. Sampson had hidden in a clump of greasewood, and about dark a rider appeared and started cutting a cow out from the herd. Sampson opened fire, and the way the rider had flinched he thought his aim had been good. But as the horseman pounded away, Sampson found he'd only shot off the man's bootheel. Afterward he'd gone to the ranch and reported the loss to his boss, Blaine Kilmer. Within an hour Kilmer had rounded up four of his neighbors and the posse was on the trail.

"Eight cows, you say?" Pritchard said incredulously. "Why, man, I've looked down from the hills up there long enough to know that the Rocking Chair must have a thousand to fifteen hundred head of cattle runnin' over it. Unless you just happened to have a certain bunch tallied, you'd never miss eight cows!"

Sampson shifted the rifle under his arm. "You stole 'em."

"I ain't saying that," Pritchard said quickly. "That chunk of leather you've been packing around with you ain't exactly evidence. It could be anything—a pad off a buckboard's brake shoe or a worn-out stirrup. I could have lost my bootheel by stepping out of my saddle in a rock pile or by hookin' it on a step."

As far as Sampson was concerned, Grady Pritchard's reasoning didn't merit a reply. He said over his shoulder: "Hand me that rope, and then some of you boys tear out the brush around that biggest sapling over there. It'll hold him all right."

It took the men less than ten minutes to get the underbrush out of the way so a horse could stand under a pockmarked cottonwood ten feet from the slow-running stream. They found Pritchard's horse behind a weather-worn rock about fifty yards away, and they allowed the man the dignity of sitting his own mount for the occasion. Aside from the necessary planning for the proceedings, there was little talk among them. Sampson, who as foreman of the Rocking Chair felt personally responsible for losing the cattle, fashioned the hang-knot himself. He also announced that he would lash the bronc from beneath Pritchard when the time came.

Pritchard had said nothing while they bound his hands and lifted him to his saddle. His face had grown pale, however, and the knot of muscle at the point of his jaw indicated his teeth were clenched to make sure they wouldn't chatter. Until the rope was knotted properly around the man's neck, Sampson had been left completely in charge. But now Blaine Kilmer kneed his horse up close to Pritchard, and Sampson moved respectfully into the background. The stolen cattle had belonged to Kilmer, and he deserved to speak his mind.

The heat of anger had put a red sheen over Kilmer's broad face, making his walrus mustache look white instead of its usual iron-gray. He had said little since they had waylaid Pritchard, but all the men were aware of his fierce temper.

"Have your last say, Pritchard," Kilmer growled, flexing the muscles of his powerful shoulders as if he longed to lay hands on the mounted man. "And let this go with you to your grave: this didn't happen because you chose to squat on what used to be Rocking Chair graze. I never have liked squatters, but I've always knowed that if I don't have title to a piece of land, the land would have to go some day. I've made no trouble about that, and you can't hold anything against me. Now, what's your last words, Pritchard?"

Pritchard took a deep breath. His pale blue eyes met the flinty-gray gaze of Blaine Kilmer. "Just this, mister! You ain't no law, so what you're doing can't be right. And there ain't much to a man who'd hang another for eight cows!"

Although Kilmer was a man of middle age, and one of the first to graze cattle in the Gila Bend country, the code of the plains which said rustlers were hanged was far older than he was. He had never questioned the rule, and he didn't question it now. The law as some knew it, law represented by a man sworn to an oath and decorated with a badge, was new in the West and not always at hand. Kilmer and his friends had done what they felt they had to do. Hanging rustlers was as much a part of their job as killing marauding wolves. So it wasn't the challenge Grady Pritchard made of his authority that angered Kilmer; it was the fact that Pritchard belittled the weight of the crime.

Kilmer rose in his stirrups, arm cocked, restraining a desire to smash his gloved fist into Pritchard's face.

"You keep saying that!" Kilmer bellowed. "Eight cows! You figure that you're out here to raise cattle—and you keep saying 'eight cows' as easy as a man spits!"

Dropping back into the saddle with disgust, Kilmer reined his horse around and turned his back on the bound man. Lige Sampson spurred up quickly to replace him, glancing at the rope to make sure it was ready. Just then a smile crossed Blaine Kilmer's face. He wheeled his horse around and shouted at Sampson.

"Cut him down, Lige!"

Lige Sampson hesitated, and Kilmer folded his hands on the saddlehorn and sent a reassuring glance over the whole crowd. "It was my cows he stole, so I'll be the one to say how they're paid for. Cut him down and turn him over to me."

A BLAZING sun shone in Pritchard's face, sending balls of sweat rolling down his shirt collar and making his back chafe against the ragged flannel shirt. His shoulderblade itched, but he couldn't scratch it because his hands were still tied behind him.

He had ridden from Mustang Springs to the Rocking Chair Ranch in the same tiring posture, and now Kilmer left him sitting in the saddle. The rancher dismounted and went into the bunkhouse. He returned in a few minutes with a ten-foot bullwhip and an extra pair of boots. After he'd hung both of these on his saddlehorn, he untied Pritchard's hands.

Except for a buxom Crow woman waddling around inside the kitchen, the Rocking Chair was deserted. Kilmer had sent Lige Sampson scouring the badlands for the eight missing steers, and the other members of his crew were already scattered over the range on their daily assignments.

Swinging into saddle again, Kilmer palmed the wicked-looking bullwhip and looked at Grady Pritchard.

"The rest of this day, mister, you'll follow my orders or you'll feel the bite of this. I'll have a gun handy, too, in case you try to get too tough. Come on."

They rode northward for an hour, working up into the foothills, climbing over rougher ground all the time. The sun was like a hot clinker and the whole earth was its forge. By midmorning Pritchard was panting, and there was little comfort in the blistering air he sucked into his lungs.

Kilmer pushed on until they rode in between two ugly granite crags, and here he at last called a halt.

"This is a box canyon, Pritchard," he said. "You can't get out any way but this, and I'll be sittin' right here for a while. It's the kind of place where yearlings and mossyhorns like to hide during roundup. Must be ten, twelve head in there. Go in and run 'em out. If I have to come after you, I'll use this whip on you."

There had been no change in the disdainful expression on Kilmer's leathery face since he'd stopped the hanging spree. Pritchard looked into the man's determined eyes for a moment, and headed into the canyon without a word. He came back an hour later with two long-horned steers thrashing through the brush in front of him. He had his dun lined out in a lope, and he was swinging his lariat in a whistling loop in front of him. The steers bellowed and tossed their horns, but Pritchard kept pushing them hard. They saw daylight in front of them, sensed an end to their freedom, and their wild hearts rebelled.

It was almost too swift to watch, but all cowmen have seen it happen. The running steers separated suddenly, both turning in a sharp half-circle to retrace their trail. Pritchard's horse sensed it before the rider, rearing in the air to escape the dangerous horns as a steer plowed beneath its raised forefeet. Pritchard let out a surprised yell, and went sailing off into the brush. The rear hoofs of one steer thumped against his ribs in passing, and Pritchard rolled over with a groan.

He had the wind knocked out of him, but there was nothing broken. Kilmer made sure of this, and then he stood over him with the bullwhip and told him to go back and get the steers. Pritchard struggled to his feet and walked slowly to his horse. He pulled himself into the saddle by grabbing the horn, and the fatigue in him was a thing that could almost be seen.

THE next time Pritchard came pounding out of the canyon he was chasing a different steer, a yearling. He guided the animal successfully onto level ground, his sweat-smeared face set in determined lines. Satisfied, he trotted his pony back to face Kilmer. But the rancher wasn't satisfied yet; he sent Pritchard back into the canyon again and again; when finally he signaled a rest Pritchard looked as though he might fall off the horse any minute.

"All right," Pritchard said between breaths as he dismounted, "you've had your game, Kilmer."

Kilmer cracked the whip angrily an inch from Pritchard's shoulder, causing him to wince in fear. "It's no game. That's eight cows, that's all. Now build a fire."

"Fire?" Pritchard asked numbly, sleeving sweat off his brow.

"Fire. When we catch hideouts and yearlings we brand them."

When he had a pile of dry wood glowing in red embers, Kilmer told Pritchard to rope out one of the steers. The rancher took a Rocking Chair branding-iron from a saddlebag and squatted by the fire to wait. He warned Pritchard there would be another posse on his trail if he tried to keep riding, and felt confident the man would return.

After a few minutes the steer came tearing through the brush within sight, Pritchard riding wildly behind it. The squatter made his throw, and the loop settled accurately before the yearling's forefeet. But as the steer catapulted in a somersault, Pritchard went pitching out of the saddle behind it, still holding to the rope. He hit the ground limply this time, rolled and got to his feet. But his cheek had scraped dirt, leaving it bloody and bruised. The steer was gone, and Kilmer ordered him to try again. The rancher showed him how to make a dally hitch around the horn with the rope when his noose settled, and Pritchard already had seen that his cowpony would brace its legs and hold the line taut.

Pritchard got the steer dogged down helplessly in front of the fire, and Kilmer handed him the red-hot iron. He made a light and faltering sweep with it, and Kilmer made him try it twice more before the brand was deep enough. Grady Pritchard didn't like the smell of burned hair and flesh or the feel of quivering hide beneath his knee. He held his breath and gritted his teeth, but he branded the steers and branded them right.

Kilmer kept Pritchard at the canyon for another hour, roping steers and burning brands, and the squatter was beginning to think he had rounded up at least two dozen cattle when the rancher finally motioned him to stop.

"Eight cows," Kilmer said tonelessly. He scattered the embers of the branding-fire with his toe and then threw sand over the ashes to make sure every spark was covered.

Afterward they rode south again; Kilmer kept slightly to the left and a pace to the rear of Pritchard all the time. He rode with squinted eyes sweeping over his pastures and his cattle. It was almost sunset when he halted to watch a cow running wildly across the prairie, bucking, flicking her tail like an animal gone mad.

"Throw a rope on her," he said to Pritchard. "But don't make her fall."

It wasn't as much trouble as the canyon roping had been, but the weariness in Grady Pritchard made it a slow job. He had the animal standing docilely with a rope around her neck when Kilmer rode up. The rancher gave Pritchard a razor-sharp Bowie and pointed to a festering sore on the cow's hip.

"Now make a slash along that broken place on her hip there," Kilmer said. He took a firm grip on the rope. "I won't let her go any place. Go ahead; slice that spot good and deep."

PRITCHARD moved warily to the cow's side, hesitated a moment, then made a swift incision along the animal's hip. The cow barely moved. She turned her head to look back at the man, and Pritchard imagined he saw an expression of gratefulness in her mellow eyes. Kilmer made a half-hitch in the rope around his saddle-horn, stepping quickly to the ground. He placed his hands on either side of the incision, spreading the opening gently. Pritchard grimaced when he saw the wriggling mass of white organisms at the bottom of the gash, and he turned his head away.

"Get a stick and dig 'em out of there," Kilmer said. "They're screwworms. Them things can ruin a good beef for you. A cow gets hooked by another one, or scratched on a piece of brush, and that's what happens this time of year. A bug lays eggs in the wound and first thing you know the poor critter's in misery. That's how they get there, and ain't but one sure way to get 'em out—*dig* 'em out."

The paleness which fatigue and fear had put in his face turned to an unhealthy yellow now, but Pritchard did as he was told. He picked a splinter off a dead cedar stump and went to work, flipping the tangle of worms out of the cut and into the grass at his feet. Kilmer got a bottle of antiseptic from his saddlebag and soaked the wound with the liquid. Then the rancher crammed a dirty rag into the incision to hold the liquid there.

"We'll let that soak a minute, and then I'll pour a little oil over the place to keep the flies off," Kilmer explained.

It required a great deal of riding to find eight cases of screwworms in the Rocking Chair herd, but Kilmer insisted on finding them; with bullwhip ready, Kilmer ordered the squatter to complete the entire operation alone.

Then, in the same tone he had used before, Kilmer said, "Eight cows." He rolled a cigarette, watching Pritchard out of knowing eyes, and added: "I'm hungry and it's getting dark. Let's head back to the ranch."

Talk of food at a time like this overcame the faltering will-power which Pritchard had summoned to help him. He tried to circle Kilmer and walk to the other side of his horse

with slow dignity, but he didn't quite make it. The rolling in his stomach could be contained no longer, and he was sick on the ground.

By the time Kilmer had finished smoking, Pritchard was over his sickness, but the humiliation of it was like a weight in his stomach. He mounted when the rancher did, without waiting for any command, and there was no conversation between them as they rode back to the Rocking Chair. There was tenseness and uncertainty in Pritchard's face, and he watched the trail all the way in vain for a chance to make a break.

SAMPSON met them at the corrals and told Kilmer he had searched the range without finding any trace of the missing cattle. He talked with Kilmer, but his eyes were on Grady Pritchard, hard and challenging.

"Forget them for right now," Kilmer said quietly. "But I aim to have satisfaction for them."

The rancher motioned Sampson on his way; when they were alone again he turned back toward the squatter.

"You can keep the boots I loaned you for the day's work," he said. "But that don't settle things. I'm goin' to take them eight cows out of your hide." Kilmer tossed the bullwhip behind him and unbuckled his gunbelt, letting it drop at his feet.

Pritchard had been wondering about the outcome of this all day, and now that it was here he was almost glad. A man like Kilmer wasn't going to pluck him from a hangman's noose and let him go away untouched—but Pritchard felt he'd taken all the punishment he deserved for one day. He had been cursed, threatened, humiliated and worked like a common prisoner.

When he saw how it was going to end. Pritchard stepped stiffly out of saddle and walked forward a few feet. He was a lean, lanky man with a blunt chin and a square jaw that gave no hint of the weakness Kilmer seemed to think was in him. Although he was worn out and bruised and saddle-sore, something inside of him welcomed this fight. He really had wanted it since he had come here a month ago. People had started pointing at him then, making fun of him because he had nothing and waiting for a chance to get him in a spot like this. He had been wrong in the way he had decided to get back at them, perhaps, but he was right now, in his mind, and in recognizing that his showing against Kilmer would be more important than a mere victory in a fight.

"I like this better than all them guns," Pritchard said between tight lips. He had grown up where rough-and-tumble fighting was a form of amusement, and there was no fear in him of another's bare fists. He hooked his thumbs significantly in the waistband of his ragged jeans. A gun had been aimed at him most of the day, but Pritchard was unarmed.

"You won't like it a bit," Kilmer grunted, and came at him.

Pritchard didn't run out to meet his opponent, or sidestep the rush. He set one leg slightly behind him and caught the full brunt of Blaine Kilmer's charge. Pritchard felt the shock of Kilmer's weight jar him all the way to his toes, but he had turned his arms in such a way that the point of his elbow rammed the rancher in the middle just above his belt. Pritchard heard the wind hiss out of the man, then he caught his own balance and straightened. Kilmer was still bent at the waist, gasping for breath. Pritchard's knotted left fist slashed down on the back of the man's neck, and his right smashed Kilmer on the side of the jaw about the same time. With a faint groan, the rancher tumbled forward into the dirt.

Pritchard didn't wait for him to get up; he reached down and grabbed Kilmer by the shirt collar. But his overconfidence proved costly—for the rancher was hurt, but not as badly as Pritchard thought. As Pritchard tugged at him, Kilmer lunged to his feet and slammed his head under Pritchard's chin, snapping Pritchard's head back between his shoulders. Cursing angrily, Kilmer pounded three sharp blows into Pritchard's face, then cocked a right hand to put him down for good.

Pritchard saw it coming in time to roll his head to one side. The rancher's arm flicked past his ear, and while it was hanging over his shoulder, Pritchard moved in quickly. He grabbed Kilmer's arm, turning to get his hip into the man's middle. Then he bent sharply, yanking on the arm. Yelling in alarm, Kilmer sailed over Pritchard's shoulder. Dust puffed up from the trampled yard as Kilmer landed in an awkward sprawl. Pritchard piled on top of him, grinding Kilmer's head back into the dirt as he tried to sit up. He pinned Kilmer's arms down with his knees, and then sat astride of his chest, pumping blows into the man's face.

Blood from the rancher's nose turned his sweeping mustache a muddy pink, but Pritchard was so tired and dizzy he couldn't see what he was doing to the man's face. He didn't care; he wanted only to be sure Kilmer didn't get up and hit him again. He couldn't withstand another onslaught from those powerful fists—and even though the rancher didn't deserve a beating like this, Pritchard couldn't afford to take one either.

Kilmer's voice came to him after a while as through a roaring fog, but Pritchard finally heard and got up.

"Enough," Kilmer breathed painfully. "I've had enough." He got to his feet, bracing his hands on his knees while he gasped for breath. At last he was able to stand erect and there was no rancor in his eyes as he watched Pritchard mount his horse.

"It's been a long time since I took a lickin'," he said, "and I reckon you couldn't do that unless you was pretty mad inside. But it won't change my ways none. A man does a day's work at the Rocking Chair, he's entitled to a meal."

"Thanks," Pritchard said, wiping blood from his own nose. "I'll pass up the grub." He turned half around in the saddle, and gazed at the ground.

"I come from farm folks," he said awkwardly. "That is, I did until my folks passed on a while back and I came out here. Back home, if we pass under a apple tree and the fruit is layin' around on the ground wastin', we take what we need and the man who owns the tree don't call it stealin'. Eight cows just standin' around eatin' grass look a whole lot like apples waitin' to be used for somebody's good. But eight cows that have been choused from the brush, roped, branded and mebbe doctored for screwworms look a lot different—they look like a man's heart and his hopes and a yard of his hide. Nobody back home would take a man's flesh and blood."

For a moment it appeared that he might say more, but his face hardened suddenly and he rode swiftly away.

THE hanging spree at Mustang Springs got to be quite a story in the Gila Bend country after that, and everyone agreed it would have been a bad mistake if it had come off. For, one at a time, during the next few days, all the missing Rocking Chair cows were found grazing somewhere on the range, looking as if they had just strayed temporarily.

No one ever accused Grady Pritchard of being a rustler again, either, and Blaine Kilmer even gave him a riding job for a few years until he got on his feet enough to start his own spread. But a peculiar expression lighted Kilmer's eyes the day Pritchard stopped by the Rocking Chair after he'd ridden to the county seat to register his brand.

"Well, Pritchard," Kilmer said, "what's the county's newest spread goin' to be called?"

A grin played around Grady Pritchard's lips as he answered: "Nothin' fancy like the Rocking Chair, Kilmer. Just two little numbers that say the same thing twice. My brand's the 88." •

Illustration by HANK BERGER

The HIGH COST of SWORDFISH

• By ARTHUR MARX

Mr. Marx learns the hard way that it's cheaper to eat fish in a diner than to catch your own. But would Ernest Hemingway eat fish in a diner?

FOR YEARS, EVERY TIME I picked up a magazine and came across a picture of Ernest Hemingway swordfishing off the coast of Cuba, I had the same reaction.

I felt that probably the main difference between Hemingway's writing and mine was that I didn't do enough swordfishing. In fact, I didn't do any swordfishing. Not that the idea didn't appeal to me; it was just that it had never occurred to me that swordfishing was for anyone but wealthy sportsmen who owned their own yachts.

But recently a friend of mine named Harry Kronman was over at my house. Harry, it turned out, is an ardent fisherman. He has caught salmon in the Columbia River, tuna off Nova Scotia, pneumonia off Alaska, and marlin off Guaymas, Mexico. And he's got a bloodstained fishing cap to prove it.

Somehow the discussion got around to fishing, and when Harry learned that I had a secret yen to catch a swordfish—well, he could hardly contain his elation. He jumped from his chair and exclaimed, "You really want to catch a swordfish? Well, man, why didn't you say so before? How about this weekend?"

"But, Harry," I replied, "isn't it awfully expensive?"

"Nonsense," he said. "Anybody can afford it! We can charter a private boat at Catalina for only fifty bucks a day, with all the equipment thrown in, and we'll split the cost. You can afford twenty-five bucks, can't you?"

There it was, as simple as that: a chance to show up Ernest Hemingway and to get away from the family—for only twenty-five dollars. A man would be a fool to turn down a proposition like that.

And I'm no fool—at least I didn't think so at the time.

"Well, if we're going away I'll have to buy some new clothes," announced Irene, my wife.

"And I need some swimming trunks," said Steve, my five-year-old delinquent.

Harry frowned. "Ethel and my brat are going to stay home," he informed us. "If there's one place I refuse to take Ethel and Ricky, it's on a fishing trip!"

Since Harry felt that way, there was nothing I could do but put my foot down and suggest to Irene that she and Steve stay home too, and perhaps get together with Harry's wife and son for some kind of an outing.

"You're not going to Catalina without me," said Irene firmly. "My manicurist has told me all about what kind of a place that Avalon is. It's filled with single girls on the prowl!"

Well, before you could say "Baked barracuda," it was Friday night and the Marx family was holed up in a room at the St. Catherine Hotel on Catalina Island. By then, I already had a substantial investment in the swordfish I was planning to catch. There were the new beach outfits for Irene and Steve; the boat fares over to the island from the mainland, and, of course, what it was costing us to stay at the hotel—thirty-six dollars a day for a room that overlooked the gardener's toolshed.

THE only cheerful note was that Irene and Steve, and Ethel and Ricky, had promised not to interfere with our fishing. They were going to stay behind and take in the sights, Irene having heard that no visitor to Catalina Island could afford to miss the exciting rides on the glass-bottom boats, and Wrigley's Bird Farm.

Harry was up at five Saturday morning, knocking frantically on our door.

"For Heaven's sake—hurry!" he shouted, as I groped for my clothes in the dark. "The swordfish are starting to jump. From my room I could see them breaking water."

The boat Harry had hired was a thirty-five-foot power craft called the *Restless*. She had once been white, but by now most of her paint had peeled off, and she smelled of dead fish.

The skipper, a weatherbeaten old sea dog (who also smelled of dead fish) was revving up the engine when we arrived on the dock.

"You the guys who aim to catch a swordfish?" he asked, glancing rather contemptuously at my store-crisp blue denim outfit and Harry's bloodstained fishing cap.

We nodded eagerly, and the skipper motioned us aboard.

As the *Restless* headed for the open sea, Harry and I stood on the stern and waved goodby to our families. Our families, however, were unable to wave back, for they were still in their hotel rooms, sound asleep.

"Nothing like the salt air to make you feel good," Harry shouted over the restful roar of the motor. "As soon as I set foot in a boat, I forget all my worries. How about you?"

"I feel good too," I said, filling my lungs with the refreshing exhaust fumes.

Sleepy though I was, I must admit that it was quite a thrill for me to hear the skipper announce a little while later that we were in "swordfish waters." I jumped up eagerly from my swivel chair on the stern and reached for the deep-sea fishing rod that had been assigned to me.

"I'll bait your hook for you," offered Harry, reaching into a bucket and bringing out a dead flying fish. "Swordfish are just about the smartest things that swim. If you don't bait your hook just right, you might just as well have stayed home in bed."

Grateful for such a friend, I watched Harry insert the huge hook in the back of the flying fish and toss it into the sea.

"Let out about seventy-five yards of line," Harry advised me, "and then put your clicker on. When a fish strikes, your reel will sing out and the skipper will stop the boat. Then count to ten, throw on your drag to set the hook, and start reeling her in."

My blood tingled with the excitement of the expected catch as I sat there tilted back in my chair, with the blue sky overhead and a staunch boat beneath me—to say nothing of a bucketful of dead flying fish that were beginning to smell.

Yes, there was no doubt about it: I was ready!

But the swordfish was not.

About eleven o'clock, Harry decided that maybe he had put the bait on the hooks the wrong way. We reeled in, changed the position of the flying fish on the hooks, and let our lines out again.

By one o'clock, we had forsaken fresh bait in favor of trolling with feathers. By midafternoon, Harry was convinced that the skipper was at fault. The arcs he was making with the boat weren't large enough, and he was trolling too slowly.

Harry took over the helm personally.

But, by five o'clock, when we were heading back to the dock, the closest we had come to a fish was the tuna sandwich I had brought along for lunch. I was tired, sunburned, discouraged and a little angry with myself for having wasted the money.

"It wasn't wasted," said Harry philosophically. "Chalk it up to experience. Tomorrow we'll make up for it."

"Tomorrow?"

"Certainly. You want to try it again, don't you? You can't go back to Beverly Hills empty-handed—a failure. What'll your friends think?"

I hadn't looked at it in quite that way before, but I could see his point.

AT dinner that evening, when Harry and I announced that we were planning on taking the *Restless* out again the following day, our wives exchanged disapproving glances.

"Well, I'm not going back to that bird farm again," insisted Irene. "When you've seen one bird, you've seen them all."

"And that goes double for glass-bottomed boats," Ethel remarked bitterly.

"I've got an idea," suggested Harry hopefully. "Why don't you girls take the children out hunting for wild boar? I hear the hills are full of them."

"I've got a better idea," replied Irene. "We'll take the children swordfishing instead."

Harry and I were too weak from the sun to put up much of an argument.

If we didn't catch any swordfish Sunday morning, it wasn't because fishing conditions weren't ideal—or that we weren't fully equipped.

The girls, who had made it known beforehand that they were coming along only for the ride, were amply supplied with sandwiches, fried chicken, thermos jugs of coffee, the latest reading matter and lots of suntan oil. And Steve had brought along his Space Patrol rocket gun—a harmless little toy that expels a rubber-tipped missile capable of putting your eye out if you are within range.

As soon as the sun came out, the girls stripped down to their bathing suits, found a comfortable place on the bow—away from the children—and spent the morning applying suntan oil to each other's lily-white shoulders.

That left it squarely up to Harry and me to keep the waves, which were larger than the previous day, from washing Steve and Ricky overboard,

and to prevent them from maiming one another with the rocket gun.

I couldn't help feeling that it was never like that when Ernest Hemingway took to the open sea.

The lunch, I have to admit, was delicious; and afterward Harry and I returned to our rods with new hope.

It was around that time that Steve sidled up to me, his face a sort of hunter's-green color, and said, "I don't feel so good, Daddy."

Irene must have suspected what was wrong with Steve, for without a word from me, she let out a scream, scrambled down from the bow, and rushed Steve over to the side of the boat—and just in time.

"I wish you'd tell your family not to make so much noise," complained Harry. "They're scaring away all the fish."

The *Restless*, meanwhile, was living up to her name. She was lurching uncomfortably from side to side, and her deck was slippery with spray.

"Arthur!" It was Irene's voice, and she was furious. "Will you please put down that rod and come over and help me? Can't you see that *your* son is seasick?"

"Yes, dear," I said obediently, and I started to reel in my line. As I did, I felt a jolt on the other end of it that nearly pulled me over the stern, and my clicker sang out noisily.

That I had actually hooked a swordfish never occurred to me. "I guess I've snagged some seaweed," I told Harry. "Will you get it off for me? I'd better see what Irene wants."

I started to hand him my pole, but he drew back.

"Are you crazy, man?" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "You've got a strike!"

All hell broke loose as my reel continued to unwind at a merry clip. The skipper cut the engine and came running to the stern with a gaff, with Ethel and Ricky close at his heels. And in the background I could hear Steve groaning and Irene threatening to divorce me if I didn't come at once.

UNDER the circumstances, I made the only decision I could. I told Harry that he'd have to land the swordfish for me. But before I could protest, he and the skipper had strapped me securely into my swivel chair and were shouting instructions at me.

"Throw on your drag," said Harry. "And don't get excited! Just do as I say."

What could I do? I threw on my drag. My heavy rod bowed almost to the breaking-point, as the swordfish's frenzied leaps carried him in and out of the water.

The fight to the finish between two of nature's finest specimens was on!

For thirty minutes, with Harry screaming advice in my ear, I doggedly wound and unwound my reel. My hands were blistered, my arms ached, and I could hardly hold onto the rod. But the swordfish seemed farther away from the boat than ever.

"Harry," I finally gasped. "Take my rod and you play him for a while. I can't go on."

HARRY looked at me scornfully. "It's not sporting to alternate, and don't ever let me hear you say anything like that again!"

"Take it for a minute," I pleaded. "No one'll ever know."

"*I'd* know," replied Harry, walking away.

Somehow I managed to stick it out; and an hour and fifty-five minutes later I had the glassy-eyed monster alongside the boat. The skipper gaffed him, put a steel cable under his tail, and hauled him on board.

"Congratulations!" said Harry, flinging his arms around me. "That beauty must weigh at least two-fifty."

"Biggest one of the season," said the skipper.

"Can I feel him?" asked Steve, who had recovered by this time, and was gnawing on a piece of fried chicken. But Irene was sulking on a bench amidships, and chose to ignore both me and my swordfish. She thought I had deliberately hooked him to avoid my fatherly duties.

"What do you say we call Catalina on the ship-to-shore phone," Harry suggested to me, "and notify them of our catch?"

"It's traditional," added the skipper.

"Then do it—by all means," I said enthusiastically.

It wasn't until after he had completed the call that the skipper made it known that there was an extra five-dollar charge for all ship-to-shore messages.

As the *Restless* headed for home, with her swordfish pennant flying in the breeze, the skipper turned to me and asked, "Mr. Marx, what do you want to do with your fish?"

This was something I hadn't thought of. "Well, I don't know," I replied. "What do you suggest?"

"I'd have him stuffed and mounted if I were you. He's a beauty."

I agreed that was a good idea.

"I know a place on the island where you can get it done for seventy-five cents a pound," said the skipper, handing me a business card.

IT didn't take any Einstein to figure out that getting this fish stuffed would cost somewhere in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars. For that price I could get a genuine reproduction of a Grandma Moses to hang over our fireplace instead.

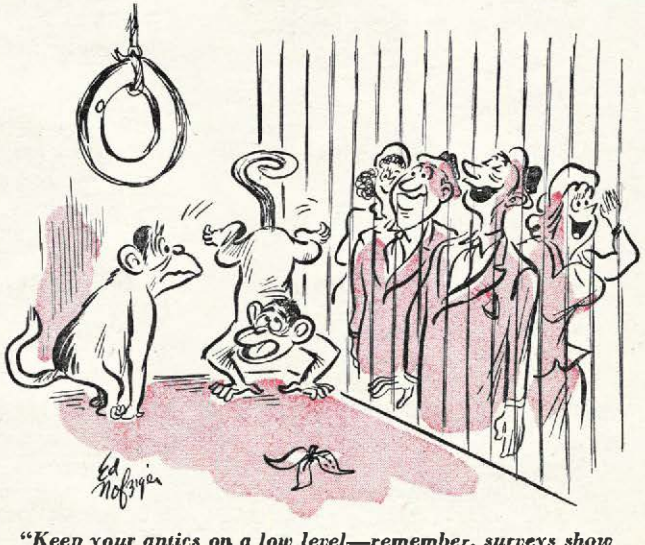
"I don't want to spend that much," I said. "What else can I do with him?"

"You can eat him."

"I don't like fish."

"Neither do I," said Harry quickly, as though he were afraid I might offer the fish to him.

"Can't we sell him?" I asked the skipper.



"Keep your antics on a low level—remember, surveys show the audience has the mentality of an eight-year-old child."

"Mr. Marx," said the skipper, his feelings obviously hurt, "this is a sporting boat. We're not allowed to sell fish commercially."

"Then you keep him," I said generously.

"I don't want him."

I tried to remember what Hemingway did with his swordfish, but I couldn't recall ever reading about how he handled that problem.

"Then let's throw him overboard," I finally suggested.

Again the skipper looked at me coldly. "That's against the fish-and-game laws. Five-hundred-dollar fine if they catch you. I won't be a party to it—might lose my boat-operator's license. Besides, there's a thousand-buck reward for anyone reporting such a violation. Never can tell who might talk."

I got his point. I also consented to let his friend stuff my fish. What was the use of going to all the trouble of catching a swordfish if you couldn't hang him up in your house and show him off to your friends?

On the dock, a crowd awaited the *Restless*. Since mine was the only swordfish caught that day, our ship-to-shore message had been relayed all over the island.

As my fish was hoisted up on a block and tackle for the islanders to admire, a young man ran over to me and said, "Mr. Marx, I'm the official photographer. You want your picture taken with the fish, don't you? It's only two dollars a picture."

I recognized a bargain when I saw one. That was cheap compared with my other expenses. "Okay, I'll take one," I said.

"It's three for five dollars," he informed me. "I don't print less than three."

I had to go through with it. He'd already set up his camera and tripod, and Irene and Steve and the Kronmans were all grouped around me and the fish.

The moment the photographer snapped the shutter, a group of anxious spectators, all carrying their own cameras, pushed us aside and promptly proceeded to take pictures of themselves standing beside *my* swordfish.

As we disentangled ourselves from the mob, another very effusive gentleman rushed up to me and shook my weary hand.

"Mr. Marx, congratulations! You are now a member in good standing of the Tuna Club."

"I am?" I said, wide-eyed. "I never thought I'd make it."

"Well, you did indeed." He handed me an application blank. "And if you'll just fill this in and send us a check for twenty dollars, you can be a *lifetime* member!"

I had just finished applying a match to the application, when a tall bronzed young man accosted me. "Mr. Marx, we of the Catalina Sports Gift Shop wish to congratulate you on catching the biggest swordfish of the week!"

"How much will it cost?" I sighed.

He gave me an aggrieved look. "Nothing," he said. "Absolutely nothing. It's the policy of my employer to present a free gift to everyone who catches a swordfish. So if you and your wife will accompany me to the shop, I'll have your gift prepared for you."

"Thanks," I said, "but I don't need anything," and I started to walk away fast.

"Arthur!" Irene scolded me. "How can you be so rude?" She turned to the man and said, "Of course, we'll accept your gift."

The gift turned out to be a small glass vase, fashioned to resemble a fish. It couldn't have sold for more than a dime, even at inflationary prices. The proprietor informed me that on this vase he would paste a typewritten inscription stating the size of the fish, by whom caught, and the date.

While the inscription was being typed out, Irene bought two more beach outfits for herself, and a complete Captain Video uniform for Steve.

My fame had already preceded me to the hotel. An announcement on the lobby bulletin board stated:

ARTHUR MARX—SWORDFISH—237 POUNDS—TWO HRS, 25 MINUTES.

While Irene and I were studying this, about a hundred and fifty hotel guests, in a festive mood, descended upon us and literally forced us into the cocktail lounge. There, for the next two hours, everyone, including the bellboys, hotel clerks and chambermaids, drank to my health.

There's no use in denying it; I was quite proud of myself. And Irene must have been impressed too, for when she spoke to me after that, it was in a friendlier tone.

Almost as friendly a tone, in fact, as the bartender used when he handed me a bill at the end of the evening for $137.68.

"I thought this was on the house," I protested.

The bartender favored me with a solicitous smile. "It's customary, Mr. Marx, for the man who catches the fish to treat everyone."

"Pay it," Harry advised me. "Don't ruin a wonderful day by being a cheapskate."

One afternoon, about a month later, my stuffed swordfish arrived at our house in a large crate. Wishing to surprise Irene, I unpacked the fish and hung it over the mantel.

"Get that fish down!" screamed Irene, the moment she saw it. "I won't have that frightening thing spoiling the looks of this room."

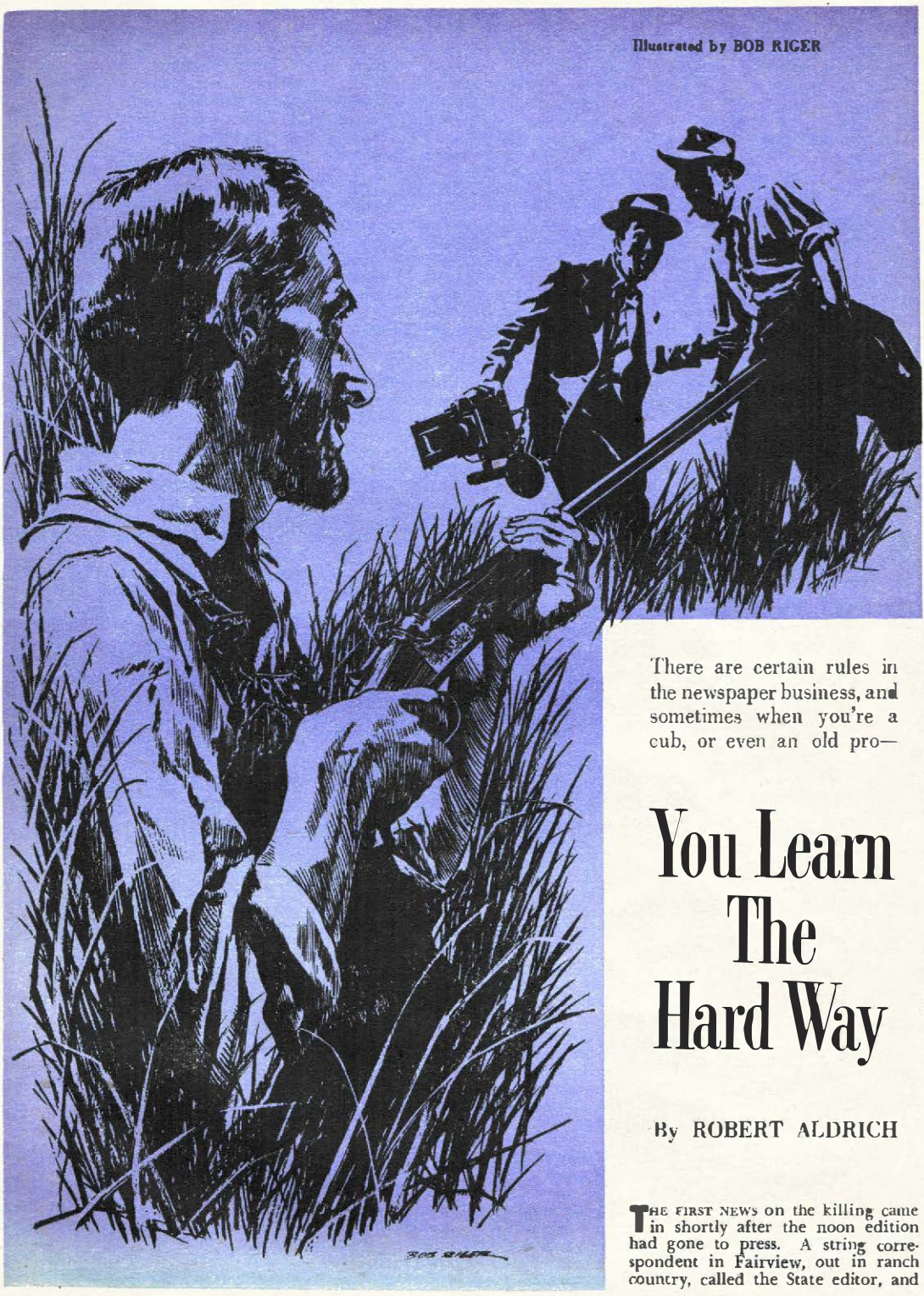
You see, we have Early American furniture, and it isn't an Early American swordfish.

"Well, what do you suggest I do with it?" I asked. "It cost me a fortune to catch it, and I'm not throwing it away now."

"Then we'll just have to build on a playroom or a den," she suggested. "You know—the kind of place where you can hang hunting and fishing trophies. I saw a wonderful room like that in some magazine. It belonged to some famous writer—I think it was Ernest Hemingway."

There's no need, of course, for me to tell you about the cost of building these days, but just in case you're not familiar with the subject, drop around and I'll be glad to show you the bill I got today from the contractor who recently completed our Swordfish Room.

It came to considerably more than twenty-five dollars. •



Illustrated by BOB RIGER

There are certain rules in the newspaper business, and sometimes when you're a cub, or even an old pro—

You Learn The Hard Way

By ROBERT ALDRICH

THE FIRST NEWS on the killing came in shortly after the noon edition had gone to press. A string correspondent in Fairview, out in ranch country, called the State editor, and

he passed it on to Jim Perrin, who was in the slot. Al Henderson didn't hear about it until Perrin handed him a sheet of jumbled information and told him to dress it up for a half-column on page one.

I can still do that, Al thought wryly as he glanced over the copy. His hand shook a little, rattling the paper, and something coiled up tight inside him. He wanted a drink.

Don't let them see. He forced himself to sit up straight in the chair. *They don't even have to smell liquor on my breath to fire me now. All it would take is the old man coming in and seeing me slouched over the desk, fighting off the need for a shot.*

He made his eyes focus on the sheet of paper and began to skim through the copy quickly, looking for a punchy lead. Suddenly the words caught his interest. It was just a hunch, an illogical spark deep in his mind, but it told him that a big one was brewing.

He found it in the third paragraph and the words seemed to jump under his pencil. He was right, this was a hot one!

THE wife of a State Legislator had been found shot to death in her home. The body of a hired hand had been found behind the garage. Another hired hand had disappeared. Half-column, hell! In the old days he would have had reporters running for the door on this one.

But in the old days he had been city editor. What he had said then had bite to it. When he said "listen," they listened, and when he put them on a story they jumped through hoops to get it.

Now, they ignored him with stiff politeness, trying not to notice the incipient shakes, trying not to remind him of what he had once been. He couldn't blame them. It was his own fault, and he was lucky to have this last chance.

He ran a fast rewrite through the typewriter and dropped it in front of Perrin. He knew his comments were not wanted, but he couldn't resist saying, "This looks like a hot one, Jim."

"That so?" Perrin asked, a shade of contempt in his voice. Perrin glanced at the story. "All right: show it to MacPherson, will you?"

Walking into the managing-editor's office, Al felt a sudden tension around his heart. He remembered how he and MacPherson had started together as cubs, and he was conscious now of the shabbiness of his suit. MacPherson kept up the show of hearty friendship, but Al knew that the lost years stood between them like an opaque curtain.

MacPherson grinned and slapped him on the shoulder.

Al showed him the story.

The lines deepened between MacPherson's eyes. "Mrs. Beckley—murdered? Terrible! I've been a guest out there at the ranch. . . . Who have we got out there, Al?"

"Nobody. Williams is our stringer in Fairview. He's closest, but he's still fifty, sixty miles from the Beckley ranch." Suddenly Al's mouth was dry and and his heart began to beat faster. He wanted this story, really wanted it.

He licked his lips. "Mac, listen. You said—sometime—when something came along. . . . Listen, this could be big. Those ranchers out there, a lot of 'em, have airplanes. They'll be organized. They'll turn this into one of those things that'll run for days. This is the kind of story I know. Let me cover it."

He hadn't meant to sound like that, his voice, husky, pleading. MacPherson looked at him, the furrows thickening around his eyes. He shook his head. "You couldn't do it, Al." His smile apologized. "Sure, you'd handle the story—you'd do it fine, Al. But I mean the physical beating; it takes a young fellow, somebody who can run around all night." He flipped a switch on his interoffice box. "Send Howard Bell in here, will you?"

"I'm in better shape than you think." Anger welled up. "I need this chance if I'm ever going to"—he choked—"going to get back up there."

Mac faced him, his eyes fiercely naked for an instant, a look that said, plainly, *I wish I could believe that, but I can't. We both know what you are.* But all he said was, "Sorry, Al. You stick on the rewrite desk. Perrin says you're doing good work."

The kid came in, then. That was all he was—a kid, maybe 19 or 20, trying to support a wife on what the *Bulletin* paid. A hotshot cub who had made it this far on gall, working himself up from copyboy to the police run. He sauntered in, showing a cocky grin. He was a good-looking, ruddy-faced, kid with broad shoulders; his gray suit was sharply pressed. He read the story and nodded confidently.

MacPherson said, "I want you to hire a plane and get out there, Howard." The managing editor leaned back in his chair. "Take a photographer along, of course."

Howard Bell copied off the names and tossed the story on the desk. "I can handle it myself," he said. "I can do my own camera work." Just like that.

"Fine." MacPherson cupped his fingers together. "Get some pictures as quick as you can. The bodies, if possible. The ranch. Everything. Send the pilot back here with the films and he can come back for you later. You may need a plane for a couple of days if it turns into an air-search. Phone us when you have anything."

The kid's eyes showed excitement now, and the blasé front faded a little.

Al stood there, and listened, and knew the thing he felt now was envy. That could be himself standing there twenty-odd years ago, with the world in front of him and never a suspicion that some day he'd be a hollow shadow begging for a chance to prove he still had it. Young Bell started out and MacPherson rose.

"Howard, come back here a minute, please."

The kid stopped at the door. MacPherson coughed. "Howard, the more I think of it, you may need somebody else. You might want to hold down a phone, for instance, if the competition gets tough." Al's heart began to pound, and MacPherson said with studied ease, "You think you'd like to go along, Henderson?"

Al managed to hide his feelings. "Sure. Why not?"

The disappointment that clouded the kid's face was unmistakable. Al knew that in Howard Bell's eyes he was a drag. A moment ago the thing had been all the kid's, a basket of fruit in his lap.

MacPherson rubbed his hands. "Fine, then! Better get going. I'll phone the airport and line up a plane for you." Howard Bell didn't say anything, and Al saw the corners of his mouth turn down.

Al stopped in the doorway and said, "Thanks, Mac," and MacPherson pointed an admonitory finger at him. "Don't let me down, pal."

AL caught up with the kid. "Well, Howard, looks like we'll have a little fun."

Howard turned, his glance withering. "Maybe." His pale blue eyes were suddenly hard. "But let's get one thing straight—it's *my* assignment. That understood?"

Al felt a tightening in his chest and only his pride kept back the tumult of anger. The insolent squirt! He said, coolly, "Let's just say we're on this together, Howard."

He was still trembling as he stopped by the copy desk to tell Perrin where he was going. In the washroom he splashed cold water on his face. He caught his own worried glance in the mirror and an instant of black dismay swept him so that he thought he was going to be sick. In the glass his gray-streaked hair mocked him.

He rubbed his face with a paper towel and started thinking about the old days—about the time when he'd have taken a yarn like this one in his stride, about the earlier times when he and Lila had talked about what they'd do with his first pay-raise. That was the most unreal part of it all: that Lila had married again and now had a family of her own.

Lord, if he could only have one drink!

When he packed his overnight bag, he slipped in a fifth of rye. He steeled himself against having one for the road.

He wouldn't open it until the time came when he couldn't go any longer. If his legs gave out on him, or he was in danger of blacking out he'd drink just enough to keep going. It was only sense to have it along. Besides, he couldn't face starting without it.

HOWARD was waiting for him at the airport; the pilot had the plane warmed up. The pilot was a stocky, good-natured man, a few years older than Howard. He'd flown for the *Bulletin* before and, as he and Howard talked, Al had a sense of being left out. That was what hurt these days. He tried not to think about the past, tried not to think at all.

The roar of the high-winged cabin plane numbed his ears, lulled him into a drowsy forgetfulness. Howard sat beside him, his Speed Graphic in his lap. Al's head started to hurt. He knew he ought to figure some way to get on with the kid. A lot would depend on what Howard told MacPherson afterward: how much Al had helped, how hard he worked, whether there'd been any liquor in sight.

There hadn't been any other reason for MacPherson to give him this assignment, except to test him. Well, he'd asked for it, Al reminded himself, gazing at the flat farm country with patches of late-winter snow. And it was going to be tough.

Once Al nudged Howard and pointed out a traffic mixup on the highway below. The kid glanced over, bit his lip and didn't say a word. He was hard, this youngster, like a barrel of nails.

Well, Al thought, *maybe I can't blame him. Maybe it's the world. I wanted the top spot then, too, and I'd have cut anybody's throat to get it.* Only he sure would enjoy taking the little jerk down a peg! Al grinned at that. He'd be a fine one to try teaching anybody humility.

By the time they reached the little Fairview airport, Al's head was ready to burst. He kept thinking of the bottle tucked away in his bag—his insurance. Only he wouldn't cash it in, not until the thing was wrapped up, no matter how much he had to take from Howard Bell.

The stringer, who also was editor of the local weekly, was waiting for them when they landed. He had few details to add to the story, but said the competition was pouring in. The *Star* had a top by-line reporter on the way, and the *Globe* was shipping in a five-man team, two reporters, two photographers, and a pilot.

The stringer boarded the plane with them, and they flew to the ranch. They landed in a pasture, and Al's stomach rocked with the impact.

He trotted after Howard Bell, feeling the shortness of his wind. The ranch house was no dump. Even if it was way out in the middle of nowhere, it was a big, sprawling brick house. The whole place reflected the prosperity of war years and high cattle prices. Al saw a garage with two new cars, a jeep parked outside.

A dozen people were standing around by the barn, where they'd found the hired man. One quick glance told Al they were the first newsmen on the scene. This was a break. If they could just cop a telephone they'd be all set.

Two or three neighbors were dabbing handkerchiefs to their noses. A grumpy-looking sheriff was in charge. Howard and Al took him aside, buttered him up a little to make him feel important, and started pumping him for information.

They learned that neighbors had found Mrs. Beckley's body in the back yard about nine A.M. Both she and the hired man, Si Kindler, had been shot in the head and chest. A ranch hand by the name of Acey Dorson had been seen around yesterday, and it was known that Mrs. Beckley's husband had fired Dorson a week ago. Acey Dorson and Si Kindler had quarreled. Mr. Beckley was out of the State and they were notifying him by long-distance.

The other hands described Dorson as a rather simple man, but definitely queer, with odd religious ideas. There was no doubt about who had done the killing.

Al went around with Howard Bell while he took his pictures. Once, to be helpful, Al said, "Shall I call the office, Howard?" He had already arranged with the elderly foreman for the use of the only telephone.

"No," Howard snapped. "I'll call 'em myself."

Al bit back a hot retort. He stood there and watched the kid shooting the back of the house and he thought, "I don't have to take this."

They went inside and the foreman cranked the party-line phone. Howard took it. There was a notebook in his hand and Al noticed suddenly that his face was slightly pale, the lips pinched. *All right, copyboy,* Al thought, *do your stuff.*

As Howard dictated to the rewrite desk, it was all Al could do to keep his mouth shut. The kid was hitting all the wrong things, hammering away at the obvious. He was giving them what they already knew.

Al said, casually, "Howard, give 'em more on the killer, Dorson. He's the key figure in this thing. Play up that religious-nut angle. Crazy killer on the loose. And you didn't mention the airplanes! The sheriff says they're going to run it like a coyote-hunt, maybe a dozen or fifteen planes. There's your story, kid."

Howard looked at him stiffly, and Al wished he could remember not to say "kid." Howard nodded, and in a moment he was telling rewrite, "Listen, Harry, kill that lead. There's going to be a big airplane roundup, like they have when they go after coyotes. A circle of planes'll close in on him. And this Dorson is a screwball. Thinks he's a messiah or something. Used to tell people the world was coming to an end. You got that?"

"They're afraid he might strike again," Al said quietly. "The whole country is armed." It was a reasonable guess. Howard passed that on to rewrite. When he hung up, he said, "Thanks" through his teeth, like it hurt.

Al said, kindly, "Always look for the big angles, Howard. The stuff you were giving them, that's follow-up for the Sunday edition. It isn't just what happened; it's what's going to happen. That keeps your story alive."

Howard seemed to stiffen. "I was getting around to that."

He wasn't going to give Al an inch. Howard went out to give his pictures to the pilot who was ready to fly back. Al looked around the house. Out in the kitchen he asked a plump, motherly-looking woman for a glass of water.

"Help yourself," she said, without getting up.

Al took a cigarette from his pack. "Who are you?"

"Nora Waines. I do the cookin' here."

He sipped his water. "Know this fellow Dorson?"

"Sure do. Crazy as a hoot owl. He killed 'em, all right—both of 'em."

"You here when it happened?"

"Yes, I was. Heard the shots. But that ain't all. I heard them quarreling early this morning, him and Miz Beckley."

SOMETHING prickled the back of Al's neck, but he said easily, "Yeah? What about?"

Nora Waines folded plump arms. "Well, Miz Beckley was a fine, decent woman, rest her soul. You understand, they wasn't nothing between them at all, except Acey—that's what everybody called him—he had these funny ideas. Good, hard worker, except when he got these spells. I never quite got the straight of it, but Acey was trying to get her to run away with him. Said she and him'd lead some kind of a new church that would save the world. Course, she just laughed at him. Only I seen it wor-

ried her. And this morning I stepped out on the back porch and I heard 'em. She sounded scared. He kept heggin' her, and she said, 'Acey, you get away from here and stay away, or I'll have you locked up.'"

Nora Waines shook her head. "That must have been what set him off. He'd been put away once, you understand, and he didn't want to go again."

"How about Si Kindler?" Al asked.

The cook sniffed, wiping at her eyes. "Poor Si, he just tried to protect her, that's all. He felt responsible, the mister being away so much. And Acey got it in for him. He killed her, and then he went down to the barn and shot Si."

Al's fingers itched for a pencil, but he didn't want to scare her into silence. He nodded, and left the pencil in his pocket.

"I ain't told the sheriff that part," she was saying, "about what went on between her and Acey. I don't want people talkin' about her, and misunderstandin'."

As if it had just occurred to him, Al said, "Where would Acey be likely to go?"

NORA WAINES stood gazing out of the window. "Well, I been thinkin'." She turned and looked at him. "Say, are you a policeman?"

Al smiled. "No, I'm with a newspaper. Name's Henderson." He held his breath. She'd be a clam from now on.

But Nora Waines went on: "You know, maybe it sounds funny, after what he's done, but I can't help feelin' sorry for Acey. Maybe he couldn't help it. Leastways, it don't seem right for them to hunt him down like a dog and kill him. That's what they'll do. All these men with their guns, even airplanes."

People were coming in the house and Al had to talk fast. "Listen, if somebody was to find Acey and talk to him, do you think he might turn himself in?"

She looked at him, as if measuring him. "I don't know. But it'd be worth tryin', wouldn't it?" She closed the kitchen door. "Now I don't know any more than you do. Only Acey, he was telling me once about a cave." She pointed. "It's hid up there in the hills. He told me he used to go up there every now and then."

When he walked outdoors a few minutes later, Al felt like a man with a time-bomb in his pocket. He had talked Nora into giving him directions to the cave. Better still, he had convinced her that she should say nothing to anyone else, at least not until he had had a chance to talk to Acey. The other reporters might not understand, he had explained. It was really only half a lie, Al told himself; for all he knew, they might not.

He found Howard talking to a group of men who were organizing the air round-up. Two more planes had landed in the pasture and there was a truck with a short-wave radio setup. Cars and other vehicles were turning into the lane. Somebody called his name.

"Well, if it isn't old Al Henderson!" He turned and warmth flushed his cheeks. A group of reporters he had known years before were looking at him. Ghosts from the past. He forced a smile and shook hands, and somebody said, "Know where Acey's hiding out, Al?"

"Sure," Al said, "I got him stuffed into a box." Everybody laughed.

Howard showed up, looking confident and full of ginger. "I've got a ride on one of those planes lined up. Going to get some shots from the air." Apparently he hadn't made any arrangement for Al to go along. Al gestured secretively and drew him around the corner of the house.

"Never mind the shots from the air," he whispered. "Listen to me a minute." Swiftly he told what he had learned from Nora Waines. The kid's eyebrows shot up.

"I'll phone that in right away."

Al restrained himself. "Stay away from the phone. You want to spill the beans? We'll stay out of sight till those planes get away. Let 'em have their wild-goose chase."

"But suppose Dorson's not there? Maybe the cook is feeding you a line. And what about pictures of the air-search? Mac'll want those." Howard was getting nervous.

Al mustered his patience. "Those planes'll be loaded with cameras and the press services will have a thousand pictures. What do you want, pictures of a lot of bare ground, or an exclusive interview with the killer?" Howard looked grim, and Al added gruffly, "Or are you scared?"

"Me? Of course not!"

Al got Nora to make some sandwiches and coffee. When Howard grew impatient, Al said, "These aren't for us, pal." They were both a little on edge as they started off, Howard with his camera and case and Al carrying the sandwiches. He'd stuck the whisky bottle in his topcoat pocket. The activity had cleared his head. Now, if his wind and legs held out—

He looked at Howard, striding along, envying him his vitality, and something else, too—the freshness, the excitement.

"Take it easy," Al said. "Acey's not going any place." He hoped. Maybe *they* were the ones chasing wild geese. The buzzing of planes overhead was alternately faint and strong.

Beyond lay the green rolling hills. They had walked half an hour before Al realized that the hills were a lot farther away than they looked. "Maybe we ought to go back and borrow that jeep," he ventured.

Howard wouldn't hear of it. "Come on, we've wasted too much time now. It can't be much farther."

Okay, hotshot. Al was sweating at every pore. They were climbing now. Thistles tore at his pants, unexpected stones and soft earth upset his footing. His muscles ached. But none of it mattered, because he had a sweet dream in the back of his head, a yarn that would knock MacPherson off his chair. He winced, thinking of the kid. All right, the kid would share the credit, but Al wasn't going to be hogged out of anything, either.

After a twenty-minute search, Howard said irritably, "I don't see any cave." His tone implied this was Al's doing, not his.

Worrisome doubts nagged Al like a cloud of horseflies. He was ready to give up as they stumbled into a ravine; then suddenly he looked up and saw a ragged man aiming a rifle at him.

Howard gave a low moan. Al's legs felt as though they were buckling. The man swung the rifle. "Stay back!" he called hoarsely.

He was a slender, bearded man in dirty overalls and a ragged blue workshirt. There was a wildness in his eyes. Behind him was the dark entrance to a cave.

Al lifted the box. "We brought you some food, Acey," he called. "Sandwiches and coffee." The man kept his eyes on the box and Al sensed the struggle going on inside him between his hunger and his fear. On a sudden impulse Al said, "Nora Waines sent it."

SLOWLY the rifle was lowered. "Give it here," Acey Dorson said.

Howard hung back a little as Al handed the box to Acey. "Nobody knows where you are, Acey," Al said. "We guessed you might be here, but we didn't tell anybody. We want to help you."

The man tore at the cardboard box, wolfed a sandwich. Al crouched beside him, feeling a mingled pity and disgust. "We're not with the law, Acey. We just want to talk to you. We're newspapermen. We want your side of what happened."

Dorson's little gray eyes hardened. Al tried a new tack. "Everyone says you were a good worker, but Beckley fired you. That right?" Acey nodded and Al asked, "You come up here often?"

Acey's glance drifted to the cave, his thin face softening. "That's my chapel." His face glowed. "I hear

the voices up here. Listen, can't you hear them now? You think it's the wind, but it ain't. I can hear them."

"And the voices—they tell you what to do?"

The strong hands gripped the rifle. "They told me I had to do it."

It came pouring out then, the muddled mind piecing together its tale of love and brooding and sudden revenge. He seemed to be enjoying it, this attention. Al slipped out paper and pencil and jotted it down. He nodded to Howard and Howard lifted his camera.

Howard's eyes widened as Al took out the bottle.

"Have a drink, Acey," Al said.

ACEY DORSON was sitting in Nora Waines' kitchen when the sheriff and two planes returned two hours later. Acey had drunk the entire bottle. He was sleeping with his head on his arm. In the general hubbub it was hard for Al Henderson to get out to the telephone. Howard had filed a bulletin the minute they got back to the house, and now he was calling to give the paper background and follow-up.

In the living-room Howard Bell's voice struck him like a slap across the face: "Got that, Harry? . . . Yeah, Nora Waines. Uh-huh, she's the one I wormed it out of, about the cave. Listen, Harry, these other guys are yapping for the phone. You've got everything now. And don't forget that by-line." Howard was grinning.

A red haze seemed to whirl in front of Al's eyes. He heard the phone click. Other reporters were packed around the telephone. Al moved quickly, stepping between them. There was sudden alarm in the kid's eyes as Al whirled him around.

"What'd you do?" Al said hoarsely. "Grab all the credit? You filed this under your own name, didn't you?"

Howard was trying to pull away, his lip curling. "Let go of me!" he snarled. The others were staring at them.

"I told you, it's my story," Howard Bell said. "What are you hollering about? I mentioned you. I said we both found him."

A burst of laughter came from the reporters, and then the sound died as Howard backed away.

"You little jerk!" Al growled, doubling his fists. "You cheap little rat!" Howard ducked his head as Al swung. The punch brushed off his cheek and Howard staggered, almost falling. The others grabbed the two of them and somebody said, "Hey, cut it out! Do your fighting outside!"

All the wind seemed to have gone out of Al. There was a stabbing pain in his chest and he thought for an instant he'd black out. Howard shook off the man holding him and brushed his hair back. "Let him go," he said. "He's an alcoholic. He's all washed up."

Al wanted to shout that it wasn't true, but the words wouldn't come out. He looked at the other reporters, but they were looking at the kid, not at him. Al spun on his heel and walked out. The room was quiet behind him, the silence broken only by the voice of one reporter asking for long-distance.

Never mind, copyboy, Al said silently. *I'll fix your wagon. Mac is still my friend and he's going to get the whole story. And when he does, you're going to be out of a job. Mac doesn't like a liar any more than I do.*

Flying back to town, they had no words for each other. It was always a tough business, but Al almost felt sorry for the kid. Howard was going to learn the hard way—and the hard way could hurt.

Some of the day staff were still around as they walked into the office. Al turned away as they shook hands with the kid and the congratulations flew. Somebody said, "Quite a story, Al!" and shoved a morning edition in his hands. There was Howard's by-line under a head that read: KILLER SURRENDERS TO BULLETIN REPORTERS. At least the head made it plural. Except for giving credit where it was due, the story was reasonably correct.

The light was still on in MacPherson's office. Al rehearsed what he'd tell him, how the kid would have flubbed the yarn if he hadn't been there. As Al walked across to the office, he heard Howard's voice coming out of the hall telephone booth, and he stopped out of curiosity.

"Yeah, isn't that wonderful, honey?" Howard was saying. Al remembered then that Howard was married.

"No, MacPherson hasn't said yet that I'll get a raise, but I'm sure I will. It's my first big story. . . . Yeah, okay. Be home right away. 'By, baby."

The words were like an echo out of the past. Al remembered the day he had called Lila to tell her of his first raise. He had been just a cub then, and the raise had meant everything. He tried to drive away the thought, but he knew that it meant everything to the kid now. The kid had played it dirty, yes. But not because he was out to get Al; it was only because he was after his first big break. Al felt some of the spite leaving him. He almost smiled.

That was me in that telephone booth—me twenty years ago. Given the chance, I probably would have done the same thing he did.

MacPherson greeted Al with a grin. "Pretty good yarn, Al," he said, dropping a copy of the paper in Al's lap.

"Yeah, the kid did all right, didn't he?" Al answered.

"Howard? Yeah, he did pretty well. He's just a kid; doesn't know the rules. But all things told, he did pretty well."

MacPherson gave Al a long, searching look and Al frowned, not quite understanding. What did MacPherson know about this?

MacPherson chuckled. "Kind of a dirty trick he pulled on you, trying to take all the credit. His by-line was on the presses before I got a chance to read the story."

"Who's been telling you stories, Mac?" Al broke in.

"Oh, nobody in particular. But don't forget, I've known you for more than twenty years, Al. Howard Bell may have switched things around a little, but that story has 'Al Henderson' written all over it. Just to make sure, I called a couple of your pals who were on the story for the *Globe*. They got scooped, and they know who scooped them. It wasn't any kid; it was an old pro named Al Henderson."

MacPherson pushed his chair away from the desk and stood up. "It was nice of you to let the kid have the break, Al. You could have made it rough for him. You may not know it, but you still have a lot of friends in this business: they'd back your side of the story, and I might have to fire the kid. I don't want to do that. I'm going to talk to him—tell him, for one thing, that we may play rough in this business, but we don't play dirty—and I think he'll admit he made a bad mistake. Once he apologizes, I think we can turn him into a good newspaperman. In a way, he's a lot like you used to be, Al."

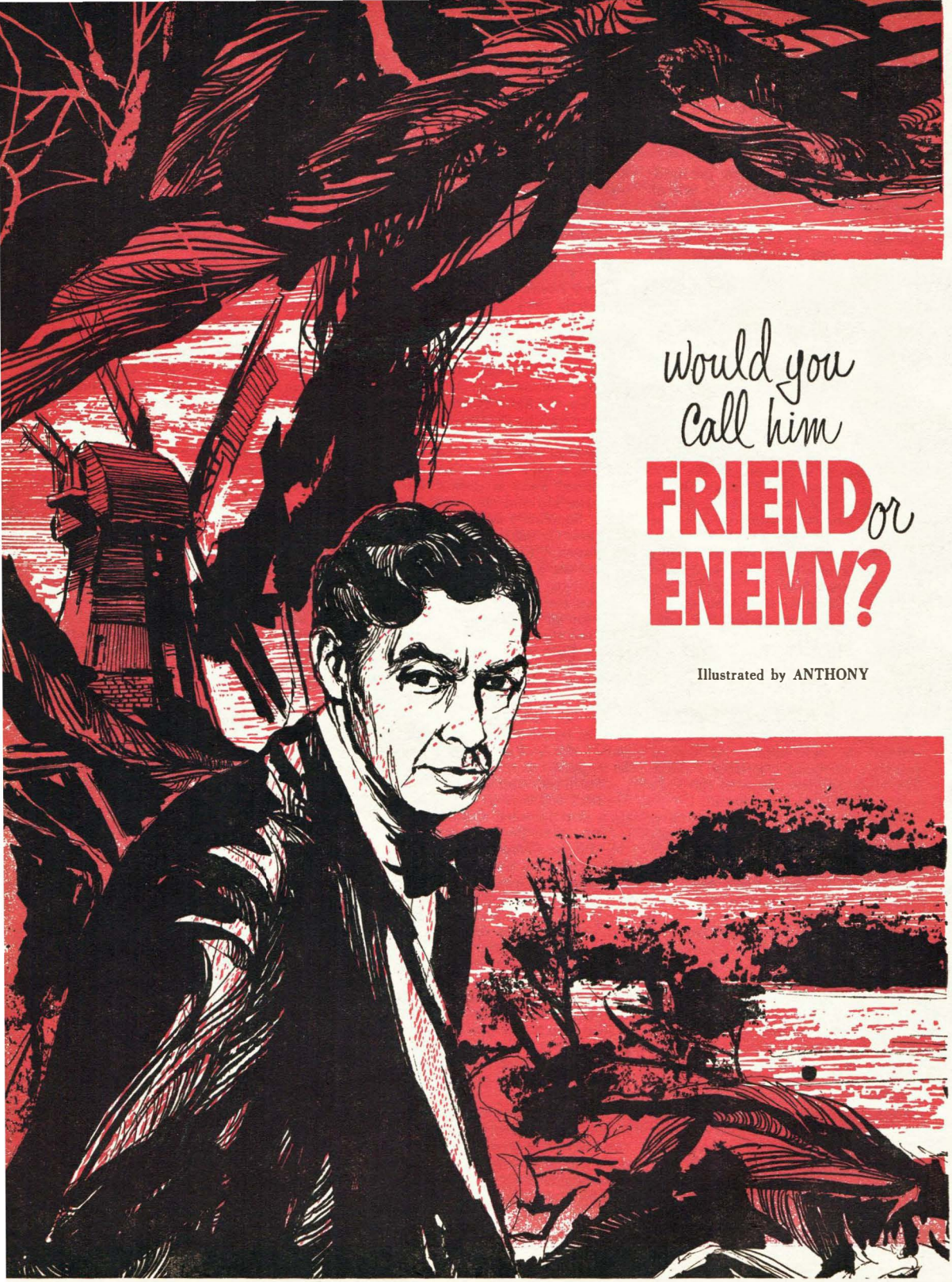
Abruptly, MacPherson changed the subject. "How'd it go with the liquor, Al?"

HE tried to make the question sound conversational, but it still caught Al unprepared. He stammered for a moment, and suddenly realized that he hadn't even thought about having a drink since he and Howard had found Acey Dorson.

"I—I think I've got it licked, Mac. When I got on the story— Well, I don't know. It just sort of took me back to the old days. I haven't had a drink all day, and for the first time in years I don't feel that I need one. I know it's going to be tough, but this time I think I can stay off it."

Al hesitated, then went on, "It may sound silly, but in a way I guess I owe something to the kid."

MacPherson looked at him for a long moment, and picked his words carefully. "I guess maybe we owe something to you, too. I think you can do it, and we'll give you all the help we can. And Al, if you're tired of that rewrite job—how about trying the city desk again?" •



would you call him FRIEND or ENEMY?

Illustrated by ANTHONY

• By ORESTE PINTO

Oreste Pinto is a former lieutenant-colonel in the Royal Dutch Army who, during the war, headed the Dutch Counter-Intelligence Mission attached to SHAEF under General Eisenhower. Col. Pinto's specific duty was to carry on the final, difficult screening in England of refugees from the continent, to be absolutely certain the Nazis were not using this method to infiltrate spies into Allied territory. One adventurous episode in his often tedious, but highly-important job of determining whether the most innocent-appearing refugee might be a dangerous spy is told in the following story, which is an excerpt from Col. Pinto's new book, "Friend or Foe?" soon to be published.

—The Editors

EARLY IN 1942, AN ESCAPE-BOAT set off from the Dutch Coast. Five miles from the English shore, it was hailed by a ship of the Royal Navy and towed into port. All the passengers, who acted as an amateur crew, were young Dutchmen. There were fourteen of them.

Since all were alien refugees when they arrived in England, they automatically were sent to the main screening center for refugees in London, the Royal Victoria Patriotic School, at Wandsworth, which a colleague and I had founded for the purpose of concentrating the interrogation of all incoming aliens under one roof. The fourteen young men all were questioned independently, and I had no hesitation in pronouncing each of them a completely genuine refugee.

Naturally, one of the obvious questions they were asked was how they had managed to effect their escape. All told the same story. It appeared that a young man named Poelhof had originated the scheme.

Poelhof was a half-caste, a *katjang* as they are popularly called in Holland, this being the Malay name for half-caste. His father had been a Dutchman stationed in the Dutch East Indies, his mother a Malay woman.

THERE is no color-bar in Holland, so many of the *katjangs* often left the Dutch East Indies, where the opportunities of studying for professional examinations were obviously limited, to undertake their higher education at Dutch universities. When Holland had been overrun by the Germans in 1940, Poelhof, his friends said, had been a university student. His friends were mostly students like himself and were also either themselves *katjangs,* or were of Dutch parentage on both sides, who had lived in the Dutch East Indies.

The Germans needed smart young men to help in the civil administration of Holland. They offered a clerical job in the Food Distribution office in Rotterdam to Poelhof, who at once accepted it. He was then just 21. From being a humble clerk he rose after only eighteen months' experience to the post of second in command of the whole Food Distribution Office. In this capacity he had under his direct control seventy-two office-workers, many of them old enough to be his father. He was obviously either a very capable young man or— And here a faint red light flashed in my mind's eye.

When one of his friends, who had known him intimately in the East Indies, told me that at the age of 17 Poelhof had passed his final examinations in Dutch East Indian law (in other words he had qualified as a solicitor entitled to practice in the East Indies), I was yet more impressed with his capabilities. When the same friend told me also that at the age of 16 Poelhof had been one of the promoters and subsequent leader of the National Socialist Youth Movement in the East Indies, I was still more impressed with his administrative ability —but not at all favorably. This movement was of course, equivalent to the Nazi Youth Movement in Germany.

The red light flashed more brightly now.

By piecing together the various stories of the fourteen refugees, I was able to find out how Poelhof had organized their escape. He had done so with consummate coolness: First he had acquired a sailing-boat with an auxiliary engine, and then, on the strength of his important official position, he had been able to stock it with all the petrol, rations and other necessities for the trip. When it came to getting the escapers on board, there was no skulking, hole-and-corner business for Poelhof. Ah, no! He had taken them one by one to the boat, quite brazenly, in broad daylight—*in an official Nazi Food Distribution car!*

And the car itself was not a closed model, where passengers could huddle down almost out of sight, but an open touring car. All the world might see into it and observe the passengers. Either Poelhof was recklessly brave, or else he was not worried about the Germans finding him out—because the German Security Police were acting in connivance with him.

Three months later, in the early spring of 1942, a second escape-boat provided by him reached the English coast. There were twelve people on board, and once again it was an all-male party. When separately interrogated, they gave similar accounts of their get-away which corresponded in every detail with the story of the first batch of fugitives. Poelhof had planned and organized the whole escape, had obtained the boat, had stocked it with provisions drawn from official sources, and had even repeated that bizarre touch of driving the escapers one by one in daylight to their rendezvous in an open German car.

To cut a long story somewhat shorter, four more escape-boats dispatched by Poelhof reached England between the early summer of 1942 and March, 1944. In all, the six escape-boats contained among them eighty-seven escapers. All of them were male, all told the same story and—stranger still if Poelhof were really in league with the Germans—all were proved on investigation to be genuine Dutch patriots.

At once two important and contradictory points emerged from the case. If Poelhof were in league with the Germans, why had he spent over two years in arranging for patriotic countrymen to escape without even once slipping in a spy or a traitor among them? Long-term plans are always necessary in war, but if the plan here was to establish confidence before infiltrating a spy into a party of escapers, at the rate Poelhof was proceeding, the war would be over before he took the first step in this sinister direction.

On the other hand, if it was so easy for Poelhof to get so many people out of Holland with impunity, why, if he were an honest Dutchman, had he not sent anyone of real importance? It was widely known that certain leading figures were urgently required in London. There were several Resistance Leaders who required detailed briefing on the part their movements were to play when the liberation of Holland began. They could best be briefed in person and thus their presence in London was of vital importance. There also were certain leading Anti-Nazi and Jewish political leaders whose duties were nullified as long as they remained in the Netherlands, but who could play a worthwhile rôle once they could get away.

Yet, instead of including such figures on his escape-boats, Poelhof had sent his own friends and acquaintances, men who were all honest patriots and excellent raw material for the fighting services, but otherwise completely unimportant. The sole exception was a Dutch solicitor who subsequently became, for a short time, a Minister in the temporary Dutch Government in London.

Strangely enough this last escaper was the only person out of the eighty-seven who held a good opinion of Poelhof. One would expect to hear nothing but gratitude for the man who had organized and effected the escapes, but practically all the escapers, with this one exception, while being grateful for what Poelhof had done, disliked him as an individual. Many of them said in their interrogation that he was conceited and overbearing. Some even called him a despot. Finally—and it was a strange thing to say about a man to whom they owed their liberty—several said that they thoroughly distrusted him.

IN fairness to Poelhof, I realized that his mixed parentage might well account for his overbearing manner. Many *katjangs* have a deep-rooted inferiority complex, which unconsciously they conceal by going to the opposite extreme and appearing to be conceited and aggressive. But I must admit that the flouting of German security had me puzzled. In wartime, when so much depends on secrecy, especially in an escape movement, no intelligent man takes unnecessary risks. From all accounts Poelhof was highly intelligent. Why then should he go out of his way to show off in front of the Germans?

As I have said earlier, the absent Poelhof already had begun to fascinate me with the complexity of his personality and of his case. I learned from member of the last escape-party

who arrived in the early spring of 1944 that the next escape-boat would have Poelhof himself on board. They also told me that two further escape-boats, apart from the six that had arrived safely, had set out from Holland but had got into trouble and had been forced to put back to the Dutch coast.

The strange story behind the first of these abortive attempts was as follows: Poelhof made ready his seventh escape-boat, provisioned it, and arranged for it to set off one dark night from a quiet point on the Dutch coast between Scheveningen and the Hook of Holland. The night was calm and the boat was in perfect order. Everything seemed set for a smooth and uneventful crossing. But shortly after this boat set forth, the engine broke down, and the desperate crew was forced to entrust their hopes to the one flimsy sail. And here again misfortune dogged them. Strong headwinds blew up and, try as they might with their limited nautical experience, they found themselves being blown inexorably back to the Dutch coast.

After storm-tossed hours, the boat was blown straight into the harbor of the Hook of Holland. The would-be escapers on board were at their wits' end. Their worst enemies could not have chosen for them a less propitious landing-place. A storm-beaten boat with an obviously civilian crew, arriving in broad daylight in a busy harbor, which would inevitably be teeming with German port-officials and soldiers, could not hope to avoid attracting attention. In dumb misery the crew took the boat in to the harbor wall, tied up and disembarked, expecting instant arrest. But no one ashore stirred a finger!

Hardly believing their momentary luck, they split up and each went on his homeward way. There were no arresting shouts, no clanking of rifle-butts, no attention whatever paid to them. They might have been a peace-time party of trippers at the end of a day's sailing.

There seemed to be only one logical explanation for this highly unusual event—Poelhof must be in league with the Germans.

This view was reinforced by the account other escapers gave me of the second unsuccessful attempt. It happened that two months later Poelhof, no whit deterred by his first and recent failure, organized yet another escape-attempt. Once more the boat encountered misfortune and was blown ashore quite near its point of departure. This time, however, the escapers did not get away scot-free. The German coastal sentries were efficient enough to arrest them all on landing. They were duly interrogated by the Gestapo and several were tortured. One man broke down under the agony of torture and confessed the whole story of the planned escape. After the kind of prompting at which the Gestapo were adept he even revealed the name of Poelhof as the organizer of the escape, and he went so far as to blurt out Poelhof's private address.

For all their many black faults, the Gestapo were at any rate an efficient force. There was only one thing they could logically do—and that was to arrest Poelhof at once. They would have taken a fiendish delight in torturing and then murdering the man who had outwitted them up to date. *But they did nothing.* They did not even call at his address and make formal inquiries about him. Poelhof just went coolly on with his official—and his secret—work as though nothing at all had happened!

There was only one conclusion I could logically draw—Poelhof was surely in league with the Gestapo and had organized both escape-attempts with their connivance. This time they had been forced to go through the motions of arresting and interrogating the would-be escapers, but when the finger pointed to Poelhof, they had had to call off the investigation. I wanted all the more to meet this gentleman.

The opportunity finally came in the late spring of 1944, when another escape-boat put out from Holland and eventually landed in England. One of the passengers was Poelhof.

Thus it was that on a bright day in the early summer of 1944, just a few weeks before D-Day, I first confronted Poelhof, and embarked on one of the most difficult counter-espionage cases I ever had to tackle.

To look at, Poelhof was a typical *katjang*. He had European features, but his jet-black hair, his dark eyes, and his yellowish complexion betrayed his Malayan parentage on his mother's side. His feet and hands were small and delicately shaped. He was below medium height and very slim in build. He had the strong and very white teeth of the native. I knew already from the details of his career that he must be highly intelligent, but I was not wholly prepared for the concentrated appearance of alert intelligence in his compact form and gleaming eyes. I had not listened to him for five minutes without realizing that he was perhaps the cleverest young man I had ever met. As his acquaintances had said, he appeared to be arrogant in the way he held himself erect and spoke in abrupt, clipped tones, but underneath the pose I glimpsed something boyish and, strangely enough, appealing. Here, I thought, was a dangerous and yet somehow attractive personality.

For eight full working days, from 9:30 in the morning until 6 at night, the interrogation lasted. I cross-examined Poelhof on every point in his past career, often getting him to repeat the same facts over and over again. I never once caught him in a slip-up.

After I had gleaned from him all the information he was able or likely to give, I spent two whole days more in arranging and sifting the facts. I then sent for him again. He entered my room, smiled at me and sat down opposite my desk. He was perfectly composed and his face was inscrutable.

"Mr. Poelhof," I said, "I have examined all the facts you have told me. Much of it I can understand easily but there are several points—nine, in fact—which I find inexplicable. I propose to ask you these nine questions and I want you to supply the answers—if you can."

"Of course," he nodded.

"Now, in the first place, only a few years ago you were a leading figure—perhaps *the* leading figure—in the National Socialist Youth Movement in the East Indies. Yet you tell me that you are and always have been a good Dutch patriot. How do you explain the obvious conflict between the two statements?"

He smiled. "That's easy, sir. I was only a kid when I joined the Movement. I thought then that it was a purely national movement that any decent young man might be proud of joining. Don't forget, sir, there were thousands of decent Dutchmen who felt as I did and found out their mistake only later. After a while I began to have my doubts and when the Germans overran Holland I really knew just what swine they could be. The fact that they had previously taken me in with their big words and fine promises made me hate them all the more. That's partly why I started the escape-business—to get some of my own back for the way they had deceived me."

It was a good answer and might conceivably be the truth. As he said, many young Dutchmen had at first been taken in by the appeal of the clever German propaganda. The National Socialist Youth Movement before the war had seemed to be a kind of glorified Boy Scout organization.

"Well, then," I went on, "question number two: You are still a very young man. In German eyes you are not even one of their precious 'Aryans,' yet once you began to work in the Food Distribution Office at Rotterdam you were promoted from junior clerk to second-in-command, all in the space of eighteen months. In fact you had dozens of men working under you, and some of them were

old enough to have been your father. How do you explain that?"

Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "That again, is quite simple, sir. In the first place I think I can say without boasting that I have some little gift for administration. Besides, I worked very hard and did help quite a lot in getting things straightened out and organized. You can imagine, sir, the original state of muddle when the Distribution Office started off. But I realize only too well that I would never have been promoted so quickly if it had not been for Mr. L., the head of the office. He is one of the best of men, and all along he has deceived the Germans as far as he could in order to help his own folk. He knows I hate the Germans as much as he does and he also knows all about the escapes I have organized. In fact he has given me many facilities for carrying out escape-work. He promoted me over the heads of my colleagues, largely because he knew that if I had authority it would be that much easier for me to help refugees to escape."

Once again the answer was reasonable and quite convincing. I knew from the official records that there was truth in what he had said about Mr. L. The latter was indeed a fervent patriot and had accepted his appointment as head of the Food Distribution Office only through his desire to help his own people. Poelhof was far too intelligent to claim friendship with such a man if it were not true.

"Very well," I said. "Now comes the third question: You helped eighty-seven men escape. If a man saves my life I have every reason to be grateful to him. Yet most of the men whose lives you saved have told me in person that they positively dislike you. Further, they are most suspicious and doubtful about your motives for helping them. How do you explain that?"

He smiled again, this time a little sadly. "I should have thought, sir, that you, as a student of human nature which you must be, could have given me the answer easily enough. Isn't it natural that people tend to dislike anyone to whom they are indebted? Besides, I realize that my manner is often abrupt and makes me seem arrogant. I just can't help it, however hard I try. People one has helped are sensitive about such things which can add to their feelings of dislike. Personally, I should find it more surprising if the men I helped had expressed a feeling of friendship for me, rather than the reverse."

Once again I felt that he had cleverly slipped past the implication of my question, but at the same time I realized his answer was a logical one.

"For the sake of argument," I said, "let us again accept your answer. Now for question four: You are a man of well above average intelligence. You must have realized all along that your secret escape-work was dangerous enough by any standard. Why on earth then should you take such an additional and quite unnecessary risk as to drive round Rotterdam in an open car with people you were about to send off on your escape-route? And in an official German car of all things!"

He was not a bit rattled by the question. "Was it really such a big risk, sir? I have always held that in an occupied country the more openly one acts the less danger is there of being suspected. It was just double-bluff. No German security policeman would ever dream that I would use an official car in broad daylight for aiding escapers. Besides, that's where psychology comes in again. It gave me a private sort of revenge to outwit those stupid louts and remove people from under their very noses."

I was beginning to have the sensation of fishing for an eel with my bare

To ask a favor a man says to himself, "What shall I say?" A woman meditates, "What shall I wear?"

—ANON.

hands. Once again I had to admit that, far from trapping him, his last answer was logical and sound. There was no point in trying to press the question, so doggedly I went on to the next.

But first of all I must give some explanatory background to question five. From the beginning, Poelhof had made it very clear that his only object in coming to England was to get instructions from the Dutch Government in London on what secret activities were most essential in Holland, and then to be dropped by parachute in Holland in order to direct those activities.

Now any refugee arriving in the United Kingdom who expressed a fervent wish to return to his own country was immediately under suspicion. The chances were that he was a genuine patriot and his only reason for wanting to return was so that he could actively help the war-effort. But there was always the risk that such a man might be a German agent in disguise.

"Let me see if you can answer question five," I said. "You are anxious to return to Holland and there commence even more important activities for the Allies? Well, if your wish is granted you will have to spend at least three months in this country, learning how to use a parachute, weapon-training, and of course being briefed on your future activities. At the end of that time you would be dropped over Holland. People would quickly recognize you in the streets of Rotterdam because of your unusual appearance. The Germans will want to know why you suddenly took three months' unofficial leave of absence and then suddenly popped up again mysteriously. Has it ever occurred to you that you may find it difficult to wriggle out of that situation?"

"Not really, sir," he replied. "In the first place I gather that agents are dropped by night?" I nodded to his question. "Then," he went on, "I should have plenty of time under cover of darkness to reach the house of one of the men already in my organization—a man I can completely trust. Once inside his house I would intend to remain in hiding there and never leave it by daylight. I have several lieutenants—dependable men with plenty of courage and initiative. They could carry out the instructions which the British would give me, and I could direct their activities from my hide-out."

I did not say so, but inwardly I had to admit to myself that it was an answer. It might or might not be his real motive for returning to Holland in a hurry, but in a court of law it would probably make a reasonable defense.

"Now," I said, "let us refer back to your activities. In all you managed to send us eighty-seven young men through your escape-service. All of them are decent young Dutchmen without doubt. But surely it must have occurred to a clever person like yourself that the men you sent were excellent raw material for the fighting services, but on the whole nothing more? There are plenty of really important men in the Netherlands—politicians, resistance leaders and others—who could be of much more use to the British. Why did you not include men like that in your parties?"

He paused for a moment in thought. "That is a good question, sir, but I think there is an answer to it. In the first place I personally don't agree that politicians are more important. The men I sent were good fighting material, as you admit. In war one needs good fighters above all else. I admit I showed some preference for men of my own age and interests—but can you really blame me for preferring my own contemporaries and, in some cases, *katjangs* like myself? There is another quite important point: Part of the long success of my escape-movement was due to the fact that I took

no unnecessary risks. I have explained the business of driving about Rotterdam in an official car. But apart from this touch of bravado—which had its reasons—I was careful to work things so that the escapers went off with the minimum of fuss and attention. Now if I had tried to help well-known personalities to escape, every German security policeman would have been on my tail at once. Those were my reasons for acting as I did."

I was beginning to feel an unwilling admiration for Poelhof. He was either a supremely confident and skillful liar, or else, as I was beginning to feel more and more, he was telling the truth. But I had still kept the most severe tests for the end.

"So far, so good," I said. "From questioning your companions and from your own story I learn that a most interesting event occurred during your voyage to this country.

"You left Holland in a small sailing-boat which had an auxiliary engine. Correct? One assumes that such a boat was only capable of sailing at five to ten knots under even the most favorable conditions. It left the mouth of the River Maas in daylight. As it left it was spotted by a German guard-ship lying at the mouth of the river. Now the German guard-ship signaled to you to heave to and await the inspection, but you ignored the signal and sailed on.

"By all the rules of international sea-law, the guard-ship would at once have fired a warning shot across your bows and, if you had still failed to obey its order, would have proceeded at once to sink you. The guard-ship was at least twice as fast as your craft, had a heavy armament while your boat was of course unarmed—and, above all, was manned by Germans. You were a sitting duck to be picked off at their leisure. And yet, by your own admission, the guard-ship just let you go on your way! Now how in Heaven's name do you explain *that?*"

Poelhof looked me straight in the face, shrugged his shoulders, grinned his engaging grin and said, "Search me. I can no more explain it than you can. Oh, I know what you're thinking—and I can't blame you in the circumstances. You think it was a put-up job, and that I had previously tipped off the Germans so that they would let me sail unmolested. That, in other words, I am a German agent. It's the only logical explanation, I realize, but it just happens not to be true. It was a complete—and lucky—coincidence that the guard-ship must have been manned by a slack crew on that one occasion. I have never been, and never intend to be, a German agent—I *swear* it. But I admit I have no logical reply to this question."

At last he had netted his return, to use a tennis metaphor, instead of hitting the ball back out of my reach. And yet there was no loss of composure and no sign of confusion or alarm in Poelhof. He must have realized all along that possibly his life, and certainly his liberty, hung on his ability to provide satisfactory answers to my questions. Now that he had failed to do so for the first time, his morale might well have cracked, leaving him an easy target for more pressing questions. But he still faced me as coolly as ever.

"These escape-boats provide a fascinating topic for discussion," I said. "In fact, one in particular interests me very much." And I proceeded to narrate the amazing story of the boat that had had to turn back because of engine trouble, and had put into the Hook of Holland in broad daylight, without once being stopped, or apparently even noticed by the Germans. "No German security policeman stopped those men," I went on. "No coast guard reported their arrival. Why . . . even in peacetime such an event would have caused mild interest; in wartime, in an occupied country, it would have been positively sensational! I'm curious as to your explanation."

Poelhof did not answer for a short moment. Then he said, "I have no explanation. The whole affair is quite inexplicable. By all rights, as you point out, all the passengers should have been arrested the minute they set foot on shore. In fact, they were lucky to reach the harbor at all without being fired on and sunk on their way in. No, I can't explain it—I wish I could."

"Perhaps there *is* an explanation," I said. "Perhaps the Germans knew all along—*because you informed them*—that the escape-boat was setting off the night before. And when it turned back, perhaps they thought it best to let the party on board go free, seeing that they were friends of yours and that you were a friend of the Germans. Is *that* possible?"

He grinned with complete coolness. "It would certainly be possible—*if* I happened to be friendly with the Germans. But, as I have already told you, I am not and have never been a friend of those swine! You may or may not believe me when I say that, but I can only tell you the truth."

"And truth is often stranger than fiction," I interrupted. "I seem to have heard that one before. Well, let us leave this point for a moment and go on to my last question. Let us talk some more about these escape-boats. They become more and more intriguing.

"Two months after the strange case we have just discussed, you organized yet another escape-party to travel by sea. On this occasion the boat left the Dutch coast from the Hondsbossche Zeewering. Like its predecessor, this boat also struck trouble and was blown back to the Dutch coast. But this time the passengers did not just disembark and walk quietly home. They were at once arrested and carefully interrogated by the Germans. We happen to know that one of them, after a lengthy interrogation which included torturing, broke down and confessed the full story of the escape. *He actually named you* as the man who organized the escape and, what's more, he even gave the Germans your private address!

"Now if the Gestapo even gets a hint of suspicion against someone, they are likely to arrest him within minutes. When the finger points directly at a suspect and all the incriminating details are known, his life is not worth a penny! But you apparently bear a charmed life. The Gestapo never followed up their information. Not only did they not arrest you at once, but they did not even call on you and submit you to a routine interrogation. Why, I ask, *why?*"

Poelhof was still composed. "Once again it seems to be one of those things. There is, however, one logical reason why the Germans did not arrest me at once. They might have wanted to keep me under observation so that in the long run I might have led them to more important people who wanted to escape from Holland. Or perhaps they didn't realize I was running a one-man show and thought that, by not having my suspicions aroused, I might eventually disclose a full-scale underground organization for their benefit."

"Yes," I agreed, "that is a logical explanation. But on the subject of logic, if the Germans had kept you under close observation they must have realized a few months later that you were preparing a further escape-party to include yourself. They would certainly not have sat back while their prize suspect was making ready to slip out of their clutches!"

In this manner, my questioning of Poelhof went on for days. Time and again, I returned to these same inexplicable questions—inexplicable unless one concluded that the man definitely was in league with the Germans. Yet he never wavered in his answers.

For me there followed many sleepless nights. If Poelhof *were* a German agent, it certainly seemed as if the Nazis were an unconscionable time in making use of him; over two years had elapsed since his first escape-boat had landed in England. It seemed to me incomprehensible that the Germans would have waited so long to

put any plans they had for Poelhof into effect.

There was the further factor that, if Poelhof actually were a Nazi agent, the Germans would have been shrewd enough to know that our Counter-Intelligence would wonder—exactly as we were doing—why he had come through unscathed when one of his associates had broken down and confessed. To allay our suspicions, the Gestapo would at least have made a token arrest of Poelhof, and later engineered his "escape," so as to permit him to arrive in England in a doubly righteous rôle: as the organizer of an escape route for his countrymen and for having escaped himself.

In addition to bringing logic to bear on the situation, I also had my "hunch." All experienced Counter-Intelligence agents will admit that, over the years, they develop a kind of sixth sense, which they can't adequately describe but which gives them almost an instinctive sense of a suspect's innocence or guilt. In Poelhof's case, I had a hunch he was innocent.

I cannot altogether explain this hunch, particularly in the face of those last three questions, for which he failed to give satisfactory answers. But, as I've said, Poelhof was one of the most intelligent young men I'd ever met, and somehow I felt that a man of his outstanding qualities would not—if he had been a German agent—have left three such glaring loose ends in his story. As shrewd as he was, he would have seen that some interrogator would pick on those very loose ends, and he would have provided himself with a convincing explanation in advance.

Accordingly, I sat down and wrote a lengthy report on the matter to the Dutch Minister of Justice, covering all aspects of the case and ending by saying that, although I thought Poelhof was innocent and should be given his liberty, at the same time he *should not*, under any circumstances—because of the lack of proof—be allowed to leave England before the end of hostilities.

As I expected, my advice was readily accepted by the Ministry of Justice. Poelhof was released and was at once given a useful administrative post; and shortly afterward, the second front having been opened, I was transferred to the staff of SHAEF on the continent. Before leaving, I went through my files and marked the case of Poelhof as a closed one.

I was not a good prophet.

In April, 1945, some nine months later, my headquarters was in the Dutch town of Breda. The German forces had broken and were streaming eastward in defeat. So rapid was the German retreat, that many of their top secret and confidential documents were left untouched as they fled.

In the neighboring town of Enschede, the Germans had until a few days earlier established one of their Counter-Intelligence headquarters. I was naturally anxious to study their methods and the information they had picked up at first hand, so I gave instructions that all documents found at the Security Office should be brought to me at once.

It was a fascinating study: There was so much German Counter-Intelligence had found out and yet so many inevitable gaps in their information. I spent many hours poring over the papers; and then, as I happened to be glancing at the first sheet of one document which consisted of seven closely-typed quarto pages, my eyes fell on my own name—"Major O. Pinto, code-name Frank Jackson."

I jerked back and the hand that was about to lift a cigarette to my lips froze in midair. To see one's own name unexpectedly in print is always something of a slight surprise. But to see it in a top-secret German document, next to one's secret code-name, when the two were known only to a select circle of trusted British agents, was a major shock.

I began to read the document closely from the beginning. It was headed, "Statement and Full Confession of the Agent 'Bobbie'—real name Anton Poelhof—made on 22nd March 1945 at Ulrum." This was a second big shock. *Poelhof*, whom I had left in London under instructions not to be allowed overseas until the end of the war, somehow had managed to get to Holland, had been captured by the Germans and had made a "full confession" involving my own name! This, I decided, was going to be interesting reading.

It was. The confession began by stating that in the summer of 1944 two members of the American O.S.S. had got in touch with him and asked him to join their organization. When he agreed, he underwent training, and was promoted to the rank of captain in the O.S.S.

The task allocated to him by the O.S.S., the statement went on, was to land by parachute and set up an espionage organization in the northern part of the Netherlands. He was to get in touch with reliable officials in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and recruit his agents from amongst them, and he had been strictly ordered not to indulge in sabotage nor active resistance to the Germans. His task was the collection of all possible information that could be passed back to his headquarters in London, including up-to-date news of German units with their locations and strengths, the effect of American daylight bombing in the area and the general state of German morale.

The confession went on to say that he had been dropped by parachute on November 10, 1944, in the province of Gröningen. He had got down at once to the job of organizing his espionage ring, and everything went smoothly. Then, exactly three months later, on February 10, 1945, the German Security Police had made a sudden raid on one of his secret hiding-places at Ulrum, a town in the same province, acting on information from a traitor in the spy-ring. Among those arrested was Poelhof. After being kept under arrest for several weeks, he finally was examined by the local commander of the German Security Police. On March 22, 1945, the commander had sent a copy of Poelhof's "statement and full confession" to Major von Feldmann, Head of Security Office 306, in Enschede. This was the document I now was reading.

It went on to list all the other information which Poelhof had given during his interrogation. This included the full details of his arrival in England, the methods of screening which he then underwent, not forgetting my own part in the affair! It also mentioned details of the American O.S.S. and the code-names of those officers he had met, together with the training he had undergone and the exact instructions given to him before setting out on his mission. There followed notes on the organization of the Dutch Secret Service both in the United Kingdom and liberated Holland.

As if the above information were not enough to give the Germans some juicy morsels to chew over, Poelhof gave them full measure in other spheres of Intelligence work. The statement listed details of the organization of the British Secret Service. It also gave Poelhof's "special observations" on the effectiveness of the V.1's, a brief statement on a German one-man torpedo which had been captured intact by the Allies on the Normandy beaches, facts about the maintenance units of the R.A.F., and finally some views on further possibilities of invasion-attempts on the shore of the Northern Netherlands!

As I finished reading the last of the seven closely-typed pages, my throat had gone dry and I felt a sick hollowness inside. From the damning evidence in front of me Poelhof had become a traitor to his country. I did not mind so much the thought that he had hoodwinked me into granting him restricted liberty of movement (although I would be less than human if this had not been a severe blow to my pride). But what made me most angry was that, through some

lack of liaison between the Dutch Government in London and the American authorities, he had been permitted to take in the O.S.S. officials with his plausible tongue, and had thus been primed with secret facts which he had only too quickly passed on to his German masters. The document admitted that the information had been given freely without any recourse to torture or other forms of interrogatory pressure.

At that moment I would have given anything to have got my hands on that smooth-tongued, smiling traitor.

EARLY in May, 1945, the whole of Northern Holland fell into Allied hands. The German prisons in the area were opened and all the inmates quickly interrogated before being released and repatriated. I took a hand in this work, which usually was just a formality, since the majority of civil prisoners in German hands either were genuine resistance workers or agents who by some miracle had escaped with their lives. It was, however, necessary to insure that no German agent had been infiltrated amongst them, and also to insure that any local collaborators who had been given protective custody by the Germans should be segregated for future detailed cross-examination.

Among the ex-prisoners rounded up to face me was—Poelhof!

He stood before me and I looked at him coldly for several seconds. Normally in my counter-espionage work I always tried to put personal feelings aside and approach each particular case in the frame of mind in which a surgeon undertakes a major operation. But I must admit that on this occasion I looked on Poelhof with active dislike, and the gravest of suspicions. I was determined to unmask his treachery.

"Well, Poelhof—or should I call you by your code-name 'Bobbie'?" I asked. "We meet again. Last time you managed to wriggle out of the situation. But I doubt if you will find it quite so easy this time. You sang me a little song last year, but now I find," and I tapped the document on the desk in front of me, "you have been singing a different tune to the enemy. How do you explain this?"

Poelhof returned my gaze as coolly as ever. The faint shadow of his grin lurked at the corners of his lips. He might have been an old friend greeting me at some reunion dinner and not a suspected traitor caught in the most incriminating circumstances. He said, "May I answer your question, sir, by asking you two of my own?"

"Ask away," I growled. "But don't think you'll get away by stalling for time. The war is almost over. I have time to spare."

"I realize your time is valuable, sir," he replied, "and so I will come straight to the point. Here is my first question. Can you point out to me, in that statement of mine in front of you now, *one little scrap of information that the Germans did not already know?*"

This was a poser. I had realized that the German Counter-Intelligence would have known already, from other sources, the various facts and details of any important information contained in his statement. To take one small personal example, I knew from other experience that my own code-name of "Frank Jackson" already had come into their possession. But I had not realized that Poelhof would have known this and would, deliberately it seemed, feed them with second-hand stuff. If he had really done so—

"We will let that pass for the moment," I said. "I accept the fact that the information you gave them was second-hand. But that still does not make you look any better in my eyes. You gave them as much as you could. The fact that all you gave them was out-of-date stuff does not alter your intention of helping the enemy."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Poelhof, still as composedly as ever. "I rather think it does. For this is the second question I wanted to ask you:

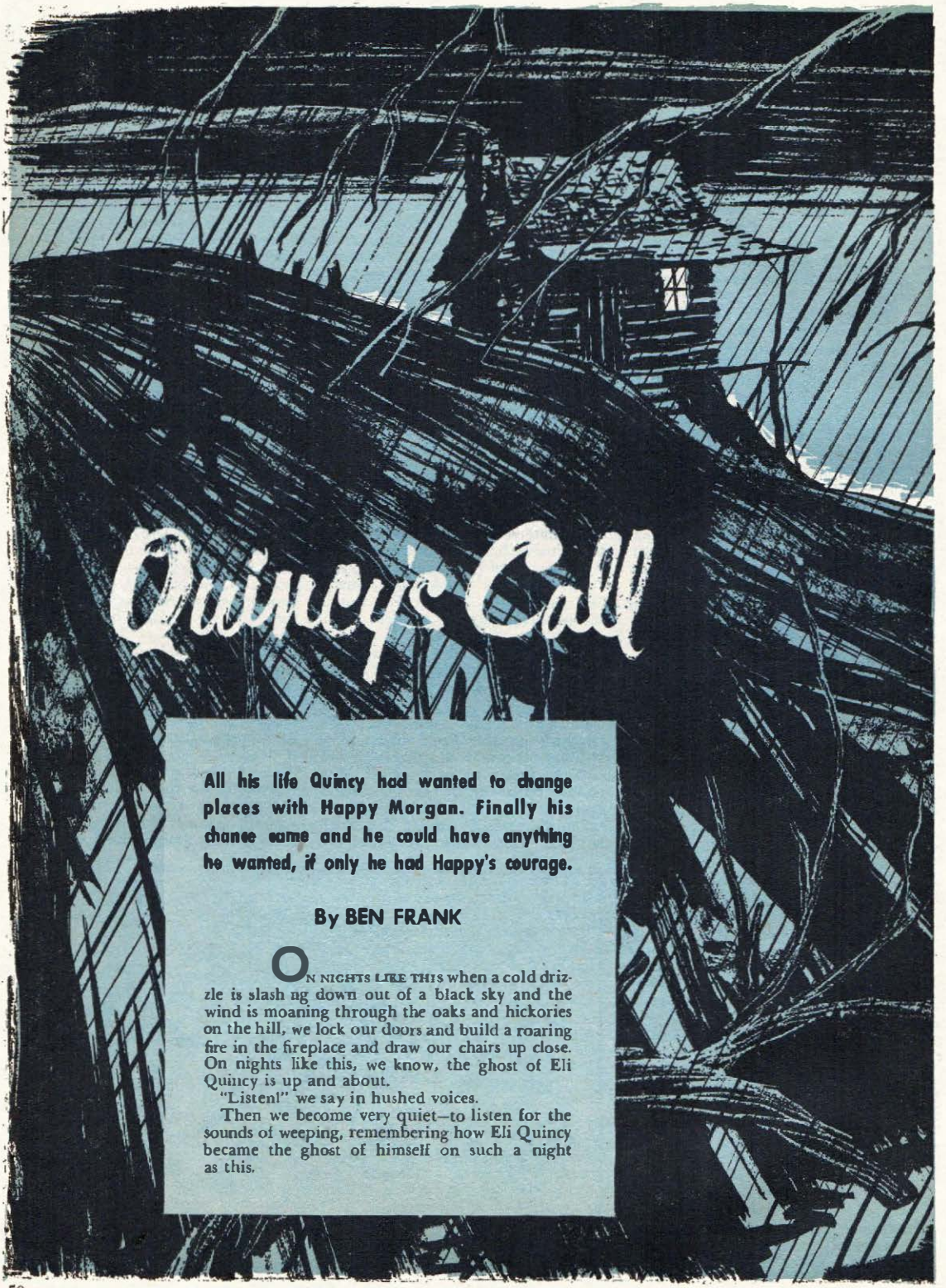
"Before I left London, I was given various names and addresses of agents in Holland to get in touch with. If I were a traitor, or a double-agent, wouldn't I have betrayed them to the Germans at the first opportunity? Wouldn't these Dutch agents be either dead or under arrest by now? Are they? Please read that document again, sir."

And that was the end of the "Poelhof case." To an interrogator experienced in Counter-Intelligence work there is no argument against such an answer. Poelhof had not betrayed a single one of his fellow resistance workers and agents. He had in fact saved both their lives and his own by his brilliant intuition, which told him almost by instinct how to act in the face of a determined enemy cross-examination. He could not have known, because I had of course no hand in his training by the O.S.S., that the very advice I would have given him would follow exactly the lines he quickly worked out for himself. If you fall into enemy hands and are cross-examined, by all means tell your interrogators correct information, which they must already know through other sources. They will at once check your information and, finding it to be true, may be convinced that you have broken down and confessed all you know. If they are Gestapo men, you probably will be spared torture, since you have confessed without recourse to it.

And that is the story of Anton Poelhof, alias "Bobbie" to his friends in the O.S.S.—a thin little half-caste with a brilliant, razor-keen intellect, escape-organizer, suspect, secret agent, again a suspect, and finally proved to be a genuine ally! Although for a long time I was never certain whether he was friend or foe, at the last I knew him for a friend—and a very good friend of both England and Holland.

What has now become of him I do not know. But of this I am certain: He was one of that select band of unsung heroes who played a big part in the war without winning either glory or profit, and who risked their lives repeatedly for their country without any tangible recompense and even without a word of thanks. No finer form of selfless patriotism exists. •

"I'm sorry—I just can't seem to break him of chasing cars."



Quincy's Call

All his life Quincy had wanted to change places with Happy Morgan. Finally his chance came and he could have anything he wanted, if only he had Happy's courage.

By BEN FRANK

ON NIGHTS LIKE THIS when a cold drizzle is slashing down out of a black sky and the wind is moaning through the oaks and hickories on the hill, we lock our doors and build a roaring fire in the fireplace and draw our chairs up close. On nights like this, we know, the ghost of Eli Quincy is up and about.

"Listen!" we say in hushed voices.

Then we become very quiet—to listen for the sounds of weeping, remembering how Eli Quincy became the ghost of himself on such a night as this.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The morning when Eli felt the call to kill Happy Morgan, it was raining fine stinging drops out of a high grayish sky. There was some wind, too—enough to shake the water off the leaves to the groaning of the limbs.

Eli sat in a homemade rocker, listening to the rain against the one window in his sidehill cabin. He was a tall lank sandy-haired man, with shadowy pale blue eyes set deep in the big ugly-shaped bones of his face. Scowling, he thought how this storm could be a sign of some kind, for there had been no rain for almost six weeks. And listening and thinking, he felt a stir of his hidden hate for Happy Morgan and mistook it for the workings of the Almighty. Eli Quincy had never been honest with himself.

At last, his hate white-hot, he strode to the fireplace and hefted his old muzzle-loader from the wooden pegs.

"Wife—" he said harshly to his wife Sarah. (The hill people had been some surprised that a good girl like Sarah, who was old man Preacher Tate's daughter, would consent to marry a hard man like Eli—surprised until they heard how Eli had got religion one night at the preacher's hellfire-and-brimstone camp-meeting. To them, that seemed to explain Sarah's marrying up with Eli.)

"Wife," Eli said again, "I reckon some squirrel-meat would taste mighty good for dinner today."

Eli's two boys, Mel and little Roe, lifted their heads. Mel, nigh on to twelve, asked, "Can I go, too, Pa?"

Eli said no and shrugged into his old sheepskin coat. Mel didn't set up any argument, for he'd had both the fear of the Almighty and his Pa beat into him a-plenty.

Sarah lifted her faded eyes, and there was a mite of fear in them. "Maybe you should wait till it stops raining, Eli," she murmured.

He put on his black, flat-brimmed hat, paying no mind to her, but telling himself how the world would be better off without Hap Morgan. Hap was a sinner, had been one all his life; but now he was a worse sinner than ever, for lately he had been running after Janie Pratt, who was buxom and pretty and young enough to be Hap's own daughter.

ELI stepped out, closed the cabin door and squashed along the path to the clapboard-roofed barn. His two shut-up fattening pigs squealed at his approach, but he gave no thought to how they would make good cured meat for next winter.

When he walked under the big hickory tree on the north side of the barn, the cold wind shook down some giant drops that plunked smartly against his black hat. But he never noticed.

With the old muzzle-loader riding against his shoulder and held snug there by a worn strap, he strode on through the dripping timber, telling himself he was hearing and feeling a call to rid the world of a sinner.

Ever since Eli Quincy and Happy Morgan had been boys together in the hill country, there'd been a batch of trouble between them. They'd fist-fought some of it out in the timber behind the log schoolhouse, with Hap coming out first-best, because he was both quicker and smarter than Eli.

Since then, there had been more trouble over the razorback pigs they let run loose in the timber to fatten on the dropped acorns. Eli always believed that Hap got some pigs that didn't rightfully belong to him.

Other things rankled in Eli's mind, too: Things like Hap's good looks and his sinful way of doing pretty much as he pleased and finding worldly things to laugh about: also, Hap, with his friendly grin and flashing dark eyes, could have had any pretty girl in the hill country for his wife, while Eli could have only one—Sarah Tate, who had never been much to think about. However, Happy had chosen to live alone in his cabin, hunting and trapping and doing as he wanted. Until lately, when he had started courting Janie Pratt.

Thinking of Janie, Eli's thin lips curled tight over his long teeth. Janie was just turned eighteen, and had fair skin and dancing blue eyes and a sinful way of tossing back her bright honey-blond hair when she laughed. She painted her cheeks and lips, even if they didn't need it, and wore her dresses low at the neck and too high above her trim ankles. Janie was a sinner who needed to be saved; but there was no saving her as long as her mind was filled with thoughts of Happy Morgan. . . .

Eli came to the little clearing in which Hap's log cabin squatted, and saw a thin plume of woodsmoke spiraling from the rock chimney. Hap's fat hunting hound lay dozing on the lean-to porch, in the dry. When Eli approached, the hound thumped his tail against the hand-sawed floor, for he was a lazy old fellow, and friendly.

Eli didn't pay no mind to the dog: he had no mind for anything but to get the killing of Happy Morgan over with as soon as possible. As for being found out and punished for murder, he hadn't given the matter a thought.

He stood close to the plank door, listening. He could hear Hap inside, whistling a sinful hoedown tune. Hate flared up brighter in Eli; he unslung his gun and pulled back the big crook-shank hammer. Lifting the latch, he gave the door a mighty shove. He stepped inside with the gun held level and ready.

"Happy Morgan," he shouted, "get down on your knees and do your praying, for in a minute you meet your Maker!"

Hap straightened from where he stood poking at the fire on the hearth. At first, his dark eyes widened in stunned surprise: then as he looked from the long gun to Eli's twisted face, he suddenly understood his danger. But if he was afraid, he didn't let on.

"Maybe I ain't in a prayin' mood!" he said, and lunged straight for Eli and the gun.

Eli squeezed the trigger, and the big hammer popped down on the copper firing cap. But the gun didn't shoot.

Maybe some big drops of water had shook down from the trees into the barrel, dampening the powder. But more than likely, the Almighty was against Eli in this, for the Almighty is One not to be fooled about a man's real purpose.

HOWEVER it was, Eli felt the gun torn from his hands and found himself taking blows on his face from Hap's big fists. He fought back savagely, while his mind held to one thought—kill, kill, kill!

They circled the cabin room, swinging their fists in great smashing blows, and then Hap backed Eli up against the rough plastered wall. Eli took a blow that brought the bloody salt taste to his mouth. They clinched, hugging each other close and gasping for breath. They tripped over their own feet and fell to the floor, making the dust fly up from between the cracks. They rolled over and over, grunting and gouging and kicking, and smashed into a chair, splintering it to bits. It was a fight to the death, and they both knew it.

Then at last Eli felt Hap's fingers clutching at his throat; at the same time, he got his long fingers around Hap's neck. And there they lay, choking each other and knowing that only the one who could hold out the longer would live.

Hap's fingers tightened; Eli couldn't breathe, and his heart seemed to swell until it became a throbbing, bursting pain in his chest. But all the time he kept his thumbs buried in Hap's windpipe. Then, for a terrible moment, blackness enveloped Eli. Suddenly he was breathing again, and the pain was gone.

He stared at Happy Morgan's face and was astonished at how death changed a man, for Hap's face was no longer handsome. The cheekbones had turned flat and ugly, and the eyes seemed sunk almost out of sight in their sockets. Hap's hair had changed, too—it had lost its slick, black luster. Releasing the pressure of his thumbs,

Illustrated by DAVE STONE

Eli sat back heavily on the floor to rest and to let his racing heart slow. However, he still stared at Hap, seeing for the first time that the man also wore a sheepskin coat. Strange, he hadn't noticed that coat before—but the light in the cabin was poor.

He got shakily to his feet and stared about at the upset table and the broken dishes. He gazed down at Hap again. It was hard for him to believe that the thing on the floor had once been Happy Morgan. Then it was that it came to him fully that he had killed Hap, not because the Almighty had given him the call, but because he'd hated Hap. And fear took hold of Eli, turning his mind crafty in its thinking of how he could escape a murderer's doom. He would, he decided, make it seem that Hap had met up with an accident.

He looked about for the dead man's hat and found it on the floor, a black, flat-brimmed hat that fit Hap's head perfectly. He lifted the dead man and slung him across his shoulders. Then his eyes fell on the muzzle-loader where Hap had flung it against the wall. Eli dared not leave the gun in the cabin, yet he couldn't carry it and Hap at the same time. For a moment he was stumped. But his mind was moving like lightning.

Smiling at his own cleverness, he lowered Hap to the floor and slipped the man's limp arm and shoulder through the gun strap. He would let Hap carry the gun, and he would carry Hap.

Outside, it was still drizzling. The old hound glanced up, shook himself to his feet and started to follow.

"Go back!" Eli said crossly.

The sound of his voice startled him, for it came out different than usual. But the hound obeyed instantly.

Eli hurried on. The weight on his shoulders got heavy, and his breath turned short, but he never stopped to rest.

AT last he reached his destination, the top of Deer Ridge Cliff. For a moment he stood there catching his breath and looking down at the tumble of jagged rocks five hundred feet below. Then, mustering his strength, he hurled Hap's body into space and watched it until it landed with a sickening thud at the foot of the cliff.

This thing done, Eli's thinking lost its craftiness. He didn't miss his gun, which had been strapped to Hap's shoulder. He didn't even miss his own sheepskin coat until he was halfway home and began to notice the cold drizzle soaking through his shirt. It came to him then with a terrific shock that he had neither his gun nor his coat; and when he put his hand to his head, he realized that he was bareheaded.

In his haste, he decided, he must have left hat, coat and gun in Hap's cabin, although he seemed to have a faint recollection of picking up both hat and gun. Confused and frightened, he stumbled back to Hap's cabin.

The hound dog welcomed him with wagging tail, but Eli paid him no mind. He hurried into the cabin and stared about, noting the broken chair and the misplaced table. The fact that there had been a fight in the cabin must be hidden, he realized. So he took the pieces of the broken chair and threw them into the fire. He squared the table around and gathered up all the broken dishes; these he carried out into the yard and dropped them into Hap's open-boxed well. Then he went back into the cabin to look for his hat, coat and gun. He couldn't find them.

Panic took hold. Sarah and the boys, and Preacher Tate, if he was around, would wonder, curious, if he went home without his coat, hat and gun. He began to search again.

Footsteps rattled on the lean-to porch, and he stopped his wild search of the room. A quick knock sounded on the door. His eyes swept the room. There was no escape, no place to hide. Suddenly and without warning, the door opened, and he found himself staring into Sarah's wide, frightened eyes. Her plain face was pale, her mousy hair stringy with rain.

He stood very still, watching her, wondering what she would say when she found him here in Hap's cabin—wondering if he would have to kill her, too. But what she said left him speechless.

"Happy," she said, her eyes fixed on his face, "have you saw anything of my man, Eli, today?"

"She thinks I'm Happy Morgan," he thought. "Her sight's a-failin' her!"

He found himself saying aloud, "Ain't seen him. Why?"

"He went huntin' early this morning. Said he'd bring some squirrel-meat home for dinner. Dinner's long past, an' he ain't come home."

Eli, bewildered, said nothing.

"He might've had an accident," Sarah went on. "I thought maybe you'd help me look for him, Happy."

"Why, sure," Eli muttered. "I'll help look for him."

He found Hap's old rain slicker and put it on. Stepping outside, he wondered what Sarah would say as soon as she saw that he was Eli and not Hap. But Sarah didn't seem to notice, even in the better light of outdoors.

"Eli's been actin' queer lately," she murmured. "It's like he is a-standin' around, a-listenin' for the Almighty to speak."

Eli threw back his head and laughed. Not so much at what Sarah had said as at the fact that she still thought he was Hap.

"Eli's crazy on account of his hell-fire-and-brimstone religion," he said boldly.

Sarah turned shocked eyes on him, but said nothing.

As they walked into the timber, a sudden daring thought struck Eli. What would happen, he wondered, if Sarah should see Hap lying dead at the foot of the cliff? As if it was a happen-so, he turned that way. The rain had stopped now; the sun came out.

When they came to the foot of the cliff, Sarah let out a cry and stumbled forward. She dropped down beside the battered body and began to sob.

"Poor Eli!" she wailed. "I knowed he shouldn't've gone a-huntin' this morning! I felt the Almighty was ag'in' it all along!"

Eli stared down at the body—the sheepskin coat; the black, flat-brimmed hat; the old muzzle-loader. It was a shock to see that in death, Hap did look startlingly like him.

Then to Eli it suddenly seemed like a great joke, and he found himself wanting to laugh. But he kept a solemn face as he said, "I'll help you tote your man home, Sarah."

WHEN they reached the sidehill cabin, the two boys, Mel and Roe, came running out to meet them. They stared wide-eyed at the burden Eli and Sarah were carrying.

"What happened to Pa?" Mel asked in a frightened voice.

"He fell over Deer Ridge Cliff," Sarah said.

Both boys began to tremble and sob; and Eli, watching and listening, thought, "Even my own sons think I'm Happy Morgan."

They carried the body into the cabin and covered it with a sheet.

"Thanks for helpin' me tote him home," Sarah said.

"Glad to help a neighbor," Eli told her, but all the time his mind was in a daze, and he felt the need for fresh air and a walk through the timber alone to think out how it was that his family mistook him for Happy.

That afternoon, he paid no mind to where he was going, and suddenly he came out of the timber at Old Man's Creek; and there was Janie Pratt pulling burrs out of her Pa's cornpatch. Seeing her, Eli knew how it was for sure. All along, when he'd been telling himself he wanted to get rid of Happy Morgan in order to save Janie's soul, he'd really wanted to get rid of the man because he wanted Janie for himself.

The shock of his first honest thinking left him panting and trembling, for the sin of his want was enough to damn a man to an eternity of hellfire. But he was too sinful weak to turn his hungry eyes away from her.

Janie lifted her head and saw him. She waved and hurried toward him, her honey-blond hair flying in the breeze, a smile leaping to her red lips and blue eyes.

"Hello, Happy," she said softly, and reaching up she gave him a quick kiss.

He could only stand and stare at her fresh young beauty, feeling the hot blood rushing through his head, like to driving him crazy.

Janie glanced back over her shoulder. "I'll meet you tonight right after dark at the mill dam, Happy," she whispered. "Pa's a-comin' now—you'd better scoot!"

She ran back into the cornpatch and began to tug at the burrs. Eli backed from sight among the trees; then he stopped to watch her lithe, graceful motions and the flutter of her hair in the breeze. And she had just kissed him!

He ran his fingers over his hot face. There was a strange feel to it: An unfamiliar smooth roundness of the cheekbones, a different set to the nose. Something had happened to his face!

His wonderment almost akin to fear, he turned and ran stumblingly to Hap's cabin. The hound greeted him with a joyful yip, but Eli kneed him to one side and hurried into the cabin. The sun was setting red in the west, and the colored light came through the window and fell into his eyes. He slid the wooden bar across the top of the latch and stood with his back against the door, panting and blinking and trying to hush the wild hammering of his heart.

AT last he stumbled over to the mirror that hung above the wash stand. He stared at the mirror and saw not his own ugly face, but the handsome face of Happy Morgan. Of a sudden, Eli knew how it was. Somehow, when he had killed Hap Morgan, he himself had escaped from his old self and had become a different man. He had become Hap Morgan, the man he had hated and envied for so long. He, Eli Quincy, was free from his old awkward, ugly self—free from Sarah and the boys, free from old Preacher Tate's hellfire-and-brimstone religion. Free—

The realization left him weak and shaking. He dropped down on a chair, and presently his thinking ran on. From now on, people would believe he was Hap. That meant that like Hap, he could do as he pleased. He could fish and hunt on Sundays and joke about old man Tate's camp-meetings. He could—he could have Janie Pratt! In fact, she was expecting him to meet her this very night!

Now that darkness had come, he lit a lamp and set it on the table. He washed and combed his hair back slick, and for a time, stood admiring his handsome face in the mirror. Then he found a clean shirt of Hap's and put it on. After blowing out the light, he stepped outside.

The moon smiled through a hole in the clouds. The wind was blowing, soft, warm and whispery. The hound started to trail along, but Eli sent him back to the cabin with a kick at his fat ribs.

At last Eli came to Old Man's Creek and hid behind an oak. He stood staring out into the white patch of moonlight that flooded the clearing by the mill dam. Janie was there, waiting for him. The moon fell bright against her soft hair and her white face and bare throat. She was the prettiest girl in all the hill country, and she was his.

Vainly Eli tried to quiet the furious beat of his heart. He felt himself beginning to tremble, and a trickle of sweat ran along his face. In spite of his desire, he remembered Preacher Tate's hellfire-and-brimstone warnings and he knew that he hadn't escaped from himself, after all. No matter what he was on the outside, he was still Eli Quincy on the inside.

He cursed himself for a fool to think thoughts like this now, with Janie waiting for him in the moonlight. Waiting, while he trembled so violently he was ashamed and afraid to go near her.

He moved silently away along the path, thinking to calm himself by a short turn among the trees. Something caused him to glance back, and what he saw froze his blood. He saw Happy Morgan standing by the oak where he himself had stood. Happy, whom Eli thought he'd murdered. But there he stood as big as life, with moonlight flooding over him.

While Eli stood staring in horror, the moon lost itself behind the clouds, and the damp darkness closed in under the sighing trees. Then a cold drizzle began to fall out of the sky and rattle against the leaves. But Eli couldn't feel the rain against his flesh. He stretched out his hands, but there was no touch of the wet cold drops. And all the time, he heard the rattle of the rain on the leaves.

Slowly, a new and greater horror gripped Eli Quincy. He turned and ran blindly but without sound away from Happy Morgan and Janie Pratt. He ran and ran, somehow dodging the trees and the low-hanging limbs, no matter if it was pitch dark. And as he ran, his horror grew.

At last, he came to his own hillside cabin and saw a lantern moving about the pigpen. He saw Preacher Tate and Sarah in the circle of yellow light, feeding the two shut-up fattening pigs.

"Sarah! Preacher!" he called wildly; but they paid no mind to him.

He ran up to them and tried to clutch Sarah's arm, but he couldn't feel her. He tried to beat his fists against Preacher Tate's thin old chest, but he couldn't touch the old man.

The fattening pigs having been fed, Sarah and her pa, the preacher, turned away from the pen and headed back to the cabin, their heads tipped against the rain.

ELI knew then for sure that he was a ghost. He knew it was his body, not Hap's, that lay under the sheet in the cabin. He knew it had been Hap who had won the death-fight that morning, but for a time his—Eli's—spirit had taken over Hap's body. Why this had happened, he didn't know, unless it was that ever since he could remember, he had wanted to be Happy Morgan, even if he did hate him. And tonight Eli'd had his chance of being Hap, but had lost it because his fear had turned him away from Janie, which was something Hap would never have done.

Eli could think of but one thing to do—return to where he'd left Hap and Janie standing by the oak tree. If he could somehow get back into Hap's body, he reckoned he could breathe and feel and live again.

But when he came to the tree, he found nobody there. Then he went running to Hap's cabin, but it was empty. Moaning and weeping, Eli went running back into the timber, searching.

Now, if he'd gone to old man Pratt's cabin, he would have found Hap. And right at the moment, Hap was talking to Janie's father.

"I know I'm older'n Janie and I ain't never been much good. But with Janie's help, maybe I can amount to somethin' yet. So I'm askin' to marry her and promisin' to make her as good a husband as a man can be."

But Eli Quincy never once thought of looking there for Happy, for it never occurred to him that Hap and Janie had met by the oak to talk of honest love and marrying.

So Eli never found Happy Morgan that night. And if he ever found him on any other night, it did him no good, for on nights like this when the cold drizzle is slashing down out of a black sky and the wind is moaning in the trees, Eli is still running through the timber, weeping.

"Listen!" we say in hushed voices, pulling our chairs close to the fire. And we grow very quiet as we listen for the sounds of weeping. •

HERMIT ON BIKINI

Who was this man and what was his incredible secret? Was the whole thing a hoax, or did it really happen? But, more important, will it happen again?

• *By JOHN LANGDON*

FROM THE FILES OF THE DISABILITY AND VESSEL PERSONNEL DIVISION, U. S. SHIPPING BOARD, JULY 9, 1952. STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN PARAM F. ERICKSON, MASTER OF THE *M. V. Thalia*, APPENDED TO THE SHIP'S LOG OF MARCH 8, 1952.

WHEN WE FIRST SIGHTED THE NATIVE CRAFT and perceived through the glasses that the sole occupant appeared to be a white man, I gave orders to change course and stand by for a possible rescue. We were passing north of the Ratak chain of the Marshall Islands, almost within sight of the northernmost island of Bikini, uninhabited since the atomic-bomb tests of July, 1946. Any craft therefore in these waters would have been most unusual.

It was a calm day. We were able to approach close to the craft, which was oddly and crudely constructed. A light line was thrown across it and with this the occupant pulled himself to the side of the ship.

I had been observing him through the binoculars all this time, aware that his white hair and beard and the pallor of his skin, most unusual in anyone exposed for any length of time to this tropic sun, could be those of a rare albino native. But when he was alongside, holding on to the Jacob's-ladder that had been lowered, I saw that his eyes were a clear blue and not the eyes of an albino. He was extremely thin, almost a skeleton.

I called out to ask him if he was strong enough to climb the ladder or should I lower a lifeboat.

"I can manage the ladder, Captain."

His voice was surprisingly strong and resonant. And when he came up the ladder, kicking the craft away from the side of the ship, it was with a swiftness and a strength that did not go with his apparent age.

FROM the first his behavior was extremely odd. He did not at once come to the top of the ladder, but stopped midway and looked up at the men waiting to help him and asked in his ringing voice that no one please touch him or come any closer to him than ten or fifteen feet.

The men looked to me for instructions and I signaled them to stand back. Only then would he come on board, lifting himself lightly and easily over the gunwale as if his body had no weight, as if the mere pressure of his hands on the ledge of the gunwale was enough to propel him up and over. He stood on the after deck looking around uncertainly, but when a couple of men took a step toward him he sprang back with an amazing, effortless bound, and held up a hand.

"Don't!" he cried out. "For your own safety don't come any nearer!"

His actions were so strange that I left the bridge and came down to the after rail of the boat deck. He turned to me.

"Captain, please order your men not to come any closer to me than they are now."

"Very well," I said. "But perhaps we had better go into my office and get this straightened out."

He shook his head. "I'm afraid to take the chance."

"Afraid to take the chance?"

"I have been living over there for six months."

"On Bikini?" I said.

"On Bikini, Captain. Bathing in its waters, eating what I found on its islands and the fish I caught in its lagoon."

I said I still did not understand.

"Captain, I'm afraid that I am radioactive. Highly—perhaps dangerously—so. I am not sure, but I do not want to take a chance on anyone else becoming infected."

I told him I thought there was little danger of that. I had done some reading on the subject and as far as I knew, radioactivity could not be communicated by proximity or even by direct contact. This made no impression on him, however. He persisted in saying that he had probably absorbed more radioactive substances than any man on record and that no one could possibly tell, without scientific tests, just what effect this could have. In any case, he asked, why take a chance? Why not let him travel back to the United States in isolation or semi-isolation, at least? I could see no harm in agreeing to this.

He then identified himself as Matthew A. Hummel, formerly carpenter on the S.S. *Cambrian* which had capsized in a typhoon and gone down in these waters about six months ago. He was not sure of the date, but there had been no other survivors.

I remembered something about it in the way one will remember those mysteries of the sea where a few weak distress signals are received, then nothing more is heard of the ship.

Later, observing him at a somewhat closer range during the trip home, I was struck by the spring to his step, the way he moved and held himself, and by the firmness and resiliency of his muscles, and I could believe he was twenty-eight years old and not the sixty-some years I had first taken him to be. Also, there was a quality to his skin that I find hard to define—a translucence, a glistening or shimmering texture I have never before seen on any human being.

A small unused storeroom on the stern of the ship was cleared and cleaned up. He was provided with an Army cot, bedding, eating utensils, towels and soap, a five-gallon bottle of drinking-water, and he was furnished a bucket with a line on it to haul up sea water for his washing. He was to take care of his own dishes, placing them on the edge of the hatch near the galley at mealtime and when food was put in them he would come and get it. He asked for pen and ink and a pad of writing paper. He said he had observations on his stay on Bikini that might be of interest to scientists and he wished to get them written down during the voyage home.

On the trip he kept to his room, writing, coming out only for his meals or to haul up a bucket of sea water. He might not have been on the ship at all except for the attitude of the crew who referred to him as "The Spook," and avoided the stern of the ship as much as possible. A few of them refused to go back there at all and there were, of course, the expected stories of strange ghostly lights to be seen in his room at night. One persistent story that had some minor basis in fact concerned a large luminous area far down in the water that seemed to be following in the wake of the ship. Undoubtedly over-active imaginations plus the presence of a rather unusual amount of phosphorescence in the water accounted for this. And one of my mates reported solemnly that when he had glanced in the porthole of the storeroom while passing by one night he had actually seen the fellow writing by the glow that came from his body.

I had two conversations with him, seated several feet apart on the after hatch. In the first, appended to the log, I obtained essential information from him such as the name and address of his wife in Oregon and of his father and mother in Baltimore, Maryland, his place and date of birth, and so forth. He was well educated and had received a Bachelor of Arts degree from an Eastern university.

The second conversation occurred on the afternoon of March 17th. We were due to arrive in San Francisco shortly after six A.M. the following morning. On this occasion he placed a roll of papers, neatly tied, on the hatch between us and asked, should anything happen to him, to see it was delivered to the proper authorities.

I WONDERED why he thought anything might happen to him but he avoided a direct answer to my questions, repeating that this was merely a precaution and said something I did not understand about his work being finished.

"I have left in there a card with a complete set of my fingerprints on it in case it becomes necessary to establish my identity," he said. "There is also a small piece of metal, a scrap of iron I picked up off the deck. I have kept it about me constantly and it might prove my claim of being highly radioactive. So I would not handle it too much if I were you. Of course you have my permission to read what I have written, if you wish. But please see that those personal letters are delivered."

His manner struck me as strange, but there was no sign of derangement. In fact, he seemed quite calm, self-possessed and at peace with himself.

These are all the facts I can attest to. I have also been asked to state my impressions in view of his disappearance from the ship—which must have occurred in the early morning hours shortly before we reached the pilot station at San Francsico. He

Illustrated by RAY HOULIHAN

had stripped clean of everything the storeroom where he had been staying. The Army cot and bedding, the utensils and towels, the water-bottle and even the bucket and the hand-line had been thrown overboard. There was no evidence that he had ever been on the ship—except, of course, for the unusually clean storeroom and the bundle of papers which he had turned over to me.

In stating my impressions I must say that as soon as I could, I read what he had written. It is obvious to me that he was insane. I am not versed in psychiatry, but the nature of his hallucination must have been such that he could appear to be rational.

I am familiar with the reports of the radiation research laboratories at Stanford and the University of California: that the scrap of iron he kept in his possession and even the steel bulkheads of the storeroom where he stayed did emit a peculiar type of high-intensity radiation that has so far defied identification, as did the card bearing his fingerprints, which proved to be those of a Matthew A. Hummel, born September 23, 1923 and last registered on the articles of the S.S. *Cambrian* as its carpenter. I might also add that the roll of papers of the document he had given me remained in my desk drawer for several hours. In the same drawer I kept my Leica camera with a nearly-used roll of film. On finishing the roll I sent it to be developed but the entire roll was ruined by overexposure.

Nevertheless, it is my firm conviction that Matthew A. Hummel was suffering from strong, obsessive hallucinations caused by the loneliness and deprivations of his stay on Bikini and possibly by his radioactive contamination. In my opinion the document is a hoax, though not a deliberate one. I do not doubt that he believed in it himself—so firmly, in fact, that he took his own life.

(Signed) *Param F. Erickson*
MASTER, M. V. THALIA
JUNE 12, 1952

DOCUMENT ATTRIBUTED TO MATTHEW A. HUMMEL

NEAR the end of last September our ship, the S.S. *Cambrian,* was running southeast from a typhoon, or rather, into the fringe of it, trying to circle it since the typhoon was moving in a general southwesterly direction. For two days the sky was overcast. We did not see the sun, and the sea boiled up around us in waves whose peaks easily reached as high as the boat-deck, nearly thirty feet above the waterline, and seemed to come at us from four different directions at once. Our instruments recorded short gusts of wind up to ninety-five and one hundred miles an hour.

During this time no work was done except that absolutely necessary for the running of the ship. It was impossible to keep anything on top of the galley ranges. The cooks had to move around with the aid of handlines we had strung, and we had no hot meals at all. Several lockers were ripped from their moorings by the force of the ship's roll whipping over and back and a few of the men who did not barricade themselves securely enough in their bunks were thrown out. We slept in quick snatches, awakening certain with each big roll that we were going on over this time. The limit-marker hand on the wheelhouse inclinometer had stopped at a fifty-five and one-half degree roll to the port side, far beyond our safety factor, and nothing but a high wave or several of them coming up under the port side at the peak of our roll at that moment, could have saved us from going on over and capsizing, since we were riding light and empty.

ON the morning of the third day the winds began to slacken and by early evening it was fairly calm. Although the sky was still solidly overcast we resumed our normal cruising speed. Around eight o'clock that night the clouds were reported to be breaking up and at ten o'clock the bridge was able for the first time in nearly three days to fix our position. We were far south of our regular course.

It was near midnight when I was awakened by my roommate, the bosun, shaking me and saying, "Come on out, Chips! Come on out on deck!"

He left without giving any explanation. He had sounded so urgent that I dressed and followed.

Never will I forget the spectacle that struck my eyes when I stepped out on the fore-deck.

The ocean extending around the ship on all sides as far as I could see was one luminous, shimmering mass of green-white fire. The ship's lights, the running-lights, the circles of the portholes and the rectangles of open doorways all seemed pale and feeble by comparison. It was beautiful yet terrifying. I could feel my heart pounding. A chill that was not from actual cold swept over me.

This was not the usual phosphorescence of waves breaking on a beach and cresting the shoreline with frothing green-white luminescence. Nor was it like the patches I had seen at sea, running and spreading where the swells broke. Nothing I had ever seen remotely approached this. Not even standing one night on the deck of a ship fogbound a few miles offshore, listening to the bellowing of the ship's whistle and watching luminous blobs of light, literally thousands of them, float up and surround the ship like huge sightless eyes. This was utterly different. There were no swells; the sea was glassy; I could see the surface of the water and a short distance beneath it, and this glow neither brightened nor dimmed but spread its brilliant radiance evenly, making every detail of the *Cambrian* clearly visible.

THEN I saw the low dark line of an island lying ahead off our starboard bow, and I joined a group of men standing at the rail.

"What island is that?" I asked.

Sykes, a seaman who had just been relieved at the wheel, said, "Bikini, I heard."

"Bikini!"

"Yeah. They're sure having one hell of a hassle up there."

"Who is?"

"All of 'em. The old man, the chief and the second mate, and the chief and the first engineer. The chief engineer swears he's got the engine wide open with all it'll take and the way it's turning over, he says we should be making fourteen and a half to fifteen knots. The second mate's ready to be tied. He claims we're not doing anywhere near that. Says he's got bearings on the island now and in an hour or two we'll know who's right."

"Who do you think is right?" someone asked.

"Now how in hell would I know?" Sykes said.

I asked Sykes if he had heard any explanation for this glow.

"All of 'em say they've never seen anything like it before," he said. "They don't know any more about it than we do."

Other groups were gathered on the fore-deck and up on the boat-deck. I could hear the murmur of hushed, excited voices. Ordinarily, after two days of constant buffeting by the typhoon, we would have wanted only to sleep. But now none of us thought of sleep. We were still out on deck as the luminosity began to fade slowly from the sky in the first faint drawn, then swiftly as the sky filled with light.

Shortly after dawn it was established by direct bearings on points of the island that our speed had dropped to something less than half. This, in spite of a full throttle and all nozzles open delivering a forward thrust of sixty-five hundred horsepower to the propeller.

Only strong headwinds or powerful tidal currents could have affected our speed that much. Even then, the current would have had to approach the proportions of a tidal-race or bore,

and that was unheard of in open ocean or among these low Pacific atolls. Nor was there any wind except a slight offshore breeze.

One seaman had the theory that we were in the grip of a powerful and until-now-unknown magnetic field. We laughed at this.

"Go ahead and laugh," he said. "But just the same, during my trick at the wheel the magnetic compass was acting up."

On modern ships the magnetic compass is infrequently referred to and so it was not strange he had been the only one to notice it. Nevertheless, we went up to the monkey-house on the flying bridge where the other binnacle was and the compass-card was pointed a quarter of a circle—ninety degrees—off our true heading.

The bosun was delegated to relay this information to the captain who verified it and said it was very strange but it explained nothing. There was no magnetic force on earth capable of slowing up a ship under full power, he said.

By noon, however, there could no longer be any doubt. We had stopped moving entirely. Whatever was holding us, magnetic force or not, we had come to a dead stop. The island, which should have been out of sight by now, was directly abeam of us. Nor was there any tide and only the faintest breeze. Boxes and bits of wood dropped over the side continued to float slowly forward past us and the magnetic compass-card had swung a full half-circle, directly opposite the direction of our heading.

It was then I began to feel fear, real fear, in myself and in the others. No one spoke of it but we gathered together now in larger groups. Now and then one of the mates or an engineer muttered something reassuring, but their words sounded hollow. The three wipers refused to go below, saying they were not needed for the running of the ship and were going to stay topside until it was moving again. The rest of us did not work. We waited, feeling the throb of the engine as the propeller went on churning and churning. We stood at the rail and stared down at the clear blue-green water. Occasionally schools of small fish or the long dark shape of a larger one darted through the water. The bleached white bone of the island with the few splinters of coconut palms on it hung stationary off the starboard, shimmering in the hot sun. Now and then someone tossed a bit of wood or a cardboard carton over the side and we followed it with our eyes until it disappeared beyond the bow.

Then something happened which the four of us who saw it finally decided must have been a trick of the dazzling sunlight on the water. We were on the stern at the time, myself, the bosun and two sailors, when about a quarter of a mile off, a wave—one single wave in the midst of that calm expanse of sea—lifted itself. We all saw it at the same time. It rose to a height of six or eight feet in a long, thin, curved arm. Then the tip of it broke off and the next instant there was a bird, a large bird like a white albatross, flying low over the water.

For several seconds none of us could say anything. It had looked exactly as if the tip of the wave that had broken off had *become* the albatross. But that was impossible.

We finally figured out, as we watched the albatross circle the ship about a quarter of a mile away and disappear in the direction of the island, that it had been resting on the water all along and had chosen that moment to take off. The only trouble with that was that we had not seen one single bird or any living thing in the sky or water except the fish, since we had been here.

We decided not to say anything to the others about it.

At three o'clock that afternoon the oiler on watch in the engine-room came up to the messroom for coffee and announced that we might not have the main turbine working much longer. We were losing the vacuum on it. It had been dropping steadily since noon and had gone from twenty-eight inches of vacuum down to twenty-one.

"The sea water just won't cool," he said. "Yet it hasn't changed temperature since I came on watch. Not by one degree. I've been checking it every fifteen minutes since noon and it's always the same—eighty-two degrees. The chief and the first are going crazy down there."

"What'll happen if we lose vacuum?" someone asked.

The oiler stared at him.

"What'll happen?" he said. "We'll lose the plant, that's what'll happen—the turbines for the screw and the generators. You can't keep 'em turning without a vacuum."

No one asked any more questions. We avoided looking at each other. A couple of men got up quickly and went out. A little later in the eight-to-twelve watch room I saw the ordinary seaman packing his belongings, folding his clothes and putting them away in a suitcase and a canvas duffel-bag, oblivious, concerned only for his possessions. From behind the closed door of the steward's room I heard sounds of angry cursing. There were several voices. Some of the men were wearing their lifejackets.

On the fore-deck I stopped beside the bosun who said, "If only we were back in that typhoon, Chips! That's something I can understand." Then he gripped my arm. "What is it, Chips? You've been to college—*what is it?*"

There was nothing I could say. I left him and went up the outside companionways to the wheelhouse. All the deck officers were in there except the second mate who was bending over the pelorus on the flying bridge, still hecking his observations. The captain came into the wheelhouse.

"I've authorized Sparks to send a distress call," he said.

Todd, the chief mate, said, "Captain, maybe if we went astern for a while we might shake it."

"Good idea, Mr. Todd." The captain called for full speed astern. The mechanical telegraph jangled and was answered from the engine-room. The engine whined to a stop, then picked up in reverse, making the ship throb like a giant heartbeat.

AN hour later, when we had not moved, he ordered the engine to full ahead again. Then they tried reversing the engine quickly, several times. Nothing had any effect. We were as motionless as if we were imbedded in a cake of ice, but with the lear, warm water slipping past us, rising and falling in little swells that lapped gently against the hull. Also, whenever the engine was reversed, the magnetic compass- ard whipped sharply around in a full half-circle in the opposite direction.

The radio operator, his face dripping with sweat and his lothes soaked, came in to report he ould not get through.

"Too much interference," he said.

"What kind of interference?"

"I don't know, Captain. It's like static and it isn't. It covers all the bands. Once in a while I get a few weak signals, but that's all."

"Well, keep trying."

He ordered the engine stopped.

Without the accustomed noise and vibration the ship was like a dead ship, not quite real. I half believed it was all a dream. I left the wheelhouse and started back down to the main deck and it was as if all my senses were muffled in thick layers of wool. I s arcely felt the deck my feet touched or the rails my hands gripped. Now and then shocks of reality came through to me and were quickly shut out.

The strain was beginning to tell on the men too. Four of the rew got into the ship's hospital, broke open a locker and stole a gallon bottle of grain alcohol. They started fighting among themselves. I saw the ordinary who had been packing his gear. He had taken the suitcase and the duffel-bag up to the boat-deck and stood near a lifeboat, staring at it. There were other men there too, in their life-jackets, obviously wanting to lower the boats, but not quite daring to until the aptain gave the order.

Just before sunset the vacuum dropped too low; the main turbine failed; then the generator kicked off the line. The little Diesel-powered emergency generator took over. The boiler fires were put out; the engine-room auxiliaries secured.

In the bleak, dimly-lighted port passageway two of the crew who during the trip had voiced their hatred of our se ond cook, Jantsen, be ause he was the only colored person on board, had thrown Jantsen down on the deck. One of them straddled Jantsen and was choking him and the other was on his knees beating at Jantsen's face with the bottom of both fists, hammerlike. There was room to reach over them and get a fire-extinguisher off the bulkhead. I swung it —I knocked out the one choking Jantsen and hauled the other off him.

"It's okay now, Jan."

HE did not hear me; he ran down the passageway into the galley and came to the door with a meat-cleaver, threatening to kill anyone who came near him.

"You too!" he screamed at me.

A few minutes after this there was a high-pitched yelling and someone ran down the passageway on the other side toward the fore-deck. I started that way but before I got outside I heard a loud splash.

Two of the engine-room crew were standing at the gunwale staring down at the water.

"What happened?" I shouted.

They turned to me, their faces rigid with unbelief.

"He disappeared!" one of them said. His voi e shook.

I could not believe what I was seeing: The water was rising, surging over the decks in a lum nous mass. The second mate emptied his pistol into it without effect; the cook hacked at t e hawser-thick arms; the blade bit through to the metal ledge, and still the water came.

"Disappeared! You mean he sank out of sight?"

They stared at me and both of them shook their heads slowly. The other one said, "Disappeared! Like that! Soon as he hit!"

They did not seem to be drunk. Yet they were badly scared. Nor was there any sign of the man who had gone overboard. I left them and started up the companionways again and stopped on the starboard wing of the cabin-deck outside the wheelhouse.

Except for the coughing chatter of the emergency generator that supplied a few feeble lights, the ship was dead, a motionless hulk frozen fast in these wide miles of ocean. The last stain of red was rapidly being washed out of the western sky and the unearthly glow from the water was rising to supplant the darkness. I went into the wheelhouse.

THE captain was sprawled face-down, half in the wheelhouse and half in the passageway behind it. The side of his face was turned to me and there was an ugly cut on his forehead. I wondered if he had stumbled and struck something or if someone had hit him. I started to bend over him and then I heard a scream that was unlike any of the others I had heard and a prolonged, racking cry that froze all other sounds, everything, even the beating of my heart:

"It's coming on board!"

For seconds a blank deathly silence hung in the wake of that cry. Then running feet pounded on the decks. There were stricken screams and other voices took up the shout. I ran out on the starboard wing.

I could not believe what I was seeing:

The water was rising. All around the ship it was rising in small spear-pointed waves, but only close up against the hull. Farther out, the sea was smooth, calm and undisturbed.

It was as if the ship were cradled in a nest of green-white flames that licked up the sides, clung, fell back, gathered themselves and rose higher —as if the steel plates of the hull were being consumed.

I stared at this seething caldron of flame-tipped water and all at once I knew—I knew with an instant, blinding impact that this water was alive. It was alive and possessed of an intelligence.

I could not have moved then if I had wanted to. Nor could I take this in in its entirety. It was too vast and insupportable. At the same time, with part of my mind, I realized this could be the only explanation for a force—or an entity—powerful enough to stop the ship, to hold it motionless hour after hour, yet all the while remain, itself, fluid enough to allow the propeller to churn through it and schools of fish to swim in it.

I was aware of the panic, the blind terror of the crew as the first thick, ropelike, livid tentacle groped for the gunwale and spilled over on to the deck. As if in a dream or a flickering projection on a distant screen, I saw the men run. Some of them crashed unheeding into bulkheads, guy-wires, resistor-houses; stumbled over coamings, got up and ran in another direction. A few crawled out on the hatch-covers and stayed on their knees, praying loudly. Their sounds blended, became one, rose to me in waves like the panting, guttural grunts of some giant animal.

The radio operator plunged into the radio shack and slammed and locked the door. I heard the power hum of the transmitter and the liquid staccato ripple of the sending key. The second mate appeared on the boat-deck below and emptied his automatic pistol at the water, then flung the gun away and ran inside. I saw Jantsen with the meat-cleaver, hacking at the hawser-thick arms of water. The blade bit through them into the metal ledge; still the water came on.

I went into the wheelhouse, found a spare lifejacket and put it on.

When I got back out on the wing, the luminous water had lunged up in one sheer, steep wave completely surrounding the ship and was surging over in one solid mass. Both the fore- and after-decks were awash with it. It poured into the midship deckhouse through the open watertight doors and was flowing up the outside companionways, vaulting them step by step in rippling heaves. Surrounding Number Three hatch where four of the men were praying, it rose over the coaming and converged on them.

Their screams cut through the other sounds as the water engulfed them. For an instant the heaped mounds of water were streaked with an iridescent play of color. Then the mounds subsided and flowed back off the hatch and there was no sign of the men, no sign they ever had been there at all.

The boat-deck below was covered. I became aware that the ship was settling and listing to starboard. I knew the engine-room had been filled and *it* was probably filling the holds. But the unimaginable force, or whatever it was, was also heeling the ship over. I braced myself against a stanchion as the water surged up the companionway and poured into the wheelhouse. A thick tentacle shot out and encircled my ankle.

I felt a sting not unlike an electric current, but not unpleasant. It was warm and vibrant. I caught my breath. The water gathered. Pulses of light and color shot back and forth in it. The thudding of my heart made a roaring in my ears. I heard a distant scream. I did not know if I had made it or not. I did not care. And in the instant that it rose and covered me and I lost consciousness, I knew an eternity, an infinity of things. . . .

When I awoke again, it was dawn. I was on the beach of what, I later learned, was the main island of Bikini. I still wore the lifejacket.

I soon realized that this spot where I had awakened was on the inshore, or the lagoon side, of the island, facing that enormous lagoon whose farthest limits I could not see. I walked along the beach to a point where the ocean was visible. There was no sign of the *Cambrian*, no evidence the ship had ever been near these waters. But I knew I could not have floated unconscious and face-up through the encircling reefs to the place where I had awakened.

In the long, solitary months I have had time to think; time to search, to find and piece together fragments of remembrance until I am now unshakably convinced that I was absorbed, fused into the body of what, for the lack of any other term I must call the monster, and then re-cast in my former shape and identity.

The monster *is*—it *becomes*—that which it absorbs. It is now neither good nor evil, but some of both. It has only one matrix or core: inexorable growth. It cannot be stopped, it cannot be destroyed, by our most powerful weapons. For it was born of our most powerful one. Born too, of our fear, our distrust, our suspicion and in a measure, of our cruelty. What it will become depends upon that balance, good or evil, existing on that ultimate, inevitable day when it has completed its final absorption.

I KNOW this will be put down as a hoax or the fantasy of a mind deranged by hardship and solitude. I cannot blame anyone for that belief. For this goes beyond the realm of everyday commonsense. But I have been in that other real realm and I have not much longer to live. I must go back to the monster, a part of which has followed this ship and is waiting for my return to the parent body. How else could I prove the reality of my conviction?

My only hope is that you who may read this do not have the seeds of that future absorption already planted within yourselves. For I fear that the radioactivity with which I am saturated, each atom linked to the body of the monster, will pass from me into the paper and ink I use. Can it pass through them, through other hands, perhaps through type and ink and paper again? I do not know. I hope not; I hope not. •

RELAX~ and enjoy it!

· By GEORGE SCULLIN

Every man who's ever looked longingly at those bodies beautiful and thought to take a course in muscle building should read this. He'll be glad he did—and it might even add years to his life.

SIT DOWN, NEIGHBOR, and take the load off your feet. Better yet, you've got a sofa, haven't you? Well, then, don't sit down; lie down. And if you feel like taking a short nap, take it. You may never get a better opportunity.

For the hour of the lazy man has come: medical opinion at last has arrived at the conclusion that

Illustrated by CARY THORNE

exercise for adults is the bunk, that all it does is build up a strangling layer of fat around your heart that can kill you just as fast as a slug from a .38. So, if you've reached the age where you're beginning to look guiltily at your expanding waistline, and you're hearing suggestions from your lady friend that you shop around for a good gym or YMCA, forget it. If you're over 30, you'd be wiser to settle for a good Morris chair.

It was Chauncey DePew, octogenarian chairman of the board of the New York Central Railroad, who first put the theory of relaxation into words a man could understand and applaud. Asked what he did for exercise, the wily old boy beamed healthily and said, "I get my exercise walking in the funeral processions of my friends who exercise."

The late, great humorist, Robert Benchley, may have put it even more succinctly—and certainly he was anticipating current thinking in medical circles on the subject—when he remarked that, "Whenever I feel the urge to exercise, I lie down until the feeling wears off."

Now these amateur soothsayers on the subject have a champion in a member of the medical fraternity. Dr. Peter J. Steincrohn, a Hartford, Connecticut, physician, in his new book, "How to Keep Fit without Exercise," announces the good news that good posture, while sitting and standing, is about as far as one need go in the direction of exercise. Says he, firmly and with the assurance of long experience in the field, "If you want physical fitness, you may have it without exercise. If you want the glow of well-being, the healthful stride, the feeling of 'being in shape' —you may attain this all-important result by the proper manner in which you sit, stand and walk. This relatively simple solution is the answer to the oft-repeated question: 'But if I don't exercise, how shall I keep fit?'"

To the above, Dr. Steincrohn adds that plenty of sleep is essential, despite the old saw that "most people sleep themselves stupid." And he recommends enjoyable vacations spent lazily, and the development of interesting hobbies early in life to keep you alert and stimulated long after you retire to pasture.

Still not convinced? Still feel that urge to get out there and flex your biceps? Well, for you the good doctor makes allowances. If you're certain, he writes, that you just *have* to do something besides sit on your duff and stare moodily into space, then he recommends—in mild doses—bowling or curling, riding, shooting, golf, swimming, walking, canoeing, sailing, lawn bowling, horseshoe pitching, fishing and gardening. And if the very thought of even one of the above has you breathing stertorously and breaking into a mild sweat, the doctor is right at your side with a soothing word. "If you'd like to know," he says, "what I consider the minimum amount of sports nourishment you require, like Dorothy Parker's gamut of from A to B, I suggest that your activities be encompassed by two: walking and gardening."

And don't get the idea the doc is saying all this because he hates sports; he doesn't at all. He's an ex-athlete himself. "I have played baseball and college football," he writes. "I have boxed and played tennis. I have sat upon (and been unseated by) horses. Once I caught a fish. Every summer for fifteen years I have played golf two or three times a week. I have played eighteen holes in a driving rain—and thirty-six or even fifty-four holes on many a bright Sunday.

"But came 40: I played golf three times that year. Came 41; the grand total was eighteen holes. I am not suggesting, however, that men and women over 40 give up their golf; but I do recommend that you do not continue to play if you've lost your zest for the game. Don't play just because your friends still like it and want you to join them.

"Don't get your clubs out simply for the reason that you've been shamed into playing. If you enjoy your golf, play it—but don't work at it. And if it requires courage and willpower for you to finish the second nine, then it isn't a game any more."

Why this sudden reversal of form on the theory of exercise? Well, it *could* stem from the realization that, the day the H-bomb went off, the most powerful man in the world wasn't Charles Atlas, Lionel Strongfort, or any of their ilk, but a skinny scientist who lifted a pinkie and exploded the infernal contraption in the first place. And from that fact a man gets a great deal of comfort, if he can't get it out of the bomb itself. For, ever since most of us in our juvenile days took a physical-culture course that left us with biceps as hard and vibrant as wet string, we have had our doubts about the strong men who straighten horseshoes with their bare hands. Of what use, we have asked ourselves through the years, are straight horseshoes?

Now we have the answer. Straight horseshoes are of no use whatever. Did they produce a lot of beautiful bodies to be exposed for the delectation of the human eye? Not more than you could see outside of a gym or a packet of French postcards!

Yet one blast at Bikini was enough to produce the Bikini bathing suit, and thus reveal more bodies beautiful —and more of the bodies—than have ever been exposed in all the centuries of artificial muscle-building. This triumph of the skinny scientist has led to a complete overhauling of the muscle-bound traditions of exercise, and the result is a complete vindication of the man who prefers to take his exercise lying down. Not yet has the day dawned when the indolent male will allow his gaze to be wrenched from the soft contours of the gal in the Bikini suit in order to get a better view of the lard-covered torso of the female Channel swimmer. Nor do the findings of science—and the opinions of Dr. Steincrohn and men like him—indicate that that terrible day will ever arrive.

No, it develops now that the road to health through exercise is not the proper one, after all; what it really is, is the road to folly.

So, if you're one of those chaps who feels the need to exercise now and then, and who is always promising himself to start pounding his chest in front of an open window any day now, you can forget the whole thing. Relax, brother! Exercise is for the young.

And don't go building up a big guilt complex about how many times you've broken your promise to exercise. Such promises are propaganda-inspired anyhow, fostered at every turn by the muscle-building courses, the home-exercise-set-of-barbells ads, the cartoons of the bathing beauties clustered around the lifeguard (bathing beauties who later marry skinny guys like us!), and the newsreels showing the lad we mentioned above, the joker who straightens horseshoes with his bare hands. We moderns have the answer to it, now: Tommyrot!

And, speaking of that propaganda —how did it ever get foisted off on us in the first place?

Well, we won't go into the muscular co-ordination of our cave-man ancestors. There are some to say that he had to be fast enough to out-jump a saber-toothed tiger, but there are others to say that the saber-tooth was pretty stupid to begin with. Anyway, there are more men left than saber-tooths, and we don't think the survival rate is based on foot-races.

That brings us up to the Greeks. They were great worshipers of the body beautiful, and their gods like Atlas—who holds up the world—and Hercules—who performed his twelve labors clad in a lion-skin (today's muscle boys, being smaller, wear leopard-skins) —are still models of physical perfection. But even the usually wordy Greeks had to combine two words, *kalos* (beautiful) and *sthenos* (strength), to provide that source of

torture we know as calisthenics. The funny thing is that the eggheads like Sophocles, Socrates, and Aristotle are better remembered today than—you know the guy I mean—the one who did all that running around Marathon and then dropped dead.

And what about all those Roman gladiators? Lion fodder!

AFTER this comprehensive short course in strong men through the centuries, we arrive at last at what is considered to be the finest group of fighting men ever assembled in the history of the world. We refer—with appropriate deference—to the pilots who manned our flying machines during World War II.

A lot of scientific abracadabra went into the selection of those men. Remember the recruiting posters: "If you are physically and mentally perfect, and only slightly superhuman, maybe you, too, can qualify as a pilot, or navigator, or gunner, or flight steward." Every test known to man was thrown at the young men who aspired to ride the skies in chariots costing considerably more than infantry shoes. And it is true that, through this process of eliminating mere humans, some mighty fine specimens of manhood won their wings.

But recently the scientists who inquire into such things got curious about the progress of these erstwhile paragons of flight. How were they standing up as they marched haltingly into their late thirties and early forties?

Well, the survey shows they are not doing so good. Out of 680 Naval aviators examined in 1940, and reexamined recently, *157 were dangerously overweight, and 87 had diseases of the heart or arteries!*

We can match that score by lining up the misfits at our local tavern any Saturday night.

The whole thing boils down to the fact that time is the great equalizer. Our bartender puts it more succinctly: "You know that little runt we used to kick off the playground? Yeah, him! He just bought the place, and he's my boss."

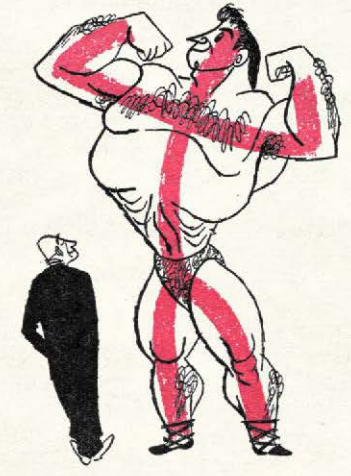
Incidentally, we know for a fact that our bartender can shoulder a keg of beer, while his new boss has just introduced some shell-thin beer glasses because his arm gets tired holding a stein. Which reminds us of another fact: Our local tennis champ has just retired from the game. The exercise was giving him "tennis elbow," a form of bursitis that was causing him considerable discomfort every time he hoisted a few. His doc, hearing of his retirement, is greatly relieved.

Before departing from these notes on the local scene, we must add that our bartender excites a lot of justifiable envy every time he picks up a keg of beer, but that, too, is only the result of the muscle-propaganda and power-worship to which we have all been subjected since infancy. As far as we can recall, no one out our way has had much occasion to run around lifting kegs of beer for the edification of his friends, and even at our clambakes we roll—*roll* is the word—out the barrel in quarter-keg lots so we can leave the rest cooling in the basement.

Yep, the propaganda is unceasing and unrelenting. It comes on the backs of candy wrappers, comic books, and juvenile reading matter. It is heard at every playground, YMCA, school gym, college gym, and on those vast fields of agony where military physical education instructors first bring home the lesson that war is hell. With all that propaganda we have no quarrel. We'll even reverse our field for a moment and say that it is all to the good.

BUT, as Hitler discovered, propaganda instilled into youth will last well into middle age, and therein lies the fat around the heart of the matter. *Of course*, it is a fine thing for a youngster to develop his muscles, if he has any, and if he can develop some co-ordination that will enable him to walk past a piano without falling over the stool, so much the better. The awkward age of youth—say from about 10 to 30—is best survived when some beneficial form of exercise has been applied, with force if necessary.

And there it should end.



Bulging biceps look fine, but get them before you're 30. After that, forget it—and relax.

The trouble is that the propaganda lingers on. When for thirty years of your life you have had it dinned into your ears and heaped on your aching back that exercise and "keeping fit" are as essential to your well-being as enough money to last until Monday, you are going to find it hard to believe that henceforth you are a free man. Yet you are. Anything you can do for your muscles has already been done by the time you are thirty. Anything you do after that can be downright damaging.

Take the little matter of getting fat, for instance. At this moment excessive fat is the number one health problem in the United States. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has some morbid figures to prove that people weighing up to 14 per cent above normal can boast of a death rate from all causes that is 22 per cent higher than that of their normal-weight confreres.

OF course, those are pretty safe odds, and do little more than to add some spice to life, like jaywalking on Hollywood Boulevard, or hot-rodding around trucks on blind curves. These same happy figures, however, go on to prove that, when you get up to 25 percent overweight, you join an exclusive suicide fraternity where you can briefly bask in a death rate 75 percent higher than that of the drab normal man.

Odds like that can kill you, as the saying goes.

Now all of the above can look like an argument for slimming exercises to keep the weight down. We know a radio announcer, in fact, who became quite famous just giving out with those exercises over the air every morning. That he is still alive after these twenty-five years, and still famous, he attributes to that program. As follows: "Every morning I would go into the studio and stretch out on a long black couch with my script. The porter would come in and adjust the microphone just so, and then adjust the light over my left shoulder just so. Then I would read the script slowly—you had to give those dames time to bend over and then get back up again if they could, you know—and all the time I'd be thinking. I'd be thinking of all those thousands of people touching their toes at my say-so, and the thought was so exhausting I've never taken a lick of exercise since."

We are sure the radio station never kept an actuarial table on the number of fat dames who keeled over from overexertion during the program, but we can vouch for the fact that the announcer is the picture of health, looking a scant forty of his fifty-three years.

The sorry fact is that exercise improves the appetite, and that leads to greater food consumption, and that produces more fat to be removed by still more exercise. It is a vicious circle by no means as laughable as it sounds. Every day doctors are finding more and more men complaining of work fatigue, firmly convinced that their jobs are killing them—when all the while they have been completely exhausted by the exercises they do to keep slim and fit.

To get right down to it, so efficient is the human body as a fuel-conserver that *one chocolate drop* will carry you a mile, a peanut-butter sandwich cannot be walked off in five miles, and a really heavy meal contains enough *surplus* food to resist the slimming effects of a thirty-mile hike.

Of course, if you *still* insist upon exercising to keep slim, we do have the encouraging statistic from one scientist who claims that the fattening effects of two doughnuts with coffee can be thwarted by a daily climb to the top of the RCA Building—or its equivalent, if the RCA Building doesn't happen to be handy.

Nope, exercise won't keep you slim. The only way to avoid the fattening influence of surplus food is to avoid surplus food. There just ain't no other way. But there again we are victims of propaganda instilled in our youth. "If you don't eat, you won't grow," says Mom, and with that she shoves a spoonful of pablum into your face and rams it down your throat with her finger. "A big appetite is a healthy appetite," says the high-school football coach approvingly, and with that he shoves your fattened frame in front of the three lugs from Jaybird Reform School, who promptly flatten you on the ten-yard line. "You gotta eat more to stand up to them guys," says the coach when you come to—and it's the kind of lesson you never forget.

So there you are at 30, still eating according to the best traditions of the training-table at dear old Rutgers, but no longer are you the growing boy who needs the extra pablum, and no longer are the cleats bouncing off your skull on every third play through center. Why, then, do you still consume the extra food?

WHILE you are mulling that one over, we hasten to add that the folly of exercise is going to tempt you whether you are rich or poor, a white-collar worker or a blue-collar worker, a farmer or a city dweller. The big reason is that, in these here United States, the living is easier. There is more food for everyone, and more leisure time in which to digest it.

The time was, and not too long ago, when the farmer had food but no leisure, and the workingman, when he had leisure, could earn no food. The result was that both remained gaunt and trim, with no foolishness about exercise. The rich man of that period was always caricatured as being fat, a sure sign of wealth and leisure.

Today all that is gone, and just how far it has gone is shown by a recent study completed by the medical department of the General Petroleum Corporation. It found, through 5000 physical examinations covering executives and workers alike, that both groups came out even, 25 percent of the executives and 25 percent of the workers being overweight. The report concluded that executives and workers alike were digging their graves with their teeth, and it found nothing amusing at all in the situation.

Dr. Howard Rusk, prominent writer on medical subjects, writing recently in *The New York Times*, cast an analytical glance at the whole overweight problem, and came to this gloomy conclusion: "No easy way to reduce is safe—no safe way to reduce is easy." But that mass reducing was in order, and in terms of long tons, he left no doubt. The point is, he devoted several hundred words to the vital, life-saving importance of diet. Not *once* in his authoritative article did the word exercise appear.

HOWEVER, being fair-minded on the subject of exercise, in a biased sort of way, we decided to see what the muscle-men had to say about their pet fetish. We met the first of these superb creatures some years ago in the person of the self-billed "most powerful man in the world." If he wasn't, he was right close to it. He was plain hell on straightening horseshoes and tearing up phone books, but his specialty at the time was being run over by twelve-ton trucks.

Then, one day, he invited us out to see his new act. It was a lulu, we will admit. He would lie on the cowling of a stock car; his head, protected by a football helmet, stuck out a foot or more beyond the radiator cap, while his driver whirled around the fairgrounds track a couple of times to pick up speed. Then, at about 60 mph, and right in front of the grandstand, he would crash headfirst through a flaming wall made of solid oak planks.

Well, this particular night he must have hit a knot, because it threw him. The car ran over him with both wheels in a cloud of smoke and flames; but we will say the car rolled over as many times as he did. A truly spectacular act.

Our strong man limped off the track, spitting out mud and bridgework, and allowed as how he would drop the stunt from his repertoire. "But," he said earnestly, through the gap in his teeth, "that shows what physical fitness and training will do for you. If I hadn't had all those trucks run over me before, I might've got hurt tonight."

THAT attitude, we are sorry to say, we found sadly lacking in the many magazines devoted to the deification of the bulging triceps. Instead, we found evidence of a Narcissus complex in the godlike young men posed before mirrors, admiring their own bursting deltoids, and we were further discouraged when we read that sex, unless approached cautiously, might well sap the energies that could be used to better advantage in the development of "a more interesting anatomical display." And here we always thought that sex was at the root of the whole thing, that those he-man muscles were being *built* just to steal that girl away from that weakling.

Normally we would not use so bitter a tone in describing a group of earnest seekers after perfection, but boy, what they have to say about *us*—well, the fat's in the fire, because, Mister, we've been insulted.

Nor could we warm up to such advice as, "Ache! If your muscles don't ache after fifty or a hundred repetitions of an exercise, they have become too accustomed to it. They are in a rut. Change to a new set of exercises that *will* bring on those welcome aches that tell you your muscles are growing." Or this sage observation: "Without fuel and spark your car would not run. Without that spark of life within you, you would not live."

Oh, well, skip it. We will just add that in our earnest perusal of a score of "joy-through-strength" journals, we came out with the conviction that they were not advocating exercise but a whole new way of life, dedicated exclusively to the creation of vast lumps of meat that can do little more than bat our brains in, delight their owners, and possibly cause some backsliding on the part of a few reformed cannibals.

We will state flatly, right here, that none of the above cracks refers in any way to the blessings of physical therapy that does so much to restore muscles injured by disease or accident. Too much cannot be said of the good done by the physical therapists, especially in their work with our wounded and with the kids hit by polio. And a bow, too, to the physical-ed instructors who help mold the bodies of our youth.

But what, then, of us who have outgrown our formative period and still

fall short of the standards set by a Greek statue? Are we to lie back and let our flabby muscles atrophy still further? A fat chance we have of that, desirable though such a course might be. Our poor heart alone, while we are lying back, is doing work equivalent to carrying 150 pounds up ten flights of stairs every hour. When we start moving about at a leisurely pace, the heart doubles this work. If we have to dodge a truck, it quadruples the work, and the scare alone can keep it pumping like a triphammer for an hour afterward. Just *thinking* about the work your heart does is enough to exhaust you long enough to let pass any impulse for violent exercise.

So let's work out a little program for ourselves, shall we? Let's start in the day we're born, to exercise like crazy. Let's whoop and holler, and play six sets of tennis every afternoon in the broiling sun. Let's carry the ball for old State, and clear the bases for old Mudville. Let's play fifty-four holes of golf, and anchor the tug-of-war team at the firemen's picnic. And let's climb mountains and swim channels and rake leaves and shovel snow.

But let's do it all before we reach the age of 30. When we've attained the latter, let's start tapering off. Let's cut the tennis down to one or two sets, and the golf down to eighteen holes, and the activity for old State down to climbing to the last row in the stadium for the annual classic. Until we're 40.

At 40, we should stop it all. According to Columbia Professor Walter B. Pitkin, life begins at this magic age, and, for us lazy folks, that's the greatest news since they told us about the discovery of the martini. When we get to be 40, we can nail the skis crosswise over the mantel, set the barbells up on end and use them as ashtrays, use the tennis racquet for straining clam juice, and the ball-bat for making cracked ice. In short, we've been emancipated.

So there you have it, or you will have as soon as I can give you this statistic from a survey completed awhile back by *Fortune* Magazine. It seems that the editors became concerned about the way retired businessmen—once virile, aggressively active gentlemen—were taking to jumping out of fifteen-story windows because they had nothing else to do. So the editors took this survey, and I'd tell you about it except that it's upstairs in the attic. And you know what climbing up to the attic would do to the heart of a man my age.

So let's just lie down a bit till the urge to quote that statistic goes away. Ho-hummm. . . . . •

Sand for a Senator

If you get a letter from your Senator and there's some sand in it, that doesn't mean your elected representative has been cavorting on a beach somewhere. He may have been right at his desk in the Senate chambers in the Capitol, when he dashed out that epistle, because even the most timid and innocuous Senators have a lot of sand.

And, what is more, it is the duty of the Senate's Sergeant-at-arms to see to it that the Senators never run out of sand.

This sand is kept in little square jars on their desks, jars with perforated tops, like salt or pepper shakers. And when a Senator gets through writing something at his desk he is apt to pick up the shaker and sprinkle its contents over the paper, to dry the ink.

Sometime ago—back in 1935, to be exact—it was discovered that a good many of the sand shakers were either plumb out of sand or running pretty darn low. Pages hurried over to the Sergeant-at-arms and found there wasn't any more sand.

The Senators were horrified. When it was pointed out to them that blotters had been invented and were considered a pretty good ink-drying substitute for sand, the Senators declared they'd heard vaguely somewhere about some such newfangled device but refused to be mollified: For years and years Senators had been using sand on their letters, and if it was good enough for Henry Clay, John Randolph, and so on, it was good enough for them.

If you're wondering what about the members of the House of Representatives—well, you see, they don't have any desks. Not that they can't write too, you understand. But there are so many of them that there isn't enough room for both them and desks in their chambers. So it was decided to eliminate the desks.

Anyway, the Sergeant-at-arms decided to get busy and find some more sand. This might sound like a fairly simple operation, even for the Government, but it didn't turn out to be that way. It developed that ordinary sand didn't do the trick. It just made the paper sandy without drying the ink. There was no record of where the old sand had come from.

So emissaries from the Sergeant-at-arms' offices scurried all over town trying to find proper Senatorial sand. Well, they found sand you could make glass with, sand for kiddies' backyard play-boxes, and so forth and so on, but no sand for drying the ink on letters. In fact, some of the people in the places they went looked at them as if they didn't have all their marbles, sand-made or otherwise.

Finally, in desperation, some of the sand still on hand in the Senate chambers was taken over to Government laboratories. Government scientists analyzed it and said it was ilmenite sand and came from the Piney River area in Virginia.

So everything finally had a very happy ending. It seems there are tons and tons of that type of sand there, so the Senators can write epistles from now until Doomsday—even if they do not hasten this event, as some of their critics contend—and there will be plenty of sand around to sprinkle on their missives. •

A Bluebook Novelette by
JOHN RHODES STURDY

Flight into Flames

The old man was a fighter, his son admitted, a man who'd fight harder to save the tiny Indian village than he would to save his own forest empire.

SOMEWHERE KENDRICK HAD READ that cancan dancers met these troopships arriving from Korea, and whirled their skirts and kicked up their pretty legs right here on the wharf for the entertainment of the returning boys. On this early morning there was none of that, although there were pretty girls enough, and there was a

military band and a roaring welcome from hundreds of throats when the big gray ship slid along the face of the pier and came finally to a stop.

Kendrick could see the decks loaded with troops—some of them waving and some of them just staring down at the crowd—and he had a queer feeling as he watched, remembering many other days.

He saw the boys march off and the civilians surge in: then he tried to find Private Harry Wright in the midst of the cheering, milling crowd.

When he did find the private, it was almost too late. The boy was marching away with a company of men, and Kendrick could get only near enough to make himself recognized and to shout: "I'm at the Olympic, Harry! Will you meet me there?"

He saw the boy nod, heard him shout something; then Kendrick was pushed aside by a crowd of men and women who were yelling and waving their arms madly.

Back at the hotel he ordered a bottle of bourbon sent up to his room, and some ice and soda. While he waited he lay on the bed and took a chance on closing his eyes. In truth, he could not keep them from closing. He had been flying almost incessantly for a week, with little sleep, and he was numb from the long vigil in the aircraft.

It was around noon when Harry Wright came to Kendrick's room. The boy had a girl with him, a rather attractive girl with a pretty face, who had her arm in his and obviously liked its being there.

They shook hands and Harry said: "This is Nancy Munro—my date." Kendrick poured a couple of drinks, the girl declining one, and they sat around the room and talked for a while, about Korea, about being home, about the weather, which was brutally hot.

Then Kendrick glanced at his watch. He looked across at Harry Wright, into the boy's tanned young face, and then he walked across the room to the girl.

"Would you mind," he said kindly, "if we met you in a few minutes downstairs, in the bar or the coffee-shop? I have some private things to say to Harry, and I haven't much time."

The boy was on his feet immediately. "Listen, Ken," he protested, "we just came up to say hello and have a drink with you."

"Please," said Kendrick to the girl.

He was thankful that she was a decent kid, and quick to understand that he was serious. She smiled, said, "Well, I'm not drinking, anyway," and she turned to the soldier. "I don't mind really, Harry. I'll see you downstairs."

She was out of room before Harry Wright could stop her, and now the soldier turned hotly on Kendrick.

"You're acting pretty damned dictatorial, Ken."

"I'm running out of time. I flew down from Camp Five last night. If I don't pull out pretty soon I won't make it back before dark."

"So?"

"Your father wants to see you."

Kendrick saw the boy's lips curl ever so slightly at the corners.

"He sent you to get me?"

"Not completely. I had to make the flight. But he asked me to pick you up."

"Well—I must say I hardly expected to find him in that mob on the wharf, waving a little flag and clapping his hands. But I didn't think he'd send a substitute." The boy sighed. "Brother, that really smells!"

"It's the fire season, Harry," said Kendrick. "We've had spot fires all over the limits, and not too many men to fight them. Yesterday morning your father went back into the Gambia Range to try to stop a blaze. I'm not a substitute—I just drive aircraft for your dad."

"No, Ken," said Harry, "You're more than that. You're a pal."

He walked to the window and Kendrick watched the back of his head and the broad shoulders of his uniform jacket.

"Look at it my way, Ken," he heard the boy say, without turning. "When I had that fight with my father I said I'd never go back to his damned woods. I don't care if he owns half the Pacific Coast. If he leaves me the company, I'll run it and I'll take the profits—but sitting in Seattle, or Los Angeles, or Timbuctoo. He had two sons—me and Ben—so he says, 'You boys learn the business the hard way, get into the woods, be loggers.' I'm scared of the woods. I'm so scared I— But Ben isn't. Ben's as strong as an ox and he loves it. And it's Ben who gets caught in the chain when they're swinging a log, and it's Ben who is dragged helpless, screaming, through the bush—"

Kendrick let him talk. Harry Wright was repeating things that Kendrick knew by heart. But there was no point in stopping him.

The boy turned around. "But it's not that, now," he said simply. "I just don't want any part of the woods on my furlough. I want a date with Nancy, the girl downstairs. I want to go to Hollywood, maybe. Or New York. Korea's a hell of a country, Ken. You know, Ken, I'll tell you something about a war—"

"You don't have to," Kendrick said, "I was in one."

Illustrated by BILL FLEMING

The boy flushed. "Sorry," he said. And then suddenly he brightened. "Look, maybe you can't make it back before dark. We'll talk to Nancy. This town must be crawling with babes."

"We'll talk to Nancy," Kendrick said. "We'll tell her you'll be back in a couple of days."

"No."

"You're going to do this for your father, Harry. I work for him, and I love him. And I think he's got this coming to him—a couple of days out of your life."

The boy looked around for his barely touched drink. "He wouldn't come to meet me," he said, almost inaudibly.

"He couldn't."

Kendrick walked over and took the soldier firmly by the arm. He turned him around.

"You do this for *me* then, Harry," he said quietly. "You do this for me, and I'll never forget it."

It was not easy for him to talk to this grown-up soldier. There were lines in the boy's face that had not been there before—telltale lines of fatigue and strain and the sudden worldliness of battle. He couldn't treat Harry now as the scared kid in the woods and the frightened youngster he had once flown south, and had babied a little, like an old man talking to a child—although there was not much difference in their ages. The uniform and the experience of combat put them on a new footing now.

He watched, and after a time Harry said: "All right, Ken, I'll go. If you promise to fly me back tomorrow. I'll see my father, but there won't be much to talk about."

"Want to finish your drink?"

"No, thanks."

"You see Nancy. I'll check out."

Kendrick's bag was already packed, but he opened it and stuffed the almost full bottle of bourbon in among his pajamas. Then he went downstairs to the desk and checked out. He stood impatiently in the lobby, with his eyes on the clock, figuring his flying time and which delays were inevitable. For one thing, he would have to put down at Vancouver and get his clearance through customs and immigration before he headed north. At best he would be flirting with darkness before he could make Camp Five.

Harry came out of the coffee-shop, alone. Kendrick walked toward him and now the soldier's face was all youth, showing its disappointment.

"You've conked me out of a swell date," he said. "I don't blame her if she's not around when I get back."

"I think she will be."

"Yeah?" Harry's manner changed again. "You think she's all right, eh?"

Kendrick could nod truthfully to that one. He did think so. . . .

They tried to delay him at Vancouver. He docked the old Crane at the seaplane base, back of the International Airport, and went through the formalities, and when they learned he was clearing for Camp Five of the Wright Export Company, they told him that he could not make it before dark.

One of the airport people, an old friend named Dawson, put it differently. "You look like you're walking in your sleep, Ken," he said.

"Maybe that's my normal look," Kendrick said. "But I slept in a hotel bed last night."

It was not completely true, because he had spent half the night on Wright Company business and the early morning hours with mechanics working over the Crane's tired engines.

"To me," said Dawson, "you and that old ship look dead-beat. You've been up too many hours, and that goes for both of you. Now you're down, stay down for a while. Who's the soldier?"

"I'm taking him to see his father," Kendrick said. "He's just home from Korea."

"All right," said Dawson. "Now I know I'm talking to a brick wall, and wasting minutes—and, pal, you'll need them."

THEY rose from the Sea Island airport at Vancouver into a clear blue sky and went north, hugging the coast and flying at a low altitude. From the corner of his eye Kendrick could see Harry sitting next to him in the cockpit, and he noticed the new tenseness in the boy's face. Harry had fallen into silence immediately the ship had left the water, and Kendrick thought he could read the soldier's mind.

For this was getting close to home—this was the last lap—and in the next few hours he would see his father. Perhaps he was thinking of the fight they had had, the bitter, violent quarrel over Ben's death, with both the older and younger man giving nothing. Perhaps he was thinking of his own fear of the big woods, and his raging and grief-stricken father calling him "damned coward!" and then of going to Kendrick with tears in his eyes, pleading: "For God's sake, get me out of here, Ken! Get me out of here, forever!"

Only seventeen at the time. And it wasn't very long ago.

"What's that ahead of us, Ken? Fog?"

Kendrick jerked his head at the words. There seemed to have been a lapse somewhere, and for a moment he was confused.

Then he said: "No. That's smoke. That's a fire burning somewhere close."

"You mentioned fires, didn't you?" the boy said. "Are there many?"

"Too many. It's a bad season. There's a forest closure all over this area. Tell me about Korea."

"There's nothing much—"

"Go ahead, tell me," Kendrick insisted, and he felt the boy stare at him.

Harry began to talk, and Kendrick listened intently. It was a lousy country . . . the winters were murder . . . it was a relief to get action in a place like that . . . there was a fellow in his unit named Clausen, who lived in San Francisco, and this fellow Clausen . . .

Harry's voice came loudly in Kendrick's ear: "Ken! What are you doing, Ken?"

He felt a hand tugging furiously at his arm and he came back suddenly to pull the aircraft into a sharp climb. He licked his dry lips.

The boy laughed nervously. "Don't do that day-dreaming stunt again on me, Ken. I thought for a moment that you were going to ditch us."

Kendrick tried to smile back at him. But Kendrick was thinking: *I can't try to make Camp Five. I'm running out of consciousness, and in a little while I'll be running out of light.*

But he could go into Lambert Island, where the senior Wright had the big lodge—his summer place. At daybreak they could make the rest of the flight. If Joseph Wright, the father, was still up on the Gambia range, they wouldn't find him at Camp Five tonight, anyway. And Kendrick was carrying a precious cargo for Wright senior.

"I'm going down at Lambert," he called to Harry. "I can't land this crate in the dark at Camp Five. That all right with you?"

The boy shrugged. "I'm holding you to your promise about tomorrow, that's all," he said.

BUT in the end it was the tired aircraft that really decided matters for Kendrick. The starboard engine began to sound off-pitch; it worried him, and he was glad when at last he saw the low-lying finger of Lambert Island ahead of him in the sea.

The light was failing rapidly as he circled for the bay at the north end of the island and came down into a light wind that was blowing offshore. There was a wharf and a seaplane ramp at the foot of the bay, and a tiny village on the beach. A couple of Indians who were fishing from the wharf took Kendrick's line when he came alongside the ramp.

There was no conversation between them as Harry and he walked up past the village and took the road to the lodge. This was the house in which the boy and the father had quarreled. This was the place that widowed Joseph Wright had built as a summer home for himself and his sons when he had come north to found his logging interests. This was the house in which Kendrick, then fresh out of the air force, had been given a job.

They entered by the front door of the big timbered lodge and Joyce, the major-domo, was the first to greet them. When he saw Harry he grasped the boy's hand and murmured: "Mr. Harry! Mr. Harry!" until the tears came to his old eyes, and the soldier put his arm around the man's shoulders and smiled and said: "It's good to see you, Joyce."

The other servants were called, and they came forward happily, shaking hands, flushed and excited at the sight of the boy in uniform.

KENDRICK turned away from the little crowd. He was thinking that he would go into the bar and pour himself a stiff drink, then wander upstairs, find a bedroom and tell old Joyce to leave him there until dawn. He discovered he had left his bag in the plane, but he was too tired to worry about it.

A tall, dark-haired girl came through a doorway to the left of the hall. Her bright eyes looked sharply at the group around Harry Wright, and then, as she started forward, she saw Kendrick.

"Ken," she said swiftly, then went forward and shook the soldier's hand.

Kendrick waited. He heard Joyce say: "You must come upstairs, Mr. Harry!"—and saw the old man leading the boy toward the staircase.

Kendrick found himself alone with the girl. She was Joan Wallace, Joseph Wright's secretary, and now she said: "How are you, Ken? Would you like a drink?" When he nodded she led the way into a large den, with a great open fireplace and a bar. She poured a drink for him, and then, looking into his eyes, she asked:

"What are you doing here?"

He said: "You don't sound pleased to see me."

She touched his arm lightly. "Forgive me," she said. "I'm worried. I thought you would go on to Camp Five. They want every available aircraft up there."

"It was getting too dark," he said, "and I had a balky engine. I didn't want to take any chances with the kid aboard."

"How does he feel?"

"He didn't want to come. It's not going to be any reunion. Maybe a sense of duty made him agree, or perhaps the fact that I had gone south to ask him."

"He thinks the world of you."

Kendrick looked at his glass. "I love the boy. And I love his father. But I doubt if they'll get together."

"Ken—Mr. Wright is in trouble."

He looked up sharply. "What do you mean, 'trouble'?"

"We were on the radio-telephone with Camp Five. They say he had a slight heart attack early this morning. He was working with the fire-fighters, right up at the edge of the fire, and when they found him, he had fallen into some brush and been burned."

Kendrick knew that his voice was suddenly hoarse. "How bad?"

"I don't know. The doctor wanted to take him out. But you know what the Chief is like. He wouldn't leave the fire. That's why—I thought you would be going into Camp Five. I thought he might listen to you and fly out. I'm afraid for him, Ken, because he's not young, and that fire is out of control. Have you listened to the radio?"

"No."

"It's twelve miles wide and moving about two miles an hour. It's swept down the Gambia Range and toward the Indian settlement at Taku. The men are falling back all along the front, and they say if it reaches Taku, they'll be pushed into the sea."

KENDRICK finished his drink. He put down his glass on the bar so heavily that the sound of the crack seemed to bounce off the walls of the room. The girl touched his arm again, and this time her fingers held.

"What are you thinking, Ken?"

"I'm thinking the old man will die before he lets that fire wipe out Taku." He swore softly. "I should have gone on. These days I'm getting to be cautious too easy."

He walked to a window and looked out. From here he could see the bay, but it was already losing its shape in the swift fall of darkness. He might have made Camp Five if he had not hesitated. By now he might have been with Joseph Wright. When he had left for the south that fire on the Gambia Range had been minor; a few men could have handled it. But now, if Joan Wallace was right and it was making two miles an hour through the bush, then it was a major disaster. And it was being pushed by a strong wind.

He heard footsteps and he turned around. Harry Wright had entered the den and the boy's face looked as though it had been drained of blood. White spots showed under his eyes, at the edge of the leathery tanned skin, and his lips were thin and pale.

He did not notice Joan Wallace. He looked straight at Kendrick, and he said, "You're a fine friend."

The words caught Kendrick off-balance. For a moment he only stared at the soldier. Then a hot stab of anger went through him.

"I don't like being called that," he said.

"So you tell me it's getting dark," the boy said in a rush of words. "We'd better go into Lambert Island. Just for the night, you say. Then in

Kendrick could sense Harry's voice getting out of control. He stepped forward and grabbed the kid by the front of his jacket. "Shut up," he said sharply. The boy turned whiter than ever and suddenly before Kendrick realized the fist was coming, Harry hit him in the face.

the morning we'll drop in to see my father, and then you'll fly me back south. That's a promise." The boy laughed harshly. "Soold Joyce meets me and takes me upstairs and says: 'Here's your room, all ready for you. We're so glad you're spending your furlough with us. Everything's arranged. I suppose your father will be here tomorrow, Mr. Harry, and we'll all settle down and have a wonderful thirty days.' "

Kendrick looked sharply at Joan Wallace. "Mr. Wright was hoping—" she began.

Harry interrupted her. "So you got me here," he said to Kendrick. "I suppose the bunch of you planned it. I'm here, and there's no way out. And when you've got me all softened up, my father arrives and we settle down for a wonderful thirty days, like Joyce says. Hail the conquering hero!"

His lips twitched. "There's even an old picture of me on the dresser. And a cupboardful of new clothes—expensive stuff, hundred-dollar stuff. Too bad, because I wear a different size now. And a brand-new fishing rod, and a gun. And do you know what else, Kendrick? I opened the connecting door and there was Ben's room just the way he left it. Not a thing changed. A shrine for poor dead Ben!"

Kendrick heard Joan Wallace gasp.

"Shut up, Harry," he said quietly.

"I'm not shutting up! So when does my father make his entrance? Tonight—or in the morning? He had to run to a fire, I think you told me. Is that part of the build-up, too?"

Kendrick could sense the boy's voice getting out of control. Joseph Wright had told him nothing about these plans for Lambert Island. He supposed the father, had had hope that once he had met his son at Camp Five the boy would stay, that they would come to the lodge together.

"You pulled a fast one on the kid, didn't you, Ken?" Harry said hotly. "The kid will follow his old pal Kendrick. I think you're a—"

Kendrick stepped forward and grabbed Harry by the front of his jacket. "Shut up," he repeated, and he knew that his voice was shaking with anger. The boy turned whiter than ever, and suddenly, before Kendrick realized that the fist was coming, Harry struck out.

Kendrick went back against the bar. He collided with a stool and it made him stumble. He fell, and he thought that he was going to lose consciousness. The fatigue and weakness of the last few days seemed suddenly to overwhelm him.

He felt his mouth with his left hand and he saw Joan Wallace start in his direction, a horrified look in her eyes. With his other hand he waved her back, and very slowly he got to his feet.

Harry Wright was staring at him. The soldier looked as though he, not Kendrick, had been hit in the face. His lips moved, but for an instant he couldn't speak. Then one low, agonized word came:

"Ken!"

Kendrick walked toward him. The boy stood completely still, and defenseless. There was a sofa behind him, and almost slowly Kendrick took his hand away from his paining mouth and pushed Harry on to the cushions. The boy's head struck the back of the sofa. His expression was numb.

"Before you call me any more names," Kendrick said coldly, "let's straighten out a few things. I didn't bring you here on purpose. And whatever your father planned, he didn't tell me. But I like him for what he did plan. He wants you back. He loves you. And if you think he's changed because of that uniform you're wearing, you're crazy. You're no conquering hero to him. You're his son."

Kendrick wiped blood from the corner of his mouth. "And before you call me any more names," he went on, "let's get this straight, too. I know how you feel; you told me once when I flew you out of here that time. Your father was a selfish man, and it blew up in his face."

He suddenly turned and walked to the bar. He poured some whisky into a tumbler and let the liquor wash his lips.

THEN he said: "But right now there isn't any selfishness in him, not even for you. He's standing up against a fire. It's moving into Taku, and you know what Taku is. There are two hundred Indians in that settlement. But maybe he shouldn't be worried too much about them. He should be worried about his stand of timber. He should be worried about seeing you. Well, just forget it, Harry, but don't call me any names."

He started for the hall door and Joan suddenly cried out: "Where are you going, Ken?"

"Taku."

"But—how can you? You can't fly into Taku in the dark."

"I won't fly," he said. "I'll go on the water."

"In the plane?"

"Yes."

She came toward him. "You're too tired, Ken," she said. "I can see it in your eyes. In the morning—"

"There may not be any Taku in the morning. You told me they needed my aircraft. I'll be there in a couple of hours."

"I'm going with you," she said.

He started to shake his head, but she interrupted him. "I'll get some black coffee. You'll need that to keep you awake. Please, Ken. Wait for me."

She left the room, and as he followed her into the hall he saw her walk in the direction of the kitchen. He found a package of cigarettes in his pocket and lighted one, and then Harry Wright was standing beside him. The boy's lips moved.

"I'm sorry, Ken."

"That's all right."

"I want to go to Taku."

Kendrick looked into the soldier's solemn eyes. "There's something else I have to tell you," he said. "I just learned it from Joan. Your father had a heart attack this morning about ten o'clock."

Harry bit his lips. "Bad?"

"I don't know. Anyway, he refused to be taken out. If you come with me—"

"You're afraid I might make some kind of a scene?"

Kendrick touched his mouth. "You made one here," he said.

"I promise you."

"That's all I need, then."

They waited for Joan Wallace. She came back with a large thermos jug, and she had put on a windbreaker over her dress. Kendrick smiled at her and took the jug. "Harry's coming," he said. Then old Joyce walked into the hall. He was carrying a couple of flashlights and he handed one to Harry Wright and the other to Kendrick.

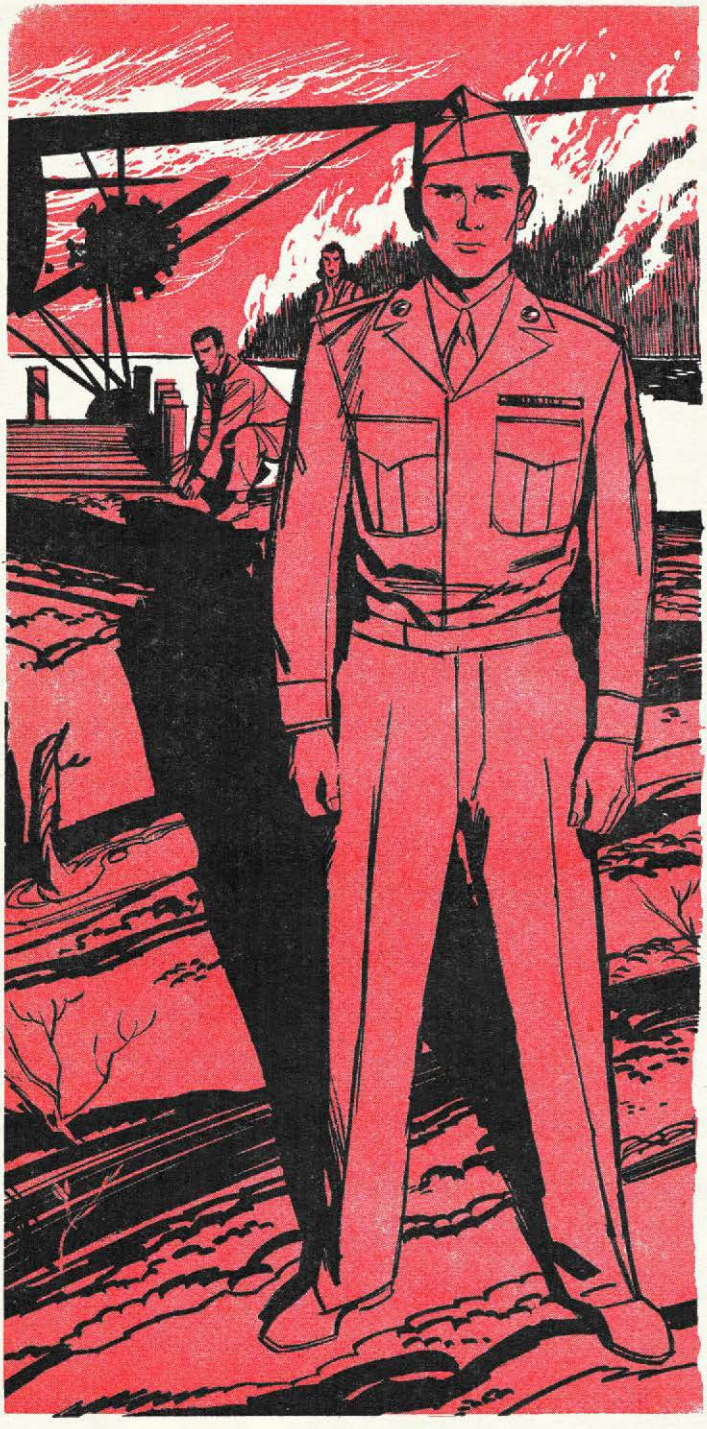
"I hope you'll be back soon," he said to the soldier, "with Mr. Wright."

For an instant Kendrick caught Joan Wallace's eye. She started for the door and the two men followed.

They were silent as they descended the hill to the small village and the wharf. The night was very dark now, and the moored aircraft was only a blob against the float. With the aid of the flashlights Kendrick cast the lines loose and held the plane while Harry and the girl got aboard. She took the seat next to the pilot's, and the soldier sat behind, then Kendrick climbed into the plane.

He flicked on the running-lights and the small spotlight over the nose of the aircraft. He waited a minute while a light breeze blowing across the bay carried them a little distance from the float. Then he started the motors.

The starboard engine coughed badly, but after a moment it came alive and he listened intently to the sound of it. He thought it would do. It had to do. If it gave out while they were on the crossing from Lambert Island to the mainland he would be in trouble. But if he made Taku he would be all right. At Camp Five,



The soldier was staring up the hill past the cluster of cabins to the woods and the red sky. They could smell the fire now, and hear it, and Kendrick wondered what the boy was thinking.

which was only a short distance away from the settlement, there was a service depot and mechanics.

He did not dare put the aircraft into the air. To try a landing on the water after dark at either Camp Five or Taku was suicide. But if the night stayed calm, as it was now—in the bay, anyway—and the engines did not fail him, he could make fair speed on the water.

He gunned the motors. The aircraft started to move, to push against the sea, and the last light of the village disappeared behind them.

He turned and looked at Joan Wallace. Then he remembered the bottle of bourbon that he had purchased in Seattle and in the flare of his flashlight he made motions to her to look in his bag. The whisky, he thought, would go well with the black coffee. Perhaps it would keep him awake. The weariness was creeping up on him again.

Outside the mouth of the bay there was more wind. He could hear the spray dash against the nose of the ship and under the wings, and he was forced to reduce speed.

He felt a hand touch his and he turned toward Joan Wallace. He could not see her face now, but he moved his fingers and pressed her hand firmly.

"I'm awake!" he said.

He felt her pass him a mug and he drank some of the liquid. The combination of coffee and whisky burned his throat a little but it gave him strength.

He did not need a compass to lead him to Taku. When the mainland was still many miles away he could see the red cast in the sky, the telltale glow of the fire. It made him feel sick because he knew that it was bad, much worse than even the radio had indicated to Joan Wallace.

The fire was already close to the sea, and therefore to Taku itself. By now a vast range of timber would have been laid waste; beautiful, high standing timber, Kendrick thought—a half million dollars gone up in smoke.

He suddenly forgot his own weariness. He was thinking now of Joseph Wright and his men struggling in the woods, fighting with bulldozers and axes and shovels to stop a blaze that kept pushing them back. He wondered how many fire trails the men had blasted out of the forest and how many times the leaping flames had jumped the guards.

He thought of Taku, and the Indian cabins that were strung out on the point; little wooden cabins built on ground that was thick with leaf-mold—and timber-dry.

He tried to get more speed out of the aircraft. The sea was running

now and he could hear the wind. It was the wind that you couldn't lick, no matter how hard you fought and labored. It was the wind high in the treetops that carried the flames onward. You had a chance with a ground-fire; you could beat it and smother it, but when the wind was high in the timber, the odds were always with the flames.

The aircraft rocked dangerously and Kendrick felt Joan's hand tighten on his arm. But he did not slacken his speed. The starboard engine was acting up again and he was afraid it would die on him. He was doing between fifty and sixty miles an hour and he was heading straight for the mainland now, keeping his eyes on the canopy of red and figuring in his mind where Taku point would be, in that haze ahead.

As he closed the laud, the fire became more distinct, and in the light of the flames he could see the gutted timber; high, naked spars sticking up into the red sky. And now the aircraft was pushing into smoke as well as sea, and Kendrick's vision became clouded. The smoke was like fog, rolling down on the ocean, and he eased the engines, fearful that he would miss the point and end up on the rocks.

But a light winked suddenly, and then another, and he knew that he was clear and that the settlement was almost on his port beam. He had switched off the spotlight, but now he turned it on again and the tiny beam stabbed at the moving smoke.

In a moment he saw the float and the ramp, and he eased the plane alongside, cutting the motors. He was out of the aircraft, with a line in his hands almost at the moment when the ship touched the float.

Joan and Harry Wright joined him. In the gleam of his flashlight he saw their faces, tense and ghostly. The soldier was staring up the hill past the cluster of cabins to the woods and the red sky. They could smell the fire now, and hear it—and Kendrick wondered what the boy was thinking.

Was he remembering his youthful fear of the big woods? Was he seeing again the face of his brother Ben, and hearing the boy's scream on that tragic day?

Kendrick moved closer to the soldier. "Well," he said kindly, "let's take a look."

They climbed the ramp, and on the wharf and the nearby bank they met a group of Indian women. Most of them carried lanterns, and piled around them were stacks of furniture and blankets and bundles of clothing. They had moved out of their cabins and now they were waiting for the inevitable.

No emotion showed in their round, bland faces. They stood silently near their belongings, looking at the newcomers. There was not a man among them, and Kendrick knew the husbands and the sons would be at the fire.

But now a man did appear. He came onto the wharf, flashing a light, and in the blackened, sweating face, Kendrick recognized Broden, a woods foreman.

"Who's that?" the man demanded.

"Kendrick."

The light bobbed. "Good that you're here, Ken. I thought it might be your plane. We may have to move out. We're cut off from Camp Five by land, and if it gets any worse we'll have to get off, any way we can."

"Where are you working?"

"About a mile and a half inland. For a time we were trying to save the timber of the North Gambia Range. But the boss pulled us out. His only thought now is the settlement here."

Yes, thought Kendrick, that was the way Joseph Wright would think.

Never ask a girl
if you may kiss her.
Do it, and don't apologize.
To apologize is like offering
a girl a drink of champagne
and giving her cider.

—Anon

"Where is he?" a voice asked. It belonged to Harry.

Broden looked around. "Who, the boss? Up the trail. He had a bit of a turn this morning. But he's on his feet." The blackened lips twisted. "God, Ken, you really want to fight for a man like him!"

"Yes," said Kendrick, "I know."

They started to move away from the silent Indians. Suddenly Kendrick looked about for Joan Wallace. "You'd better—" he began.

"I want to stay with you, Ken," she said.

They walked up the hill between the Indian cabins. There was a logging road rising back into the bush and Broden led the way, his light flashing on the ruts.

"For about the last hour," he told Kendrick, "we've been holding our own. We've bulldozed out a good clearance and we've checked the left flank." He lowered his voice. "We lost two men. Early this afternoon. They were cutting a trail and the wind came up suddenly and the fire jumped the guard. They didn't have a chance."

Kendrick was silent. He was smelling the heavy smoke and listening to the roar of the flames. Back somewhere a tree crashed to the ground. The sky was bright, and after a time they didn't need their flashlights. When he looked at Joan Wallace and Harry Wright their faces were almost unreal.

They came into a clearance. Ahead of them, on the other side, they could see the burning timber. It rose like a red wall, and the heat of the flames struck them in the face.

Kendrick saw Harry Wright falter in his step. For a moment the boy stopped, staring up at the towering, blazing trees. Then he looked at Kendrick and a little smile appeared on the corners of his lips and he came forward again.

"Funny," he muttered, "what a tree can do to me that a man never could."

Kendrick caught sight of men working at the edge of the clearing. They were moving quickly, shoveling dirt and beating at flames that threatened to run along the ground.

There was a bulldozer in the center of the clearing, and leaning against it was a figure that Kendrick recognized. As he came closer he could see Joseph Wright's dirt-smeared face, his tangled white hair, his bloodshot eyes.

The boss turned to look at the newcomers. One of his hands was bandaged and there was a strip of adhesive tape over his right eye.

"Ken!" he called. "Who's that—Joan?"

Kendrick stopped. He let Harry Wright come ahead, pass him, and move toward the figure leaning against the bulldozer. He could see the soldier's eyes and he knew that he held his breath at that moment.

Joseph Wright suddenly straightened. He appeared to push himself away from the big machine and for a moment he almost staggered.

"Hello, Dad."

The boy's voice was almost drowned by the roar of the fire behind the clearing. Kendrick felt someone come close to him, and Joan Wallace slipped her hand in his.

"Harry—this is a poor welcome home for you."

"How are you, Dad?"

"I'm okay. Well, Harry—" Kendrick saw the older man put out his hand and the son take it. "I'm glad you're here. I'm glad to see you."

"Ken met me," the boy said. "We stopped at the lodge. We didn't know it was this bad until Joan told us. Thanks for getting my room ready, Dad."

Kendrick turned away suddenly, but Joan's hand was firm in his.

"I got you some clothes," he heard the father say. "I thought you might be needing them."

"Yes, I saw them. They look good."

"I—"

KENDRICK heard the groan and turned swiftly. He saw Harry Wright holding his father in his arms and he ran forward.

"Put me down, Harry," the boss whispered. "Just for a minute—I'll be all right."

Gently the soldier lowered his father to the ground, still holding him.

"I keep running out of breath," Joseph Wright muttered. "I'm no good at fire-fighting this way." He looked into his son's eyes. "But we've got to save Taku, Harry. Those Indians—they're all friends of mine. When I first came up here they were good to me. It means their homes, son. Whatever we do, we've got to save Taku."

"We'll do it."

"That's right, Harry. I'm glad you're with me, boy."

Somewhere a tree crashed like a clap of thunder and the sky seemed to go brighter. Red sparks danced above the timber.

Broden, the foreman, came toward the group on the run. "You'd better move back, sir. We're losing ground."

"No."

Broden appealed to Kendrick: "He can't stay here. Or the girl. For God's sake, get them out of here!"

Young Harry Wright looked up. "Look after him, Ken," he said. "Please look after him."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stay here. They can use me."

Kendrick stared at the boy. He seemed to be looking right into the soldier's mind.

Then he said: "Yes, Harry. I'll take him."

To his right was a roaring wall of fire, but he hardly felt the heat. Thoughts came and went in a confused sequence. He stumbled forward and his head struck something. Then he was pulled to his feet and half-carried, half-dragged away from that wall of fire.

He helped Joseph Wright to his feet. He ignored the man's protests and nodded to Joan Wallace: she came and took the other arm. For a second, again, Kendrick saw Harry, and slowly he nodded. He wanted that nod to speak for him; to tell the soldier that everything was all right, that he was proud of him.

The fire roared against their backs as the three figures, the girl and the men, went down the logging trail.

Kendrick stopped at the first Indian house. There was a woman standing in the open doorway; an old woman, who saw Joseph Wright and muttered his name and then led them inside. Most of the furniture had been removed but there was a cot still lying in one corner of the room and Kendrick and Joan lowered Wright on to it. The man's eyes were closed and he was breathing heavily.

"The bourbon," Kendrick said to the girl. "Would you get it?"

She nodded and left the cabin, and Kendrick sat on the edge of the cot and watched Wright's face. After a moment the man opened his eyes, and his lips moved.

"It's been a little rough, Ken," he whispered.

"Yes, Joe."

"For you, too. For all of us."

"Maybe the wind will change."

"Maybe. Harry looks good, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he looks fine."

"Who hit you in the mouth, Ken?"

"I fell."

"That so?" The man on the cot closed his eyes again for a moment. "How did you get him to come?"

"I asked him."

"Yes. I'd like to think it was like that. I'd like to think he was glad to see his room. Even the new clothes. I did it all wrong, I was just hoping—"

"You were half passed-out back there. You didn't see his eyes."

"What about his eyes?"

"He's proud of you. He walked into that clearing and he was proud of you, like you are of him. He's up there fighting fire, now."

The older man smiled a little. "Maybe the wind will change, like you said," he muttered.

Kendrick looked up as Joan re-entered the room. He took the bottle from her and helped Joseph Wright to a drink, and then as the man rested his head back on the cot, Kendrick rose to his feet.

"Don't let anything happen to the boy," he heard Wright murmur.

Kendrick looked at Joan. Her cheeks were pale and there were dirt-marks on her forehead. He thought that she must have slipped in the dark, going for the bourbon, because one of her stockings was torn and her shoes were scuffed.

He walked to the open door of the cabin, resting his shoulder for a moment against the jamb. The light outside was unearthly, filtering through the smoke. Even from here he almost choked.

"I'll be back later," he said hoarsely.

"Ken—"

DARK shapes came down the trail. There were five of them and he recognized the squat figures of Indian men. He hailed one.

"Where are you going?"

The man stopped for an instant. "We go stand-by the boats," he said.

The Indian rejoined the others and Kendrick felt sick. This was close to the end, then. They were going to stand-by the boats, prepare to evacuate. It meant the last of Taku. It meant retreat into the sea, leaving the settlement to the flames that would not stop until they died finally on the bank, licked out by the cold waters.

It meant defeat for the sick, worn-out man who lay there in the corner. A helpless rage seized Kendrick. It was for this man that he felt his heart bleed. A rich man—a tycoon, if you wanted to use the word—who might have been sitting behind a desk in Seattle or Vancouver, or in the big lodge at Lambert Island; who, instead, had stood in the blazing timber, with his men, to save a tiny Indian village.

KENDRICK'S eyes felt wet and clouded. "Stay here," he said to Joan Wallace. "There'll be time to get aboard the aircraft, if there's no other way."

"All right, Ken."

He could not escape from her eyes. He knew that he was crying a little—from rage, from a weakness that seemed to be taking hold of his whole body—and he felt ashamed and did not know what to do.

Suddenly she put her arms around him and held him close, so that her cheek was against his. Neither of them spoke.

Then he went out into the trail, glancing for a second toward the other cabin and the flickering lights down by the wharf, and then ahead of him, to the woods and the fire.

He could hear a crashing in the bush, and he thought it must be the bulldozer striving desperately to cut another guard, perhaps the last one.

For the first time he realized that there was an uphill slope to the trail. He knew it because his legs slackened and he found that he was stumbling in and out of the ruts. It was strange how the fatigue came and went, in waves, so that at times it was only a kind of numbness. But now his feet dragged and he could feel his heart pumping against his chest—and his lungs, half-filled with smoke, made him bend over until he hardly knew where he was going.

He heard the bulldozer again, closer now, and he came across a group of men who were working with axes against a stand of young timber. They did not even glance at him. Their faces glistened with sweat and their eyes were circled with black.

The bush was burning fiercely ahead of him. The bulldozer came through a cut, so close to the flames that it seemed as though the driver would be burned alive. The giant machine lumbered past, pushing rock and earth out of its path.

The heat burned Kendrick's eyes. He almost fell into a man, who steadied him with a powerful hand. It was Broden.

"Where's the boy?" Kendrick gasped.

"The soldier? He's working on the flank. He's doing a hell of a job. Who is he?"

"Wright's son."

Broden swore. "Like father, like son," Kendrick thought he heard the foreman say.

"You sent the Indians to the boats?"

"Only a few of them. I'm losing ground, inch by inch. I can't help it. It's been too long and too tough."

"If you had more men—"

"It wouldn't mean anything."

"How do I find the boy?"

Broden pointed to the left. "They're working over toward the shoreline. Around from the point. You'd better stick here with me, Ken."

Kendrick only shook his head. He wanted to be with young Harry Wright. He would blame himself for anything that happened to the boy—the youngster who hated the woods. Into his clouded mind came a brief

Advice is something wise men don't need and fools won't take.

—Anon

picture of the hotel room in Seattle and the girl named Nancy. Perhaps he should never have tried to interfere, or act as a go-between for the father. Perhaps he should have left Harry to enjoy the furlough that, heaven knew, the boy deserved. But he had meant right. He had wanted, more than anything, to see the father and son together. But it was no good if something happened and it ended here—in these terrible burning woods!

The thoughts came and went in a confused sequence. He had left Broden and he was stumbling into the bush, taking a rutted trail that the bulldozer had made. He was close to burning timber, but somehow he hardly felt the heat. His boots stumbled over broken pieces of root and rocks and mounds of earth; then suddenly there was an end to the trail.

To his right was a roaring wall of fire and ahead of him and to his left there was thick, tangled underbrush. He tried to push his way into the latter, but he had no tools and the bush only threw him back. Confused, he staggered in a circle. Smoke filled his eyes. It seemed to be blowing into his face, as though on a gentle breeze.

He stumbled and fell forward and his head struck something—perhaps a rock. He crawled a little, and then stopped. He dug at his eyes with his knuckles, and then he crawled some more. He was on the bulldozed trail, he could feel that by his hands, and he thought, *maybe if I just keep crawling like this—*

He was pulled to his feet. "Come on, Ken," a vague voice said in his ear, "let's get out of this," and hands came under his armpits on both sides of him and he felt himself being half-dragged and half-carried. His eyes cleared a little and sweating faces were close to his; unfamiliar faces, it seemed to him at first, but then he knew the one on the right. It belonged to Broden.

They dragged him all the way back to the logging road. He heard the bulldozer working and he saw the dim figures of men.

"Can you stand?" he heard Broden ask.

He nodded.

"Do you feel the wind, Ken?"

"Wind?"

"Can't you feel it? It's coming up quick. Maybe a real blow. And away from Taku this time, Ken. Do you hear me? It's blowing east."

Kendrick tried to understand. He stood swaying on his feet, staring at Broden's face.

"And even if it never gets beyond a breeze, we're home free. We can broaden this cut and hold."

A funny thought came into Kendrick's mind. "Maybe the wind will change," he had said to Joseph Wright.

He heard another voice interrupt. "Boss, we can't get through to those men on the flank. They're in the path of the blaze now. They're cut off completely."

"My God, man, you've got to do it!"

"No, sir." The voice was sharp and definite. "Not from this side. It's impossible. But those men will be pushed to the edge of the water. If we could reach them from the other side—from the sea—we could save them."

Kendrick heard Broden shouting. But the words were lost to him. The sea! That was Kendrick's baby, he thought deliriously. He was the seaman in the crowd. Hadn't he just sailed from Lambert Island to Taku in the good ship, S.S. *Crane*?

HARRY WRIGHT was on the flank of the fire, he told himself—Harry Wright and some other men, being pushed back to the shore, to the rocks on the beach. And the aircraft could reach them. The aircraft could taxi around the point at Taku and come along the beach and pick them up.

Voices were still shouting as Kendrick stumbled away. Men passed him on the run and one of them accidentally jostled him so that he almost fell. He staggered against a tree, hitting it sharply, and holding on with his arms. His head hurt him, but he did not understand that—he did not remember anything about his head.

He pushed himself away from the tree and staggered on, down the slope of the logging trail. He could not even hear the fire behind him; he had ceased to smell the smoke. He knew he had to concentrate on keeping his feet, of trying to navigate in a straight line, and the road was dark now. Somewhere he had lost his flashlight.

A crazy refrain kept running through his mind. The sea! That was Kendrick's baby. He was supposed to be a flyer, but he didn't fly his aircraft, he sailed her. He sailed her from Lambert Island to Taku, and he was going to sail her again.

He saw the lights of the cabins, dimly. Joan Wallace was in one of them, with Joseph Wright, but he couldn't remember which. He couldn't remember much of anything. He found himself in a crowd of Indian women and he stumbled over a stool that was lying on the ground. He saw the wharf, and when he reached there he almost fell down the steep ramp to the float.

There was the S.S. *Crane* sitting there; there was the good old ship!

He had to grope in the dark to untie the lines and get aboard. He almost slipped and one leg splashed in the water. He fumbled and felt his way into the pilot's seat. This was better, he thought, this was home.

He realized that someone—Broden?—had been right; there was a wind now. It was carrying the aircraft away from the float, and he knew that he had to get his prop turning quickly. There was a reef close at hand, almost opposite the point.

He made an effort to concentrate. He got the port motor going. It swung the ship around and he tried the starboard engine. It coughed and sputtered, but it didn't catch. He tried again and this time there was no response at all.

He felt the bitter taste of sweat in his mouth. Again and again he attempted to start the engine, but in his heart now he knew the truth—that at last the sick, tired thing had given up.

The wind and the whirling prop of the port engine were making the aircraft turn in crazy patterns. He could not control the direction, and now, suddenly, he bowed his head and then switched off the single prop.

He did not seem to care where he was drifting. He was crying like a baby and he was shouting: "You've failed—you've failed!" over and over again in his tired, tortured mind.

He did not even see clearly the twinkling lights that appeared around him nor feel the Indian canoes snuggle close to the body of the aircraft. Perhaps that was a long time later; perhaps it was only minutes.

Then slowly he became half-conscious of what was happening; that a heavy canoe was pushing at the ship and that another was taking it under tow. Frantically he wrenched open the door and he shouted: "Go around the point—men there!"

A voice answered him: "Don't worry, Mister. Everything all right."

"They're safe?"

"Safe pretty soon, Mister. Boats have gone for them."

Kendrick fell back and closed his eyes.

He had a semiconscious vision in which an archangel or someone was telling him to stay in the air where he belonged. It was semiconscious, because he realized vaguely that other,

Celebrity: the advantage of being known to those who do not know you.

—CHAMFORT

more earthly figures, were moving around him.

He heard a crazy giggle that he suddenly realized was his own. When he sat up abruptly he found he had been lying on a cot in a cabin, and that Joan Wallace was seated beside him. Behind her he could see three or four Indians. They appeared to be moving furniture.

"Harry?" he suddenly burst out.

"The Indians took Harry and the others off in boats," Joan answered him. "Is that what you were trying to do, Ken?"

He nodded vaguely, looking at her. Her face was dirty and her hair awry, but her eyes were soft.

"Where's Harry now?"

"In the other cabin, with his father."

He nodded in the direction of the Indians. "They're moving back in?"

She smiled. "You and I don't seem to bother them," she said. "Yes, they're moving back. The fire's still burning and the men are still working, but Taku is safe."

He said suddenly: "My God, it's almost light!"

"You slept a long time, Ken."

He asked, quietly now: "Did you?"

"I wasn't tired, like you."

He felt for her hand. "My head hurts," he said.

"You got a nasty bump on it."

"I guess something must have knocked me silly. I can just remember that the starboard motor wouldn't turn over. I'll have to see about that."

She got up from the cot to let him rise. He found that he was shaky; that his legs were sore.

"How are things in the other cabin?"

"Mr. Wright is a great deal better."

"I mean—other things."

He saw her eyes move to the left, across his shoulder, and he turned. Harry Wright was standing in the door. The boy's uniform was ripped and his face was smeared with dirt.

"My father said, if you were awake, Ken, he'd like to see you. He's still lying down."

"Right away," Kendrick said.

The soldier was looking straight at him. "There are a couple of things I thought you'd like to know. Maybe Joan doesn't mind if I tell them to you now. For one thing, I guess that fire must have pushed my trouble about the woods right out of me."

Kendrick nodded.

"The other thing is about Nancy."

Kendrick suddenly remembered. "Your date?"

The soldier hesitated. "Well, to tell the truth, she's a little more than a date, Ken. I thought—that when we got out of this fire mess—I'd send a wire and see if her family would let her come up and spend the rest of my furlough with us on Lambert Island."

Kendrick knew what the boy was really telling him. He walked over, a little stiffly, and touched the soldier's tattered sleeve.

"I think that's a great plan, Harry," he said. "Maybe Joan and I could join you, and we'll have a ball."

"Ken!"

He turned and looked at Joan. "Don't you like it?" he asked.

Her eyes were bright when she answered him. "I'm just surprised, that's all. I think it's a great plan, too."

He grinned a little and walked out the doorway into the half-light. He could still smell and see the smoke, and back in the woods, the red sky. Then he remembered something. He remembered saying, "Maybe the wind will change," and he realized that he had prayed a little then.

He looked up at the sky directly above him, and he thought: *Maybe the rain will come now, and fix everything.*

And he prayed a little, again.

And then he walked across to the other cabin, to see his friend the boss. •

WHIPPLETREE

Even a man with a name like Edgar can be pushed just so far before he decides he needs a nickname.

By FRANK O'ROURKE

Illustrated by BOB GREENHALGH

IF THERE WERE UGLIER, MEANER MEN in Spring County than the Caudle brothers, nobody had met them. The Caudles wandered up from Texas with a small bunch of longhorns in '74, and squatted above the creek bottoms in the rough, brushy hills. Their cows apparently birthed twins every year, for the herd increased rapidly despite annual sales. Once wholly longhorns, the Caudle calves became blockier, splotched with red and white markings. Bull owners finally penned their pedigreed animals in stouter barns and gave the Caudles suspicious looks, but questions were too dangerous.

The Caudles visited Bent Fork on Saturday nights, slicked up at the barbershop, and stormed the dance pavilion by way of Tooker's saloon. The Caudles danced like bears shod with horseshoes; and no dance blessed with their presence ended peacefully. People talked of booting them into the next State, but nobody wanted to make the first move. In the early fall of '79, the Caudles had grown even uglier and meaner; like death and taxes, they seemed destined to stay.

That Saturday afternoon they headed for Bent Fork, eager for pleasure, having skipped last week's dance for a profitable cow deal up on the Missouri. They rode down from the hills

onto the first creek bottom and spotted a new soddy, property of the homesteader even then busy at his chopping-block. The Caudles were unshaven and full of mean thoughts, none of which amounted to beans as they discovered this interloper. The homesteader looked up with a wide grin and said, "Get down, boys; I'll fix supper in a jiffy."

Jake Caudle said, "Who the hell are you?"

"Johnson," the homesteader said. "Just moved here. Who are *you?*"

Jake looked at his brother Dop, who was not quite so ugly, being three years younger. "He don't know us."

"Ain't that a shame!" said Dop.

"I'm Jake Caudle," Jake said. "This is my brother Dop. We run cows up north."

"Good country for cows," Johnson agreed affably. "Let's eat and I'll ride along to town."

"He'll ride along to town," Jake said.

Dop grinned meanly. "Nice of him. Fella gets scared of the dark, ridin' alone nights."

"Johnson," Jake Caudle said, "we're kinda surprised, finding you on this bottom. We always bring our cows down here, come spring, for branding and sorting."

"Plenty of water," Johnson said. "My fence'll run across the creek north of here, but there's lots of grass and water above. You need any help then, just say so."

"He don't get the idea," Jake said.

Dop shook his bullet head sadly. "I purely hate to tell him."

"We won't," Jake said. "Well, we sure hate to see a fence up here; but we'll talk that over later, Johnson."

EDGAR JOHNSON was so big and strong, and so good-natured, that people mistook his friendliness for timidity. He was nailing up a door for his soddy when the Caudles appeared, and now he laid the hammer down and straightened. Doing so, his head came level with their belts, mounted though they were on tall horses.

"Anything you say," Johnson said. "I won't get to the fence for a while."

"He won't," Jake smirked.

Dop said, "Do tell."

Jake sensed future fun with this half-cousin to an elephant. There was no need scaring Johnson today, with all the autumn available to pull the Caudle variety of practical jokes. Jake said, "We're late for town, Dop."

"And time to call on Serena," Dop said, who was smitten with a certain girl. The girl hated him so heartily that he misjudged her loathing for kittenish delay.

They almost ran Johnson down, spurring across his yard, racing toward the bottom road. Johnson watched them a moment and went back to his work. He was cleating the last cross-brace when bare feet slapped the grass behind his soddy and he saw a boy peeking out.

"Doggone it," Johnson said, "come out and act human! Everybody in these parts is going or coming in a terrible hurry."

The boy came around the soddy and regarded Johnson wonderingly. Johnson returned the stare with good humor. The boy had long, silky yellow hair pushed under a green home-knit cap; he was clean and fair-skinned, and didn't smell bad like the Caudles. Johnson said, "Where you from, son?"

"Your neighbor down the creek on the west slope," the boy said. "Watch those Caudles. They're a pair of hydrophobia skunks."

"You were listening," Johnson said.

"Couldn't help it. Hear 'em a mile away."

"They *were* a little loud," Johnson agreed. "Could've stood a bath, too."

The boy said abruptly, "You going to build a fence across the creek?"

"Sure," Johnson said, lifting his new door. "Why not? Hey, you hungry?"

"What I come for," the boy said. "You come to supper and get acquainted."

"Son," Johnson said, with a sudden smile that was all big white teeth and happy little sun wrinkles, "nobody asks a Johnson to the table twice! I accept. What's your name?"

"Thomas," the boy said. "Serena Thomas. Be there in an hour."

The boy was gone downslope, running like a deer, before Johnson mumbled "Serena?" and then blushed pinkly. "Doggone girl!" Johnson murmured. "Looked just like a boy—didn't she?"

Johnson fitted the new door against the casing in his ten-by-fifteen soddy. He could wash up and be at Thomas' in half an hour, and he hated to waste a minute these days, getting established on his homestead. He had to finish the soddy and build a warm shed for his big draft horses, Buck and Charley. Then he had wood-cutting and fence-building and a hundred other chores before winter. It took elbow grease in this prairie country and time was the most precious commodity a man possessed. Johnson was so busy he'd been on the homestead two weeks and never met his neighbors. In fact, he didn't have time to worry over people's josh-ing him about his first name.

Edgar was a funny name for his size of man; there was an off-key sound about hitching Edgar up with two hundred and forty pounds of young man. Perceptive people instinctively sensed his dislike for the name and didn't use it; the clerk in the courthouse called him plain Johnson; so did the banker, and Tooker at the saloon. Johnson hoped the folks out here would forget his first name. He wanted a nickname badly, but nobody seemed to find a good one.

Johnson used his drawknife on the door, fitted it again, and nailed the hinges and barrel-bolt lock in place. He took a bath in the creek, dressed in clean clothes and headed for the Thomas place. By the time he had met the family, and sniffed elderberry pie and beef-stew, he was willing to forgive the girl for fooling him.

"SIT to," said Sam Thomas. "Best way to get acquainted, over the supper table."

"You like chokecherry jelly or honey on your biscuits?" Mrs. Thomas asked.

"Both," Johnson said honestly, thus capturing Mrs. Thomas' heart.

"They stop?" Johnson asked her.

"Who?" Serena said. "The Caudles?"

"One of 'em mentioned your name," Johnson explained. "It's not a very common name."

"Ha!" Sam Thomas snorted. "They bother Serena just once, I'll—"

"Now, now," Mrs. Thomas murmured. "Remember your liver."

"We hate 'em," Serena said bluntly. "I don't like thinking about the Caudles while I'm eating."

Johnson nodded and turned seriously to the business at hand. He ate hugely, finishing with elderberry pie and hot, strong coffee, and sat smiling at these new friends. Sam told of coming from Iowa in '77, and gave Johnson a lecture on conditions in this new State of Nebraska.

"But here," Sam said. "I'm blatting like a politician. Where you from, Johnson?"

"Missouri," Johnson said. "I been roaming the last few years. Time to settle down."

"Best thing for a man," Sam said. "Get a wife, have a home. We're happy to get a neighbor like you."

"Lucky," Serena said, "compared to some I know."

Johnson didn't know if that was a compliment or a jab in the short ribs. It was time for bed and Mrs. Thomas was already setting coffee-cake in a stone crock. Johnson traded a week's wood-cutting in Sam's cottonwood grove for milk from the Thomas cows until he could buy his own. Sam shook hands good-night and said, "Serena, see Johnson on his way."

Serena went outside with him and looked at the sky, and said, "Going to do anything about the Caudles?"

"What for?" Johnson said. "They don't bother me."

"You'll find out," Serena said. "Are you good-natured clear to the bone, or do you ever get mad?"

"Don't like fighting," Johnson said amiably. "It wastes time."

Serena gave him a doubtful look. "Times you've got to fight."

"Maybe so," Johnson said. "That was fine pie. Well, good-night."

"Don't fall asleep walking home," Serena said.

Johnson said, "Why, a man don't fall—" and found himself talking to a closed door. For a young girl she was sure frisky with her tongue! Johnson forgot her words then, it was such a pretty night and the land smelled so clean and fresh around him.

THE Caudles owned two Sharps & Hankins Navy rifles they had picked up somewhere, odd .56-caliber buffalo guns carried across their saddlehorns whenever they desired to impress certain folks with the Caudle brand of meanness and virility. The Caudles had replaced the original stocks with hand-carved walnut stocks and forearms, all in one heavy piece, cut so oversized that breech and barrel snuggled almost unseen within the forearm groove. The rifles were too heavy for practical use, but invaluable for carrying a point of argument.

Having enjoyed the Saturday-night dance during which they started three fights and mashed a dozen toes, the Caudles rode home and passed the ensuing week re-branding the new Missouri calves and chuckling over certain information gathered in Bent Fork. But on Saturday afternoon they saddled up and slung their buffalo guns, and headed for town by way of Johnson's place, eager to press their acquaintance in the happy-go-lucky Caudle style.

Johnson was working beside his wagon, patching a split singletree with wire and staples. He had started plowing with his big team, and the tough prairie sod juxtaposed against the tremendous strength of his horses was just too much for an ordinary singletree. Old-timers called them "swingletrees" and those with poetic bent had attached the melodious name of "whippletree" to the short piece of wood. Johnson was calling them other names in a mild voice when the Caudles rode into his yard.

"No fence yet?" Jake called.

"Huh?" Johnson said. "Oh, howdy. Aim to start it next week."

The Caudles patted their buffalo guns and regarded Johnson with benevolent hatred. Jake said, "You must be workin' hard, Edgar."

"What's that?" Johnson said, dropping the split whippletree.

"Edgar," Jake repeated. "Now I ask you, ain't that a helluva name for such a fine, upstanding young man?"

"Awful," Dop said sadly. "Kind of sissy-sounding."

"Well, Edgar," Jake said, lifting his buffalo gun and blowing imaginary dust from the gleaming stock and row of notches, "you're sure getting things done around here."

"How'd you learn my name?" Johnson asked.

"A little bird"—and Jake grinned. "Don't you like it—Edgar?"

Johnson said heavily, "Most folks just call me Johnson."

"That ain't right," Dop said. "Is it, Jake?"

"No, sir," Jake said strongly. "Man ought to have two names. Besides, Edgar sort of fits."

"Bad name for calling on a girl," Dop said meaningly.

"Calling on a girl?" Johnson said absently. "Names got nothing to do with that if the girl wants you."

Dop moved his buffalo gun and squinted meanly at Johnson. "And if nobody else objects, Edgar."

JOHNSON was tired of this talk by now and again trying to wire up his split whippletree, wondering how many he'd have to cut and shape from cottonwood to hold his big team. He saw the sun glint on the walnut stocks of their buffalo guns, and thought absently what fine whippletrees they'd make. There wasn't a stick of walnut in the county and he didn't have the cash to buy factory-made in Bent Fork just yet. Johnson sighed with regret and tried to remember what Dop had just said.

"Guess he don't care," Jake said.

Dop scowled. "Or somethin' is bothering him. You got troubles, Edgar?"

"I need a cow," Johnson said, without thinking.

"A cow!" Jake said. "Whyn't you say so? We got more cows than we can count."

Johnson looked up at them. "Coming fresh?"

"Plenty," Jake said. "What you figure on paying, Edgar?"

Johnson was thinking of prices in Bent Fork, and the possibility of making a better deal up-country. The Caudle stock wasn't anything he'd want permanent, that was a cinch, but right now a dollar saved was two dollars earned. He said cautiously, "I'm short of cash money, but I'm open to a fair price."

"We got a red heifer," Jake said, "fresh her first time. White spots, and gentle. Fifty bucks, we'll deliver."

"I can't go above twenty," Johnson said.

Dop grunted. "Twenty!"

"Shut up," Jake said casually. "Make it twenty-five, Edgar, and we'll bring her down Monday."

"No deal till I see her," Johnson said. "If I like her, I'll pay twenty-five."

"Now you're showing sense," Jake said admiringly. "Trade with your neighbors and let them city slickers alone. Come on, Dop. I'm dry and music's waiting."

Alone again, Johnson wondered how it would feel to dance a little. But he didn't know anybody except the Thomases, and Serena was too young. Anyway, he had a chance to buy the cow cheap, and he hated to keep taking milk from Mrs. Thomas. He was invited to supper again, and he decided not to tell Sam about the cow until he made the deal because Sam apparently figured him a greenhorn with cows. Johnson cleaned up and walked the mile to the Thomas place, finding Sam and his wife alone.

"Where's Serena?" Johnson asked.

"Dance," Mrs. Thomas replied. "Went with the Ericsons."

"She's kinda young," Johnson said, helping himself to creamed peas.

"Eighteen," said Sam. "Old enough to be married and have her firstborn, if she'd ever pick a man."

"Doggone," Johnson said mildly. "She's older'n I thought."

"She feels a person," Mrs. Thomas said, watching him hopefully. "Have some more meat."

ON Monday Johnson was cooking his dinner when Serena entered the soddy and placed a basket on the table. She said, "Always eating!" and began setting fruit jars on Johnson's back shelf. Johnson saw elderberries and currants and plum jell. He licked his lips in anticipation of better meals, and then remembered.

"How was the dance?" he asked.

"Oh, fine," Serena said. "I don't go often."

"You ought to," Johnson told her. "Dances are good for girls."

"Got to be invited first," Serena said moodily. "They're not partial to stringbeans out here."

"You, a stringbean?" Johnson said, "Why, you're just right, Serena."

Serena gave him a sidelong look and lifted her basket. "For who?"

Johnson was about to say, real boldly, "For somebody big." They heard horses then, and went outside to see the Caudles hazing a fat heifer into the corral. She was long-gone with calf and she bawled lustily as Dop Caudle poked her inside and closed the gate.

Serena said, "What's this about?"

"Cow," Johnson said, starting across the yard.

"Wait—" Serena began, but Jake turned and whipped off his hat.

"Howdy, Edgar," Jake said. "Servant, Miss Serena! You're lookin' prettier every day."

"Yes, sir!" Dop said, removing his hat. "I sure enjoyed our dance Saturday night, Serena."

Dop had swung her three times during a Circle Two Step, the nearest he'd ever get to her, and now he was making the most of it. Serena said, "Glad somebody did," and stood unmoving beside Johnson's soddy.

"Well," Jake said. "There's the cow, Edgar. Look her over. Didn't brag her up too much, did I?"

Johnson went into the corral and gave the cow a close examination. She was skittish, like most cows about to calve, but she was a young one, healthy, and worth at least three times twenty-five dollars. Johnson said, "It's a deal. Write out a bill of sale."

"Got it right here," Jake said, rummaging in his coat pocket. "Raised her ourselves, going on two years old, sound and fat."

Johnson read the bill of sale, signed by the Caudles, and passed over twenty-five dollars to Jake. Serena watched him from the doorway and started to say something, then changed her mind. Jake gave her another hat-flourish. "Glad to do business with a neighbor. Ain't started that fence yet, have you, Edgar?"

"I got my posts cut," Johnson said. "Start tomorrow."

"Yeah?" Dop said, then remembered Serena and smiled like a wolf delaying a full meal. "See you at the dance Saturday, Serena."

"Not if I can help it," Serena said bluntly.

"Spirit," Jake said. "Always like spirit in a girl. Edgar, we'll be down tomorrow to talk about that fence. *Adios.*"

The Caudles galloped away and Serena looked at Johnson. "Got a bargain, didn't you?"

"Sure did," Johnson said happily. "Wouldn't wait and ask Dad's advice!"

"Now," Johnson said. "There's the cow. Worth the money, and more."

"No," Serena said. "Not from them. You wait, you'll see. Neighbors—more like rattlesnakes! And you let them call you Edgar."

JOHNSON blushed and looked away. "Can't help my name, Serena."

"If you don't like it," Serena said, "tell them to stop calling you that."

"But—"

"Bah!" Serena said. "You make me sick sometimes. I'm going home."

Johnson wanted to say something but Serena walked down the slope and refused to wave or look around. He felt bad inside. Watching her, he decided she must have grown a little in the past three weeks, she looked so tall going through the grass. Then he turned to the corral with a proud grin. "Babe," Johnson said to the cow, "—that's your name from now on. Just you take it easy. I'll fix you up after work."

Johnson ate his meal and hurried out to plow. Midway through the afternoon, Buck and Charley ran into the granddaddy of all sod knots, bunched their great muscles in protest—and with the jerk snapped both whippletrees. There was nothing to do but knock off and make new ones. Johnson turned Buck and Charley onto the grass and took a look at the cow before starting supper. He looked again, and then ran for the corral.

"What?" Johnson said. "Oh, no!"

The cow, once so fat and sleek, leaned slatternly against the corral fence. She was so skinny her rib-case stuck up like a set of hayrake teeth. Johnson looked at her and felt the blood color his face with shame. When he gave the cow the kind of examination he'd neglected in the beginning, he finally located the tiny skin punctures where the Caudles had inserted reeds beneath the hide and used home-made bellows to blow her up so fat and slick, then sealed the holes with gum and replastered the little flaps of skin. The cow was young, all right, but further examination with lye soap and water showed the white spots in a faded, dirty pattern of good old longhorn blood. He'd bought a poor brush-cutter that had slipped her calf early in the summer, and would never amount to a hill of beans. Give a little milk, maybe, but no more.

Johnson patted the cow gently on her bony hip and said, "Not your fault, Babe," and turned her out to graze on the grass. He looked at his hands, now clenched into huge fists, and murmured: "Lord, I've kept my temper for five years, since that day in Independence. You owe me one more time, Lord. I hope You understand." Thereupon, Johnson immediately hitched Buck and Charley to the wagon, gathered his cottonwood fenceposts and wire, and went up the north slope to begin his fence.

He dug the holes and set his posts, and strung a three-strand fence from east to west across his north line, cutting off the hill trail completely. Anybody coming down now, Caudles most of all, would detour a mile to the east en route into town. Johnson worked straight through the waning afternoon and into the night, finishing at one in the morning.

Sam Thomas was waiting in the yard when Johnson woke the next morning. Johnson blushed redly and Sam said, "Late for milking, ain't it?"

"Listen," Johnson said. "I can't keep whippletrees from busting! I'm behind in my work. I could say I knew that cow was puffed up and bought her anyway because she'll fatten out. But I won't. I got stung—and I was warned."

"It's all over the county," Sam said. "Those Caudles made a special trip into town and bragged about it. You're stuck, and everybody knows it. Serena's mad at you, and I'm getting mad."

"So Serena's mad," Johnson said. "Doggone stringbean!"

"That'll do," Sam said. "My daughter's a fine girl and I'll fight anybody who says different. Which is a helluva lot more than I can say for some folks. Us Thomases mayn't be long on muscle—but nobody pushes us around, and we don't claim cowards for friends. There's a box social tonight at the schoolhouse and Serena's fixing fried chicken, but I guess we'll have to go alone. You'll probably want to stay home and lick the Caudles' boots in case they stop by."

"H'm'm," Johnson said. "Well, I got work to do, Sam. Whippletrees to make and plowing—and milking!"

THAT afternoon Johnson was carving a new pair of whippletrees when the Caudles rode into his yard and lounged over their saddlehorns, regarding him with unholy glee. Johnson put his drawknife down on the chopping-block and straightened up carefully, flexing his arms.

"How's the cow?" Jake asked.

"Fine," Johnson said. "I was getting worried you two wouldn't stop."

"Worried?" Jake said, fondling his buffalo gun. "He was worried, Dop."

"And the cow's fine," Dop grinned. "And we're fine, so get to business, Jake."

"Edgar," Jake Caudle said meanly, "you just can't take a hint, I guess, so we'll tell you flat out. Pack your duds and move along. Take your cow with you."

"Lord," Johnson murmured softly, "I sure hope You forgive me! A man can stand just so much."

"How's that?" Jake asked.

Johnson looked at the fine stocks of their buffalo guns and said, "You plumb begged for it!" Then he crossed the intervening space so quickly that Jake couldn't lift his buffalo gun before Johnson reached his horse. Thereafter, events transpired in an earthshaking round of swirling dust, flying bodies, frightened horses, and resounding oaths that flew with centrifugal force from the whirling vortex of action.

Johnson pulled Jake from the saddle as Dop bellowed a tardy warning and swung his buffalo gun at Johnson's head with unadulterated murderous intent. Johnson threw Jake into Dop's middle and tumbled them both to the ground as the buffalo guns hurtled away to thump in the near-by grass. Johnson pushed the

horses aside like so much milkweed fuzz and dived at the rolling bodies.

"Now!" Johnson roared. "You cowswelling, mangy, miserable pups! Call me Edgar, will you? Sell me a poor old cow? Make fun of me in town, eh?"

The Caudles were cowards at heart, but once their addled senses collected, they fought back with the strength of terror. They were big and strong, and Johnson was one against two. Jake yelled, "Take him, Dop!"

"We'll get him!" Dop answered.

The battle began near the chopping-block and moved toward the soddy, then down the yard slope to the corral. The buffalo guns were forgotten and the Caudles' .44's fell from their holsters and skittered out of reach. Jake drew a ten-inch skinning-knife and slashed at Johnson's throat, and Johnson, laughing in a wild way that curdled Jake's blood, chopped one huge hand down on Jake's wrist and spun the knife far away.

Jake cried, "Get behind him, Dop!"

"*You* get behind," Dop screamed. "He's got me!"

"All right," Johnson said suddenly. "From now on I get mean."

He slammed Dop to the ground, turned and blocked a haymaker punch from Jake, and hit Jake on the jaw with the full power of his great right fist and shoulder. Jake described a graceful parabola and lit on the back of his neck.

"Jake!" Dop shrieked. "Jake, get up!"

"They don't get up," Johnson said. "Once I get mad, nobody gets up."

He yanked Dop upright and planted another crushing right fist against Dop's nose and jaw. Dop flew back and collapsed atop Jake, wriggled one foot like a headless chicken, and lay still. Johnson stepped back and dusted his hands. When they came to, he'd make a little speech. In the meantime, his eyes wandered to their buffalo guns and the drawknife, and he got the idea. Long before the Candles groaned and sat up, Johnson had separated the stocks from the barrels.

"Just the ticket," Johnson said to himself; then he noticed the Caudles. "Now listen to me, you windbags—"

EVERYBODY knew the Caudles had passed north that afternoon, heading for home after a big night in town. People drove up to the schoolhouse that evening for the box social, and wondered what the Caudles had done when they stopped at Johnson's. Because the Caudles had their big buffalo guns along, and news of Johnson's fence had gotten around. The Thomases arrived and got down from their buggy with two big baskets; then everybody heard the wagon coming down the road at a smart clip.

They saw the big team, and Johnson's silhouette against the blue night sky; then he was driving smack before the schoolhouse door, into the lantern light, jumping down and smiling bashfully at Serena.

"Hope I'm not late," Johnson said. "Had quite a lot to do this afternoon."

Serena looked at him strangely, and then someone gasped with surprise and held a lantern over Johnson's wagon behind the horses. Johnson made the slickest, fanciest whippletrees ever seen in Spring County. Serena looked again, and then took Johnson's arm and seemed to grow up right in that moment and become a woman.

"I guess it's time to eat," Serena said. "Come along, Whippletree."

FROM that night on, and after the wedding a month later, they were known as the Whippletree Johnsons. The name stuck and got shinier and more natural as the years passed and the whippletrees, used on the spring

Johnson was about to say something real bold when the Caudles hazed a fat heifer into the corral. "Wait—" Serena began, but Jake turned and whipped off his hat. "Howdy, Edgar."

glanced around and said mildly, "I sure been having trouble with whippletrees, but I got them licked for a while. Serena, if that's your box, I'm warning the folks I aim to bid it in." He chuckled. "I still got a little cash left after buying my cow."

Serena looked down at the running gear and saw the new whippletrees that gleamed in the lanternlight. The old Sharps and Hankins buffalo guns took a mighty big stock and forearm in one piece; and trimmed to size they buggy then, turned deeper brown and smoother with age. Nobody saw the Caudles again in Nebraska, but Tooker had it on good authority from a whisky drummer that two cripples stopped briefly at the Rosebud store for supplies and inquired the shortest route to Idaho. Additional information that each had a rifle barrel wrapped around his neck, like a bow tie, was considered somewhat doubtful. But nobody asked Whippletree Johnson for a demonstration. •

He was an expert in revolutions, he said, a master of territorial changes and coups d'etat.

THE SPECIALIST

BLUEBOOK'S SHORT SHORT by BRIAN MOORE

PRESIDENT CARLO EMILIO SANCHEZ was displeased. . . . Displeasure was the rarest of emotions for President Sanchez. In ten years of uninterrupted rule, he had made a point of always being pleased. He had been pleased with his labor unions when they voted to strike against the opponents of his plan for a one-party state. He had been pleased when, before the trial, his crack army guard had disregarded the Presidential appeal for clemency and shot General Fulgencio, his rival for power. And the President had been both touched and pleased when thousands of peons came in government trucks to Bogara, capital city of Astaguente, to demand that he submit himself to another five unprecedented years of public service.

But this morning he was displeased. His matutinal cup of maté, served in a Georgian silver bowl, had been excellent, as usual. A review of cadets had been planned to start the day's ceremonial, affording him an opportunity to wear his naval uniform, a thing of glory which was his especial favorite.

"You make me sick," said President Sanchez.

General Rodolfo Chevez, who held the portfolio for war, looked worried. His sad spaniel-like eyes wavered as though he had been cuffed.

"You make me sick to my stomach," the President continued. "You, Rodolfo, of all men! And at this hour! Mornings, Rodolfo, are for recollection and anticipation. Mornings are when the mind gathers its force and savors the events of the coming day. And what happens today?" The President paused, his beaky nose lifted as though he smelled something unpleasant. "Today, when I have scarcely shaken sleep from my eyes, when I am collecting my thoughts for the words of encouragement which I must offer my cadets, you ask me to give an audience. And to a foreigner!"

"*P-perdón, Excellencia,*" Chevez stammered. "B-but this is a matter of urgency. Our visitor has come here secretly on a matter of great importance. He says he can reveal its nature to you alone. And I am assured his visit may be of immense benefit to our beloved country. He is waiting now in the anteroom, Excellency. He will be brief, I promise."

"Your promises are unnecessary, Rodolfo," President Sanchez said. "In ten minutes I must review the honor guard. I shall give him exactly ten minutes. Show him in. He can talk while I finish dressing."

A MOMENT later, the double mahogany doors of the President's bedroom swung open. Two splendid palace guards came to attention. The doors closed.

President Sanchez immersed his iron-gray head in a basin of icy water; a moment later his visitor heard the crack of gleaming black boots on the tiled floor as he marched back into the bedroom.

The visitor was small, middle-aged, a Latin Buddha with deep slant eyes and a brown pockmarked skin. He wore a loud, red-and-black check sports coat and brown slacks.

"Excellency," he said. "A thousand apologies. I disturb you. I am desolate. I shall wait outside."

The white towel in which President Sanchez' head was wrapped, shook angrily.

"No. Now!" said a muffled voice.

The newcomer bowed respectfully. "I am Vitalio de Meximo Armas. I thank you for the favor of this audience."

The towel fell to the floor. The President's eyes, cold and catlike, narrowed behind the huge promontory of his nose.

"I am honored," said President Sanchez slowly.

"It is I who am honored," Armas said, with a stiff little military bow. "Your Excellency is gracious to remember my humble name."

The President suddenly became aware that he was wearing a collarless shirt. "Sit down, General Armas," he said. "You must excuse my toilette. I did not know—"

"Please!" the small man protested. "And I must be humble, Excellency. I have never held the rank of general."

President Sanchez coughed loudly. He reached for a white Turkish box.

"Cigarette?"

"*Gracias.*" Both men inhaled slowly.

"YOU arranged the coup in Venezolo, if I am not mistaken," President Sanchez said through a cloud of smoke.

"*Seguramente*, Excellency. Two coups, to be exact—in '36 and in '48. I had also the honor of making the transfer of government in Palanguay, in Obispo and in the Gran Colombio. I have seen fifteen Presidents installed, in my time. I am, if Your Excellency will pardon the conceit, a professional in such matters."

"So?" President Sanchez looked puzzled.

"Your Excellency is a very busy man," Armas said. "So I will try to be brief. I have spent some months in a study of Your Excellency's army, naval and police forces. I also have studied such matters as national revenue. I have made similar studies in your neighboring country of Gumalo. I am, as I have told you, an expert in territorial changes and *coups d'etat*. Do I interest you, or am I presuming on your good nature, Excellency?"

"You are most interesting. Please continue."

"My methods are simple. I work only for money. But, as you will readily understand, Excellency, I must first have the complete confidence of my clients. I provide an exact—a scientific—service, if I may presume to use the term. The operation in which I had hoped to interest you is similar to the Venezolo affair. Or perhaps I have said too much?"

"No, no, *mi caro amigo*. I assure you I am most interested," said President Sanchez, smiling broadly.

"Let us then take a hypothetical case," Armas said, spreading his broad firm fingers fanwise on his knees. "Shall we say that I guarantee the following elements: First—complete surprise. Second—complete support of the younger officer elements in the army, navy and police forces. At a given signal these elements would seize control of a key army base outside the capital."

"Their main army base at Santa Barbara," President Sanchez interjected.

"An excellent example, Excellency. Then, a speech to the troops. I specialize in preparing this type of oration. The whole operation would take exactly forty minutes. While this is happening, picked units all over the country would move to seize control of all garrisons, naval bases, radio stations and communication centers. Armored cars, followed by truckloads of infantrymen, roll toward the *palacio* forty-five minutes after the start of the operation. At that moment, a nationwide communiqué is broadcast."

Armas paused and smiled confidently. "Foreign troops would not be needed up to this point, Excellency," he said. "But before the soldiers reach the palace a special corps of picked foreign officers would have to be ready inside the palace grounds. They have exactly fifteen minutes to silence the palace guard and run up the surrender-flag."

"*Diablo, hombre!* That would be a dangerous task for the officers," President Sanchez grunted.

"True. But timing for the whole affair is only sixty minutes. I am known, Excellency, as the sixty-minute specialist. When it is over, there would be a press conference. Your Excellency has had experience in such matters: Free and honest elections would be promised as soon as possible—the usual assurance. I provide lists of all political friends of the former regime. An experienced foreign-officer corps can round them up without difficulty."

"Only sixty minutes, Excellency," Armas repeated, with his ingratiating smile. "You can have confidence in me. I have never failed."

"But what about President Garrido?" Sanchez demanded. "According to your plan, you have only fifteen minutes to find and kill him. Then you must dispose of the body in secret."

"Political murder is distasteful," Armas said. "It makes for martyrs. I arrange immediate deportation. I personally, ensure that he makes no fuss."

"All very well. But Garrido is a madman. He would fight to the last."

Armas smiled. "No more than you have, Excellency. We have had a pleasant fifteen-minute conversation." The red-and-black sports coat fell open and a large revolver menaced the President. Armas put two fingers in his mouth and whistled.

TWO officers of President Garrido's army stepped over the fallen guards as the mahogany doors swung open. Behind them, sheepish but pleased, was President Sanchez' minister for war.

Armas looked at his watch. "Fifty-nine minutes," he said. "Time for the press conference. We shall fly to Cuba together, Excellency. I always like to leave before the speechmaking starts." •

Illustrated by JACK WHITSETT

How to make a MILLION DOLLARS

Think it's impossible? That, because of taxes and high prices, the days of quick millions are past? Well, they aren't, as these cheering examples will quickly prove.

By LESTER DAVID

ALL THOSE WHO *don't* WANT to become millionaires, skip this article. The rest gather round; I've got news for you.

Here's the pitch:

The editors of *Bluebook* had heard a lot of talk, same as everyone else, about how all the frontiers have been explored and how Opportunity is just a whimsical word found only in dictionaries and on give-away programs. They asked me to see if the doors to really Big Money were actually locked and barred these days, or if it was still possible to become a millionaire or establish a million-dollar business in this country.

So I looked. I spent several lovely weeks, hobnobbing with millionaires and casing the general huge jackpot situation. I interviewed industrialists who won their success recently and those who did it long ago; I spoke to officials of big trade organizations and economic-research agencies, and I got the views of important men of science.

What I learned almost has persuaded me to throw this typewriter into the attic and tell the editors to get themselves another boy. Me, I'm after that million.

Because I discovered that the time is just as good now as it ever has been for creating million-dollar enterprises right here in America.

As proof, there's a brand-new crop of big-money fellows all over the country who have made their fortunes since the end of World War II.

And backing up these personal exhibits are the words of people who should know—people, for example, like David Sarnoff, board chairman of the Radio Corporation of America. Here is what he thinks of your chances for really big success these days:

"The opportunities that await the young man and young woman in the United States today exceed many times those that have existed in this or any other country at any time in history."

And here is a message from Dr. Karl T. Compton, chairman of the board of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and one of the nation's foremost physicists: "I believe that the young man of ideas, ability and ambition can look forward to the greatest opportunities in history."

Dr. Harold G. Moulton, president of the Brookings Institution, the famous economic-research agency in Washington, hammers hard at the Gloomy Gusses who claim that the chances for big success, like the bustle, are behind us. He labels this attitude "sheer shortsightedness."

"We are today opening up vast new intensive frontiers," asserts Dr. Moulton. "These frontiers are opened up by science and engineering."

And he believes "that the unfulfilled desires of the great bulk of the American population provide the essential foundation for an almost limitless economic expansion."

Yes, big money *can* and *is* being made right now. But an even more vital point is this:

In my wanderings, I found one subject cropping up time and again on the subject of millionaires. It was the myth, cherished by almost everyone, that to make a million in today's fiercely competitive business world, you need the scientific know-how of a Charles Kettering, the shrewdness of a Billy Rose, the wisdom of a Bernard Baruch, and the scruples of a starving lion with two broken legs.

It is my happy duty to report that there is about as much truth in this latter theory as there is in the notion that all fat men are jolly or that baldheadedness is a sign of virility. In other words, it just ain't so.

The illusion is being knocked squarely on the noggin by the new big-money men, who are proving that fortunes can be made without any such special equipment. They are showing it can be accomplished with attributes no more rare than alertness, a desire to get rich, the horse-sense to grab at a chance when it pops up and the willingness to sweat.

Consider the saga of one Hal Zimmerman, a young man of 32, who started with a shoestring—and a frazzled one at that—no farther back than his buck-private days during the last war.

He had heard a lot about the mail-order business, the selling of small specialties via the postman. He knew that many millions of dollars' worth of merchandise were being ordered by mail throughout the country, and he set out to grab off a slice of the trade.

Now, a private in the Air Force doesn't have much time to himself, but Zimmerman made good use of what little there was. He began selling cheap watches, enlisting the aid of the United States Post Office. Orders came in, accompanied by the pleasant rustle of money, and Zimmerman pursed his lips and murmured: "Hm-m-m!"

After his discharge, and his return to Montgomery, Ala., Zimmerman continued his business, which even in the Army had grown to sizeable proportions. He added more and more items, until today his American Merchandising Company is called the fastest-growing mail-order house in the country.

Zimmerman has unlocked the Big Safe, and he would be the last to claim that it has a very special combination known only to a very special few.

You see, he's by no means the only one to tap the mail-order business for a jackpot. Many thousands are doing it in practically every corner of the nation, using their kitchens, spare-rooms, attics, cellars, garages and what-have-you as offices. A number of these have clicked in a spectacular way.

Such as the firm of Harry and David, who have a million-a-year business in the sale by mail of assorted fruits and vegetables. And the fellow in Rutland, Vt., who sells $10,000 worth of sporting goods each week. And the couple in up-State New York who send out stacks of boxes of smoked turkey and get back stacks of letters, containing a total of $500,000, each year.

Don't get the idea that any of these people fell cozily into their bonanzas without effort. There was energy, knowledge of the business, bitterness of early failure; but what they did could be done by—shall we say *you?*

Consider, now, big corporations. What's the chance of a young guy these days to sit in the president's chair of his own mammoth firm? Start low, work hard, then marry the boss' daughter? Or wait until you're a grizzled gent and then take over? Maybe. But take a long look at two young fellows who did neither and got there anyway.

Harvey L. Pokrass, all of 29, decided in 1947 to go into the television-and-radio-manufacturing business. Why? "Because," he says, "no field offers to youth as much opportunity as television. It's the only line where the young man is on a par with the veteran, because actually there are no veterans."

Pokrass was by no means rich. He got some financing together and organized the Tele King Corporation in New York City. As recently as six years ago, mind you. Today, the firm has about 1,000 employees, and does a gross business in the neighborhood of $25,000,000 annually! It is accounted the country's leading independent TV-set manufacturer.

And Pokrass is sitting in the president's chair now, having successfully bucked the competition of the multi-million-dollar corporations which have been in the field.

A number of young tycoons are becoming that way by taking over de-

> The reason so few marriages
> are happy is because
> young ladies spend their time
> in making nets,
> not in making cages.
>
> —*Jonathan Swift*

funct or financially tottering businesses with a minimum of cash and infusing new methods and products into their crusted arteries.

There are many of these old firms, generally sitting on the edges of a town, which progress has passed by. They are doing business in old-fashioned ways and getting along by serving a few old and faithful customers. New blood, with new ideas, can yank them up to pay-off levels in a hurry, however.

Richard A. Snelling, only 25, is a case in point. He graduated from college in 1947 and went to work for a garden-supply house in Boston. He became engrossed in the field, read all he could on the subject, and then he heard about Henry A. Dreer, Inc.

The Dreer firm was one of the oldest horticultural concerns in America, a revered name in the industry, but it had fallen onto bleak days and into receivership. It was the Big Chance for Snelling.

In 1951, Snelling dug up $1,000 and bought the Dreer name from the receiver. Then he hustled around among his friends and raised $25,000 through the sale of stock, with which he reorganized the company.

He surrounded himself with a team of young men—Winslow Martin, now 32, as his vice-president; Samuel Roulon-Miller, 29, as sales-manager, and Samuel Gilbert, 25, as assistant in charge of new products. Snelling knew he needed some new products to offer the public, so he commissioned a research corporation to develop a liquid soil-conditioner, which soon emerged under the name of Fluffium. Other new products were introduced and the business slowly gathered speed.

In the first fiscal year after Snelling and his young outfit took over, the company did $1,500,000 worth of business. The second year is now drawing to a close, and chances are bright that it will double that figure.

Robert A. Weaver, Jr., is another young magnate—he's 35—who gave a dying old business an injection of new ideas, thereby bringing it to lusty life. When the war ended, Weaver started looking for something to do and his eye fell on the small and struggling Bettinger Company, in Waltham, Mass. It was a porcelain-enamel plant that was failing on its feet. Its chief customer was a stove concern located near by.

Darling: the popular form of address used in speaking to a person of the opposite sex whose name you cannot at the moment recall.

—Oliver Herford

Weaver, however, saw dynamic new possibilities in porcelain-enamel. He was convinced the material could be adapted to almost any use, that it was better, cheaper, stronger and more decorative than many materials now in use. So he bought a slice of the Bettinger firm with his own small savings and some borrowed cash.

It was in 1947 that the old management decided to throw in the sponge. Then Weaver, with more borrowed money, took over. Like Snelling, he too surrounded himself with a young team of executives and went to work developing new products.

Using porcelain-enamel, he created fireplaces which are much cheaper than conventional ones, windowsills which never need painting, movie screens for outdoor theaters, and a variety of other things ranging from coaster sets to chemical tanks.

The transfusion took. Today, the Bettinger Company is riding high, hitting the million-and-a-half-annual-business mark, and rising rapidly.

And this is the lesson you can learn: Throughout the nation there are these small plants, usually fabricating very specialized articles and selling them to a few specialized customers. The industrial world has changed markedly all around them, new and different products have squeezed them virtually out of the field, demands have dwindled because of the natural shifts in population.

But the little outfits struggle on, heads barely above the financial waters. These are the veins that some young tycoons are tapping and finding gold inside. Does it inspire *you?*

Can't be done today, huh? It *is* being done, in the fields of plastics, consulting engineering, raising of cattle, chemistry, and in businesses of almost every variety. Citing the case of Don Thomas, who started as a bricklayer's assistant at 13 and now runs a $20,000,000 machine company, Ralph Hendershot, the financial writer, declares:

"Nowhere but in a country like the U.S. could a thing like this happen. The fact that it has happened, and that other cases equally spectacular are to be found, refutes the claims heard from time to time that opportunities no longer exist in this country."

Don Thomas did it with courage, push, persistence and high-octane energy, qualities which are scattered around in abundance among the young guys in America. Suggest to Mr. Thomas that he is a genius, blessed with super-unique gifts, and he will snort at you.

It didn't take genius, for instance, to buy, at 23, a rundown gasoline station in Detroit and slowly build it up. He subsequently sold it and then acquired a seven-station chain, five stations of which he sold in 1944. With $25,000 in capital, he hired six employees and organized the Clinton Machine Company, in Maquoketa, Iowa, which manufactures small gasoline engines ranging from three-quarters to three horsepower.

The fact that there were many large corporations in the field, which had been making engines of all types and sizes for many years, didn't faze Thomas.

It fazed him so little, in fact, that his biggest problem has been to keep his working capital of sufficient proportions to meet the needs of his company's phenomenal growth.

The list of start-from-scratch boys is endless. And that's fine. Because the more there are, the better it makes the rest of us feel. The story of the seven Hoffman brothers of Madison, Wis., for example, makes us feel dandy.

Eleven years ago, they started business with a shack on the University of Wisconsin campus. Now, with the whole thing still a family operation, they have a big and busy steak house which seats 350 patrons and has two cocktail lounges to handle the overflow. In addition, the boys have branched out into related enterprises, one of the most promising of which is the Hoffman Sauce Company. There is also a hotel-and-restaurant-supply business and a chemical firm.

Back in 1941, Francis and Fred Hoffman opened their tiny lunchroom and happily began whipping up short orders. It caught on and soon the other brothers came into the business. The future looked promising, they even spoke about expanding—and then came the war. Off went the brothers Hoffman into the services.

On their return, they put all their savings into one kitty, got some more money through GI loans, and launched themselves once again in the restaurant business. It clicked and kept clicking, until today the steak house is the talk of the campus and is jammed nightly.

Francis Hoffman got the idea for the sauce company, and it stemmed from the war. Over in Europe, he bailed out of a plane and floated down on a Bavarian farm, where he was given shelter. Food there was not too plentiful, but there was one thing Francis remembered—a delicious salad dressing which the lads of the house made up.

When he returned to Madison, Francis thought of that salad dressing, and felt his customers would find it to their liking, too. So, entirely from memory of the taste, he worked for many months, finally succeeding in duplicating it. The sauce was a sensation. Customers asked for samples to take home and the brothers obliged until they got the idea of bottling and selling the stuff.

The sauce is going far—in fact, it went as far as Hong Kong recently, in a 30-gallon shipment to a Chinese café. And the brothers Hoffman are going far, too, right in Madison, as proprietors of a million-dollar business.

Perhaps the biggest single factor that has made the millionaire possibilities so bright today is the breath-taking forward march of science. Never before in history have the laboratory Merlins gone so all out to help you make money.

There are fabulous new metals, plastics, cloths and chemicals which work a variety of undreamed-of wonders. There are miracle crops that increase yield many times over, and new methods of raising bigger and meatier cattle. Did you know that there is a new chemical that makes its commercial debut for every working day in the year?

All these make the living standards of American consumers finer and bet-

ter—but did you ever stop to think that they also represent new business opportunities as well?

Look, for instance, what science is doing down on the farm, bearing commercial possibilities in mind as you do so.

Not long ago, farmers were burning or throwing away tens of millions of dollars each year in the form of sawdust, chicken feathers, waste skim milk and asparagus butts. Some of it could be used as feed, but the rest went into the rubbish heap.

But from the labs came the startling news that there was much gold in them thar hills of waste.

Take sawdust: Never used to be any more use for the stuff than to cover the floors of saloons and butcher shops. Now its practical uses are many. Composition wallboard is only one. The Wood Research Laboratory of Virginia Polytechnic Institute has actually created more than 150 types of boards from wood waste. As a result, many large plants have sprung up, producing these new composition boards.

The possibilities for new businesses out of sawdust are so bright that the U.S. Department of Commerce has published a full report telling you how to set up a small plant at fairly low cost to produce insulating boards from sawdust, thinnings, cull trees or pulpmill wood waste. The Northeastern Wood Utilization Council, of New Haven, Conn., also has published a report telling of new developments in the field.

But wallboards are by no means all that you can make from sawdust. Grind the stuff fine and it's perfect to dry-clean expensive furs. Mold it into bricks and it's excellent for heating. Mix it with cement and you get a strong material for floor slabs.

It also can be used in the manufacture of linoleum, to provide a fiber base, and is a good mixer for poisons, to make insecticides. The Southern Research Institute, of Birmingham, Ala., has found that sawdust, treated with chemicals, makes a nutritious poultry feed.

Take chicken feathers, apparently of no earthly use except for kids to stick in their hair and play Indian. The Albany, Cal., laboratory of the Department of Agriculture estimated that 38,000 tons of chicken feathers were being thrown away each year—a crying shame in view of the fact that they can be used to make paintbrush bristles, plastic ash trays, carpets and absorption pads. Not to mention that they can be converted into wigs for department-store mannikins and false beards for children and actors.

Waste skim milk? Paintbrushes, hairbrushes and buffers are just a few of the things into which it can be converted.

Corncobs? They can be made into nylon hose, building blocks, ethyl alcohol and an inexpensive method of cleaning carbon from engine parts.

Any million-dollar ideas in the lot for you?

In the industrial centers, wonder metals, chemicals and plastics, each more startling than the other, are coming rapidly off the scientific assembly line. And each can be a vastly profitable enterprise.

Stanley Sperber, a young ex-GI, found this out when he latched onto something called titania, or rutile. Research workers of the National Lead Company had been trying to improve the qualities of titanium dioxide as a pigment for paints. But they found that when the pure oxide is fed in powdered form through an oxy-acetylene flame, it turns into a peculiar, solid substance.

A substance you could hardly distinguish from a diamond! It sparkles beautifully and looks exactly like the real thing when encased in a setting. Just to make sure, Sperber took a 10-carat stone, worth less than $100, to a pawnbroker and was immediately offered a fantastic sum.

He formed the Hudson Gem Company, which sells synthetic gems all over the country. He's doing right fine, all because he saw a business jewel glittering in one of science's newest laboratory marvels.

Science also is going out to sea. Recent investigations have shown a number of possibilities dazzling in their promise.

The bed of the ocean, for example, has been found to be incomparably fertile because it is the repository of top soil washed from continental areas for hundreds of centuries. More, the ocean teems with protein in the form of plankton, which are microscopic plants or animals.

Hence farming of the seas on vast scales may be next on the horizons.

Fantastic ivory-tower drivel? Not so fast.

The Institute of Seaweed Research, in Scotland, has found the ocean a vast repository of an infinite number of substances useful to man. Accordingly, in Aberdeen it now is possible to buy ice cream made partly of materials extracted from seaweed. The alginic acids in seaweed provide the agent which thickens custards. It also stiffens textiles and furnishes the base for transparent films to coat paper. Treated another ingenious way, it makes soluble medical dressings and swabs which a doctor may leave in a wound.

That's not all. Alginic acid is being used for the manufacture of high-grade cosmetics, and seaweed produces substances useful in compounding tooth paste. Processed another way, the stuff provides a pale green meal which cows eat with relish, and it's as good for them as spinach is for kids.

Don't scoff at sea farming. The pioneer is the guy who holds all the blue chips at the end. Remember that Clarence Birdseye started this whole big thing with frozen foods! Remember too, that there was once a mechanic named Henry Ford, who fiddled with an auto car amid snickers. Remember that those who caught the first faint glimmer far on the horizons wound up with the jackpot.

It has happened many times before, is happening now, and certainly will happen again.

The helicopter field is just one example. It was only last December that an official agency in New York City forecast the arrival of the Helicopter Age by 1975, when the flying eggbeaters will dominate the short-haul transport and delivery field. Fred M. Glass, aviation director for the Port of New York Authority, predicted, in a 160-page report, that 6,000,000 passengers, 40,500,000 pounds of mail and more than 6,500,000 pounds of cargo will be shuttled in and out of Manhattan and the metropolitan area's airports every year.

Frank Piasecki, 33 years old, didn't make any intensive surveys but he had caught sight of the glimmer. While in his twenties he began making helicopters; today he is chairman of the board of the Piasecki Helicopter Corporation of Morton, Pa., one of the runaway leaders in the field.

It's undoubtedly true that our present tax structure makes it tougher to hang onto a million bucks in cold cash than it was before. But even despite taxes, it's being done. And the surface of the new fields in which more can do it has barely been scratched.

Next best to the glittering goal of a million in the bank is the establishment of a million-dollar business—which means that you sell a million's worth of merchandise annually. Settling for that isn't so bad.

Paul A. Porter, former head of the Office of Price Administration, tells you: "There is no doubt whatsoever that a man with determination to make a million dollars can do so today, one way or another. And he wouldn't necessarily have to be a genius either."

Nor does he have to find buried treasure or stumble across a diamond field. He can do it in a practical, open-to-everybody way.

Somehow, it makes you feel good to know it's true. •

DOUBLE FEATURE

As a BLUEBOOK bonus, we are presenting a double feature this month. Instead of our usual one novel, we offer two complete novels in this issue.

We've had this idea in the back of our mind for some time, but we've been waiting for a day when we had two completely different but equally good novels to offer. Here, we think we have them.

ONE—For mystery fans there is "Mark of the Beast," starting on the next page. The author, Walter C. Brown, has thrown away the rule-book and created a compelling, vivid story about a man who wakes up one day to find himself accused of murder.

TWO—For sports fans, "The Second Chance" starts on page 111. It's John D. MacDonald's story of a fighter whose heart is too big for his own good. He starts out to do a favor for a friend, and winds up fighting for his respectability, and for a woman he lost.

THE EDITORS

Illustrated by STAN DRAKE

Mark of the Beast

A Complete Novel by WALTER C. BROWN—They told me to plead self-defense, that the case was all against me. But, though I wasn't the murderer, how could I prove it from a jail cell?

IT HAPPENED WITHOUT WARNING. One evening I was in my own cabin, a free man. The next morning I was in a jail cell—charged with murder.

Here are the basic facts about myself in one brief paragraph: My name is Owen Randall. I am a research chemist, twenty-seven, and a bachelor. I had come to Carson's Cove to combine a vacation with recovery from an auto accident that had left me with some bent ribs, a collection of bruises, and a knee so badly wrenched that I had to hobble around with a cane.

I was alone that night in the two-room beach bungalow I had rented. It was late, and my wrenched knee throbbed like a toothache from too much walking through loose sand.

But the aching knee had its compensations—all my lonely trudging had been for Norma Webley's benefit and safety. I could go to sleep, knowing that for one more night there would be no danger for Norma in that queer house on Gunner's Ridge.

My knee always hurt worse at night; getting to sleep had been a problem until I discovered that a double jigger of whisky, gulped down at bedtime, made me drowsy enough to ignore the aching twinges. To me the whisky was medicine. I have never had a taste for liquor, and rarely drink.

That evening, as usual, I measured the liquor into the glass, swallowed it hastily.

I took off my coat and hung it in the closet. Crossing the room I stumbled into a chair. I attributed it to clumsiness, but as I took off my tie my fingers seemed thick and unmanageable, and when I started on my shirt I couldn't find the buttonholes.

I knew then that something was wrong. A faint singing began in my ears and I had trouble focusing my eyes. Then my head began spinning and the whole room rocked as the singing in my ears swelled to a roar.

I groped blindly for the edge of the bed and fell on it with a jolt. I felt myself slipping, sliding down an endless black tunnel.

After that came total blackout—a timeless blank until I began to come awake again, reluctantly, with something cold and wet slapping me across the face with rhythmic insistence.

A LEAN, square-jawed face edged into my wobbly vision. The face belonged to a man in a dark blue police uniform. A sopping wet towel dangled from his hand.

"All right, Randall!" he said crisply. "You're awake now?"

"Yes," I said. My voice sounded thick and hoarse, and I had a taste like bitter black coffee in my mouth.

"Know me, Randall?" the officer asked.

"Yes," I said. "You're . . . Captain . . . Tyson."

I closed my eyes against the harsh stabbing of the ceiling lights.

"Hey—snap out of it!" Tyson growled, and the wet towel slashed at my face again.

"Stop that!" a voice protested. "You don't have to keep doing that!" It was a woman's voice, Norma Webley's voice.

I pulled my eyes open again. Norma was standing behind Tyson, a bright red sports coat draped over her shoulders. Her face was pale, her dark eyes dilated, and her dark hair, that marvelous midnight hair, was ruffled and windblown.

"Norma!" I said in a whisper, and then I stopped, for other faces began swimming into focus.

One of the faces belonged to young Sergeant Pete Moran, who drove the Cove's police car. Another was that of a poker-faced, thin-nosed man I had never seen before. Then Dr. Harwood, the local physician. And Nick Stroud, tall and blond, of the Stroud Detective Agency, although I wasn't supposed to know that.

And I saw Janet Barlowe, my pretty, brown-haired neighbor, standing in the doorway with her father, Lloyd Barlowe, the famous magazine illustrator. Barlowe was wearing a striped bathrobe. Janet had on a light coat over pale blue sleeping-pajamas.

A strangely assorted group to be standing there, apparently awaiting my awakening, all of them staring at me with a peculiar intentness.

"WHAT's the matter?" I mumbled, jerking up on one elbow. "What happened?"

"As if you didn't know!" Captain Tyson snapped, and stepped back. "Take a look, Randall—on the floor!"

My eyes moved heavily to where Tyson pointed and I saw a white sheet draped over a sprawled, shapeless huddle. The toe of a man's shoe stuck out from under the edge of the sheet. Then Tyson reached down and whipped off the white covering.

It was Vincent Webley, Norma's husband. Blood matted his thin, sandy hair.

I could barely manage a whisper. "Dead?"

"You should know!" Tyson snapped back, and turned to Harwood. "Doc, how many times you figure Webley was hit?"

"At least a dozen!" Dr. Harwood replied. "More than enough to—"

"Owen!" Norma's voice reached me in an anguished cry. "Why did you do it? Why did you do it?"

The words struck me into dazed numbness. All I could grasp of this fantastic scene was that Vincent Webley was lying here in my room—murdered—and these people believed I had killed him! All of them! Even Norma Webley!

"But—but I—I didn't!" I had to wrestle each word out of my closed-up throat. I groped for a more convincing protest, some desperate explanation, but I couldn't find it.

There was silence then, hostile, disbelieving silence. They were all staring at me, silently, speculatively, with faces like masks. I searched Norma's face. Her eyes were wide and dark, looking at me with a frightened intensity.

"Norma!" I gasped. "I—I didn't do it! I swear it!"

She wrenched her gaze from mine and put her hands up to her face, sobbing suddenly as she turned aside in hopeless grief.

THEN Captain Tyson bent down and lifted something off the floor. It was a cane—a smooth, tough black hickory cane with a plain curved handle.

"This cane yours, Randall?" he demanded.

"Yes," I said. "I was in an auto accident, and—"

"Never mind all that! It's your cane. And it has blood on it, Vincent Webley's blood! Now go ahead, Randall. Talk!"

"I—I don't know anything about that!" I stammered. "But I didn't kill Webley! I don't even know how he got here. I was all alone—" I wobbled up to a sitting position. "Look, this is crazy! Why should I kill Webley? I knew the man only by sight; I met him only once."

"Yes, we know—at the Cove Inn!" Tyson cut in harshly. "Where he warned you to stay away from his wife! That doesn't sound much as if you and Webley were strangers!"

"But—but we were!" I protested. "He had made a mistake—"

"*You* made the mistake!" Tyson shot back. "You didn't take his warning! The very next day you met Mrs. Webley secretly, under that pier out there! Someone saw you, Randall. You were seen talking to her, kissing her!"

Norma gave a sudden gasp at this unexpected exposure. I could only stare at Tyson, dumfounded at his exact knowledge.

I glanced quickly at Janet Barlowe, who had not moved an inch from the doorway. I knew what she must be thinking and suddenly I wanted her, above all others, to believe in me in spite of what she was seeing and hearing in this room. But Janet's deep blue eyes looked at me as if I were a total stranger.

Then Nick Stroud leaned over the foot of my bed. "Look, Randall, I've got bad news for you. I'm a private detective. Mr. Webley hired me to check up on his wife. I've been tailing you two around. I have a written record of every move you've made, and I've turned it over to Captain Tyson. You might as well come clean."

"That's right, Randall!" Tyson took it up. "We know all about those little night jaunts to Gunner's Ridge to see Mrs. Webley."

"That's a lie!" Norma broke in furiously. "Owen did come to Gunner's Ridge at night, but it wasn't to see me! The reason—"

"Never mind the reason!" Tyson cut in sharply. "The fact is established."

"Hear me out!" Norma insisted. "Owen was there to watch the house, to bring me help if I needed it. Captain Tyson, the truth is I was afraid of my husband, afraid even for my life! When Vincent flew into a jealous rage he was like an insane man!"

"We'll go into that later!" Tyson snapped, but Norma would not be silenced.

"I had promised Owen that if ever I needed help I'd turn on the lantern above our beach-steps. Then he would go for the police—for you, Captain Tyson."

Tyson's lip curled. "That's right, Mrs. Webley, talk fast—so Randall can get the cover-up story straight!" He swung around to me. "No doubt you'll give us the same yarn: You were hanging around Gunner's Ridge just to watch for a signal-light!"

"That's true!" I said. "I never met Mrs. Webley up there. I never saw her anywhere at night."

"Okay!" Tyson said. "A gentleman is expected to lie."

"It's the truth!" Norma flared. "You're trying to slander my character and Mr. Randall's character. We were simply friends, nothing more!"

"So it's *Mr.* Randall now!" Tyson mocked. "It was 'Owen' a minute ago. Just friends, eh? Well, that's not the way your husband saw it! And it's not the way I see it, either—after a look at Stroud's records!"

"It's true, just the same!" Norma retorted angrily. "Ask your hired detective if he ever saw Mr. Randall and myself together on Gunner's Ridge!"

Tyson smiled. "It's pitch-dark up there at night, Mrs. Webley. But I can tell you something Stroud *did* see. He saw that secret little meeting you two had under the pier, and the kissing that went with it! Just friends, eh?"

Norma's face flamed scarlet. She whirled suddenly on Nick Stroud. "You snooping beast!" she cried, and slapped him across the face with her hand.

The blond detective backed away before her fury, raising his arm as she struck at him again.

"That's enough of that, Mrs. Webley!" Tyson barked, and flashed a quick signal to Sergeant Moran.

Moran took Norma by the arm and pushed her toward the door. Norma twisted in his grasp, calling back to me, "Owen! You're entitled to legal protection! Make him send for your lawyer!"

Then she was outside, and Captain Tyson came and stood over me, his leathery face hard and determined.

"Look, Randall, why don't you talk, and get it over with? You were carrying on an affair with Mrs. Webley, and Webley found out. He came here tonight for a showdown; you had a fight and killed him! That's the story, Randall, and you're nailed down on it, good and tight."

He said all this quietly, patiently, as if we were talking about a ticket for double parking, instead of murder. I could only stare at him in utter amazement, utter incredulity at this fantastic distortion of the truth.

I tried to sit up straighter, and the room began to sway again. I tried to say something, but only a few senseless sounds came out.

"Damn it, Doc, he's still half-drunk!" Tyson said to Harwood. "Give him some more of that black coffee."

"We've poured half a gallon into him already," Harwood replied as he turned and went into my alcove kitchen.

I beckoned excitedly to Captain Tyson to come closer, for my numbed mind had suddenly fastened on a point, a defensive point against this

> Love is a passion that can do and undo everything.
>
> —*Anon*

spider-web of distortions and false conclusions that had me trapped.

"I'm not drunk!" I mumbled. "I must have been drugged."

"Drugged?" Tyson snorted in contempt. "Listen, Randall, I guess I know whisky when I see it, and smell it! You were plastered when we broke in here!"

"Drugged!" I insisted. "Something—in the whisky."

Tyson picked up my bottle of Scotch. "This it?"

Harwood came back with a cup of coffee, black and pungent. "Here, drink this!" he ordered.

"Listen, Doc," Tyson said. "Randall's claiming now that he was drugged. In this whisky—"

Harwood opened the bottle and sniffed, then tasted a little from the palm of his hand. "Smells all right, tastes all right," he said, squinting at me. "How much did you drink?"

"A double jigger," I answered. "I never take more than that."

But I could see he thought I was lying about the quantity. "The bottle's two-thirds gone," he pointed out. He picked up my glass and sniffed at the inside. "How soon did the effect hit you?"

"Right away," I told him. "I got dizzy—I blacked out."

"Well, since Randall raises the point," Tyson said, "we'll have the stuff analyzed, just for the record. Personally, I've got ten bucks says the only drug in this bottle is alcohol."

Nick Stroud stepped forward. "Captain, if you want a quick check on that bottle, why not sample the liquor right now? We could try half the amount Randall claims he drank. If it's been doped, it'll show quick enough."

"Yeah!" Tyson said. "But who does the sampling?"

"I'll play guinea-pig," Stroud volunteered.

"Okay—try it," Tyson said, and Harwood poured some of the whisky in a glass. Stroud sniffed it, then took a small swallow. "Here goes!" he said, and downed the rest of it.

I sat waiting, sipping the thick coffee, watching Stroud's face.

A minute ticked by, and nothing happened. "I still feel okay," Stroud said. "Smooth Scotch!" He held out his hands to show their steadiness. "Shall I try another shot, Captain?"

"No," Tyson said, "I'm satisfied. How about it, Randall? Got any more quick alibis you want knocked over?"

I shook my head. "I still say I never saw Webley. I was all alone here. The whisky was drugged."

"Save it for the jury," Tyson said, and tapped my shoulder. "Randall, you're under arrest for the murder of Vincent Webley!"

A tap on the shoulder, a few simple words, a gesture toward the door, and my life seemed to end. Tyson pulled me to my feet and I stumbled from a jolting twinge of pain in my knee.

"My cane!" I said. "I can't walk without my cane."

"Here, grab my arm," Tyson said grimly. "We're saving that cane, Randall—as Exhibit A for the jury!"

As I limped toward the door, hanging onto Tyson's arm, Nick Stroud touched my shoulder. "Randall, I'm sorry," he said. "I took this thing on just as routine business. I had no idea it'd turn out like this."

Stroud sounded sincere enough, but I didn't answer him. I was still too bewildered by all that was happening to me.

Tyson halted just short of the door, beckoning to the poker-faced, sharp-nosed man who had been standing quietly in the background all this time.

"Andrews, you were employed by Webley as cashier of the Surf Club. Did Webley ever carry large sums of money on his person?"

"No, sir," Andrews replied. "He cashed his personal checks with me. They were usually for one hundred dollars. I cashed one like that for him yesterday."

Tyson nodded, and turned to me. "We found eighty-four dollars in Web-

ley's wallet. I'm telling you this, Randall, so you don't start claiming that somebody killed Webley to pick his pockets. Let's go!"

JANET BARLOWE and her father were still there at the doorway. They moved aside to give us room.

"Janet," I said, "I *didn't* kill Webley! Please believe that. None of this happened the way they're telling it."

But Janet didn't say anything—she just looked at me. I knew she was thinking: "Norma Webley believes you did it. And Norma should know! I warned you, Owen—remember?"

Then Lloyd Barlowe said, "Want me to see about a lawyer for you, Randall?" But his voice was crisp and cold; he didn't believe me, either.

I shook my head. All I wanted now was to get away from this fantastic nightmare, away from this staring group who had already tried and convicted me as the murderer of Norma Webley's husband.

Captain Tyson opened the door and we went out onto the porch. Sergeant Moran was still there, guarding Norma. She looked at me, her dark eyes filled with grief and despair.

"Owen, what can I say?" she cried. "I'd give anything if this hadn't happened. But I know it couldn't have been your fault. I know it must have been done in self-defense."

"Norma, don't talk like that! I *didn't* do it! Can't you get that straight? *I didn't kill him!*"

But my denial didn't seem to get through to her. "I'll stand by you, Owen." She was weeping then. "I'll tell them what kind of man Vincent was! I'll show them the marks on my arm—"

"Come on, break it up!" Tyson ordered impatiently. "Moran, take Randall to the station. Book him for murder. I'll be along later, after I've had a talk with Mrs. Webley."

Moran took me by the arm and guided me down the steps and into the red police car. I sat beside him on the front seat while he backed the car around and swung out of the Dunes, taking the inlet road to Carson's Cove.

Rolling along past the dark, silent cottages, with the damp salt breeze blowing, I began to feel uneasy inside, and then nauseated. I stood it as long as I could, but I had to signal Moran for a stop.

"Sick!" I gulped. Moran took one look at my face and pulled up. I stumbled out of the car, leaned over the edge of a drainage ditch, and was completely and thoroughly sick. After that I felt a little better. I turned and hobbled back to the car. Moran was leaning against the open door, a police .38 dangling from his hand.

"Thought maybe you'd be foolish enough to try a break," he said as we climbed back into the car. He sat there a moment, looking at me, then pulled out a packet of cigarettes.

"Smoke?" he offered, but I shook my head. He lit one for himself, then tossed the packet to me. "Keep 'em," he said. "They'll come in handy later!"

Then he gunned the motor, and we were rolling again.

The Carson's Cove police station was a small, square brick building. My cell was clean enough, but it was a grim little box smelling of disinfectant, its only light the naked glow of a bulb in the corridor ceiling.

Apparently the only other occupant of the cell-block was a sleeping drunk, off in a cell somewhere to my left. He had a long, rasping snore, like a dull-toothed saw hacking a log.

I looked at my watch, but the pointing hands were meaningless. All I knew was that it was pitch-dark outside, and I was locked in a narrow room with a web of steel bars where the front wall should have been.

I sat on the edge of the cot, staring at those bars. Vincent Webley was dead—murdered—beaten to death in my bungalow and with my cane. I knew all that as cold fact, but I was still too numbed to think straight.

I could only remember— I could only try to grope my way back to the beginning of all this, back to my first day at Carson's Cove.

I HAD never been to Carson's Cove before, although it was less than a hundred miles from my home. It was an old fishing village turned summer resort—quaint, quiet, picturesque.

There was a row of waterfront shops, and two small but well-managed hotels, the Carson House and the Cove Inn. Outside the Old Town was a beach section called the Dunes, made up of small bungalows and seaside cottages.

I had rented one of the Dunes bungalows—two rooms, small, neatly furnished, with a fine view of the beach. It was Number 7, and stood alone in a little sandy hollow about fifty yards from the broken remains of an old wharf.

The nearest house to Number 7 was a fine-looking, white-walled, blue-shuttered cottage up on the slope behind the bungalow. The real estate agent had told me it belonged to Lloyd Barlowe, the famous magazine illustrator.

My first impressions of Carson's Cove were pleasant. After unpacking my bags, I took my hickory cane and set out for my first limping stroll along the smooth beach.

It was a perfect day, with a bright sky of Wedgwood blue, small round powder-puff clouds, sunshine like liquid amber, and a light cool breeze with the tang of salt-spray.

Oddly enough, practically the first person I had run into at the Cove was Nicholas Stroud, the detective.

I was limping across the sand when I heard a rumbling growl behind me. Turning, I saw a dog—a sturdy brute, a shaggy, hammer-headed Airedale almost the size of a Great Dane. He circled around me, growling, showing a set of white fangs.

Naturally I stopped in my tracks, turning as the dog circled me, talking to him in a quiet, soothing tone. But I kept a tight grip on my stick, for he looked dangerous.

Then a tall blond man in slacks and a T-shirt appeared between the dunes, calling out sharply to the dog: "Stop that, Rusty! Come here!"

The dog stopped his circling, but he kept on growling, watching me with hostile eyes. "Damn you, Rusty—shut up!" the blond man snapped, coming up and cuffing him across the ears.

He turned to me then, in apology. "I'll have to teach this hound better

manners. I don't know what's got into him. He's usually friendly with strangers."

I tried talking to the dog, snapping my fingers, inviting him to make friends, but he just growled at me, those white fangs glinting under his lifted lip.

Rusty's master cuffed him again. "Any time he bothers you, whack him with your cane, good and hard. That'll teach him."

"Oh, he'll get over it," I said, but as I hobbled on along the beach Rusty was still growling in his throat.

I followed the tide line. Gulls circled with lazy grace above the taut white sails of catboats and trim racing yawls. The water twinkled as with a million silver sequins. And there was music in the air, faint, fitful snatches of piano music, drifting down on the wind from one of the cottages up on the curving ridge.

As I strolled toward this ridge I heard the music more clearly. It was random bits of Chopin, played with dash and vigor, with an expert touch on the keys. A man's touch, I felt sure.

The music came from the first house on the ridge. It was a strikingly beautiful place, low and rambling, with panel-type walls of whitewashed stone. Wide, square windows cornered every angle of the walls, and it had a raised flagstone terrace. It was a house quite obviously belonging to someone with money.

THERE was no one in sight, and I halted by the low stone wall in front, listening to the headlong rush of music. The unseen pianist had swung from Chopin into a rippling flood of brilliant melody, a concerto theme that teased my memory.

The playing was fine, but there was a weird pace to its tempo, a reckless bravura, as if hard anger lay behind the flying fingers. I remembered a cocktail party where I had heard a piano played in this headlong fashion by a guest who had taken too many Martinis.

With the swirling notes of the angry piano ringing in my ears, I walked along beside the low wall, turning at its corner. And it was there I first saw Norma Webley.

She was sitting on the wall, a magazine on her lap, a half eaten apple in her hand. Her hair was dark and shining, midnight hair as black as the anthracite cat stretched out lazily beside her. And she looked up at me with the most vivid dark eyes I have ever seen, gypsy eyes, in a small, pale, oval face, poised and proud.

I looked with pleasure at the slim lines of her tailored gray slacks, at the tautly molded curves of her pale yellow pullover sweater. Her only jewelry was a narrow diamond wedding ring.

It was a beautiful day, and she was a beautiful girl. It was the most natural thing in the world to smile to her. She nodded her head and smiled in return, an impersonal, noncommittal smile.

"I hope I didn't startle you, coming around the corner like that," I said.

"No, not at all," she replied. Her voice was low and quiet, with a measured depth that just missed huskiness. A very intriguing voice—a very intriguing girl.

Suddenly the piano music ended with an angry, two-handed crash of discordant notes. In a split second the girl jumped from the wall and rushed toward the house. Our talk couldn't have frightened her. We were just two strangers sharing a chance meeting.

I shifted my cane, looking over toward the open window from which the music came. "That's wonderful music," I remarked. "I've been trying to place it. The Delius Concerto, isn't it?"

She studied me for a moment with poised appraisal. "Yes, it's the Delius," she confirmed. "Not too many people would recognize it. Perhaps you're a musician?"

"No. I heard it once at a concert," I said. And we went on from there, chatting politely, without effort. I found myself explaining my presence at Carson's Cove. I mentioned the reason for my walking with a cane. We talked a little about music, and auto accidents, and about the Cove.

That was all there was to our talk. No prying for names, no really personal details. We were just two casual strangers sharing a chance interlude on a fine sunny day.

SUDDENLY the piano music ended with an angry, two-handed crash of discordant notes. In a split second the girl jumped from the wall and was walking hurriedly toward a small door in the house-wing. She disappeared with a speed that could only be called flight.

I stood there, rooted by that crashing discord and by the girl's abrupt flight. Then I heard a voice coming from the house—a masculine, quarreling voice that was presently punctuated by a small, sharp cry. I was sure the cry was the voice of the dark-eyed girl.

The man's voice rose to an angry bellow. "Don't lie to me! Right under my nose! I saw you!"

"But I've told you the truth!" the girl's voice answered. "I never saw him before, never! Run after him, ask him! Ask him!" Then another low cry and, "You're hurting my arm!"

"Next time I'll twist your neck!" the man snarled. Then a door slammed, and there was deep silence.

I walked on slowly toward the beach. At the edge of the soft sand I stopped to light a cigarette, and glanced back over my shoulder. The charming beach house stood drowsing in the warm sunshine, the black cat still stretched out lazily on the wall, beside the half-eaten apple.

"Just a private quarrel," I said to myself. "Husband-and-wife stuff. No harm done, so forget it."

I strolled on toward the Cove, along the popular part of the beach, dotted with swimmers and sunbathers, talking and shouting and laughing. Plenty of pretty girls sunning themselves in bathing suits, but my thoughts were back with the lovely dark-haired girl at the white beach house.

Making a complete circle of the Cove, I came back along the inlet beach and cut across the dunes to my bungalow. I was just going up the steps when a tall, sun-tanned girl came suddenly around the corner of the porch.

Her bright brown hair had golden glints that shone in the sun, her eyes were a deep blue, and the briefest of bathing suits covered a beautifully lithe, tanned body.

"Oh!" she said, startled. "I didn't know any one was living here."

"Just since today," I explained.

A slender, gray-haired man in swimming trunks came plodding along behind the shapely girl. "Sorry if we're trespassing," he said to me. "It's a short cut to the beach—"

"Keep right on using it, any time you want," I said.

He gave me a pleasant smile. "Thank you. That's our place up there on the slope." He pointed to the white cottage with the blue shutters. "I'm Lloyd Barlowe. This is my daughter Janet."

"My name's Owen Randall," I said. We all smiled and nodded and they went on, the girl flushing a little, conscious suddenly of her wet, clinging bathing suit.

I watched Janet Barlowe's tanned figure move lithely up the sandy slope. Lloyd Barlowe, the famous magazine artist—no doubt he often used his pretty daughter as his model.

My thoughts compared Janet Barlowe, with her direct blue eyes and her carefree exposure to that gypsy-eyed girl on the wall, who had been completely covered from ankle to throat. It was quite an interesting study in contrasts.

I WENT to the old Cove Inn for dinner that evening. It is a pleasant place with pine-paneled walls, seaprints, handcarved ship models, and polished copperware hanging on the big stone fireplaces at either end of the long room.

The food was fine but I didn't give it as much attention as it deserved, for the dark-eyed girl was there, sitting directly across the room from me, at a corner table for two. There was a man with her, lean and rather English-looking, with a high-bridged nose and sandy hair growing thin above the forehead.

The girl had seen me, too. I caught a look turned my way, a brief glance, quickly suppressed. She was wearing a blue dinner dress with a simplicity of line that marked it as expensive.

They got up finally, and the girl draped a scarf over her shoulders. As they made their way toward the door, I saw that the sandy-haired man had had a little too much to drink. It showed in the careful, deliberate way he steered his course between the tables.

As the dark-haired girl disappeared through the arched doorway, the sandy-haired man wheeled suddenly, came back, and made his way straight to my table. He bent over me, so close that I caught the whisky-reek on his breath.

"Randall!" he said deliberately, glaring at me with glittering eyes. "I'm telling you, keep away from my wife! I never warn anybody twice. Remember that!"

He turned on his heel then, and stalked through the door. For a moment I just sat there foolishly, stunned by his sudden warning, his knowledge of my name.

THEN I got to my feet and started after him, but my injured knee slowed me down and by the time I reached the door he was pulling away from the Inn in a sleek red convertible, jerking angrily at the wheel. The dark-haired girl was beside him, her face white, her body rigid as a statue.

I went back and resumed my dinner, feeling like an awkward fool. Everyone seated near me had heard that crazy accusation, and I know how that type of scandal could be spread around in the lazy idleness of a resort town. From this point on I would be a marked man in Carson's Cove.

I forced myself to sit there and finish my dinner but it was a relief to rise finally and escape from the Inn into the friendly darkness.

I wondered where I could get some information about that dark-eyed girl and her husband, and I thought of the real-estate office where I had rented my bungalow. I found it still open, and old Mr. Thurlow was at his desk.

I chatted with him about the Cove, and told him how much I liked the bungalow. I mentioned the attractive houses I'd seen up on the ridge, and asked him who lived in the first one, just off the Dunes.

"That's Gunner's Ridge," Thurlow informed me. "Nice houses up there, money-people. First house? That's Vincent Webley's place."

"Webley?" I said. "A musician, isn't he?"

Thurlow grinned. "Well, he sure can play the piano, especially when he's been hitting the bottle. And that's pretty often. But that's not what he's famous for, around the Cove. Ever hear of the Surf Club, over at Brixton Beach?"

"No," I said.

"Well, you'll hear plenty about it. It's a gambling place; Webley owns it. A regular gold-mine, I'm told."

"He's married, isn't he?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," Thurlow answered. "Mrs. Webley's a good bit younger than he is, and quite a looker. I guess that's what makes all the trouble between 'em."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Jealousy," Thurlow said. "Webley's crazy jealous. Watches her all the time, checks up on her. It's a shame—nobody'd blame Norma Webley if she walked out on him one of these days."

Thurlow paused, giving me a sharp glance. "Funny thing, Mr. Randall, you walking in here, asking me about Webley. I had a phone call from him this afternoon, asking me about *you*."

"Me?" I said, pretending surprise, but now I understood how Webley had been able to use my name at the Cove Inn.

"He asked me if I knew anything about a young man who walked with a cane. By his description I knew he meant you, Mr. Randall. So I told him that you'd rented Number 7, out in the Dunes."

"What else did he want to know?" I asked.

"He wanted me to give him your city address. I told him I couldn't give out information like that, and he hung up on me."

Thurlow kept his sharp look on me. "And it wasn't more than an hour or two after Webley's call, when in popped Mr. Stroud, asking me exactly the same kind of questions."

"Stroud? I don't know anybody named Stroud."

"Well, he seemed to know you—by sight, if not by name. He asked me if you'd brought your wife with you to the Cove."

"He's got the wrong number," I replied. "I'm not married. This Stroud—what's he look like?"

"Big blond fellow," Thurlow said. "About thirty or so."

"With a dog, a big Airedale?" I cut in.

"Yes, that's him," Thurlow said. "Nicholas Stroud."

"Know anything about him?" I asked. "His line of business?"

"Don't know a thing," Thurlow replied. "Stroud's not much of a mixer. Just lies around the beach. He's got Number 19 at the Dunes, if you want to look him up."

"Not me," I said. "I don't know the man. Just happened to notice him and his dog down at the beach. . . . This Stroud," I added, "is he a friend of Webley's?"

Thurlow shook his head. "Webley's not a man who goes in for friends. By the way, if Webley ever invites you out to his Surf Club, I'd think twice. They tell me the stakes run pretty high out there, and the house generally wins."

"I doubt if I'll get the invitation," I said, "but thanks for the tip."

On my way back to the Dunes I thought over Thurlow's information, and the Webley mystery began to clarify itself. Vincent Webley must have seen me that afternoon chatting with his wife. Evidently that was enough to spark his hair-trigger jealousy.

And then, when Norma Webley denied knowing me, he'd called up Thurlow to ask about the stranger with the cane. Later, half-drunk, spotting me at the Inn, he'd flared up all over again.

Well, that explained Vincent Webley. But this Nicholas Stroud—what the devil did *he* want, snooping around, asking for my name, asking if my wife was with me? If he thought he knew me, why hadn't he mentioned it when we met on the beach?

Obviously I was a case of mistaken identity, I decided, and dismissed Stroud from my mind.

Returning to my bungalow, I sat on the dark porch, thinking about

Before going to war
say a prayer;
before going to sea say
two prayers;
before marrying
say three prayers.

—Anon

that scene in the Cove Inn, and my own anger started building up. Suddenly I decided the thing to do was go up there, tonight, face Vincent Webley, and get the whole silly nonsense straightened out.

On the impulse I grabbed my hickory cane and cut across the Dunes. But by the time I reached Gunner's Ridge I realized that my plan was useless as well as foolish.

What could I possibly say that would convince Webley he had made a mistake? A man that far sunk in senseless jealousy wouldn't listen to reason, or logic. He'd probably swing at me; then I'd have to sock him, and the net result would be twice as much scandal for the Cove gossips.

"Forget it!" I told myself. "Webley was half drunk. He's probably loaded by this time. You'd only stir up more trouble."

I stood in the starlit silence of Gunner's Ridge. Vincent Webley was again at his piano, playing the Brahms Rhapsody as if he hated the ringing chords, hated Johannes Brahms, hated all the music in the world.

There was no clue to Norma Webley's whereabouts, no windows lighted other than the big picture-window in the living-room, and I wondered if she were in there with Webley, forced to listen to that angry piano.

And then the impromptu recital broke off with the same clattering discord that had ended Webley's afternoon session. Hearing it, I stepped nearer to the house, remembering Norma's flight from the wall, and the angry quarrel that had followed.

But this time there was no outburst of voices. There was nothiug but silence. Presently I heard a door open, then slam, and I saw Webley cross the tiled terrace and disappear around the corner of the house.

A garage door rattled: then the sleek red convertible backed down the drive, and with a burst of power the red car raced off aloug the bay road.

"Probably on his way to the Surf Club," I guessed, for the bay road led past the Dunes and the old lighthouse to Brixton Beach.

With Webley's departure the lights in the living-room winked out, then a window in the left wing of the house lit up, and I had a brief glimpse of Norma as she adjusted the white Venetian blinds.

When I got back to my bungalow I was really limping. I'd done a lot of walking that day, much of it through loose sand, and my twisted knee was one big ache. I had a hard time getting to sleep, in spite of my nocturnal dose of straight Scotch.

The next morning, as I started out for a stroll along the beach, I had my second brush with Nick Stroud's surly dog. As before, Rusty came circling around me, snarling, blocking my path, as hostile as ever.

I waited, expecting Stroud to appear, but there was no sign of him. Finally I got tired of trying to coax the dog into friendliness. Stroud had advised me to whack the animal if he gave me any more trouble, and I decided to take his advice.

"Okay, Rusty, you're asking for it!" I said, and went for him, my hickory cane ready for action. That broke it up, for when Rusty saw I meant business he turned tail and galloped off into the dunes.

Janet Barlowe was down there on the beach, the center of a laughing, shouting group playing around in the surf. I nodded a good morning as I went by, and she waved her hand, but her eyes held a kind of wary appraisal.

"She knows," I thought. "She's already heard about that business at the Cove Inn. Now she's looking me over for wolf-marks."

Lloyd Barlowe was a little farther along the beach, sitting on a log, making random sketches of gulls in flight.

"Morning, Randall!" he said. His tone was friendly enough, but he too

was sizing me up with cool speculation, and it roughed up my anger again.

"Mr. Barlowe," I said, "apparently you're one of the solid citizens here at the Cove. I'm just a visiting stranger, but do you mind if I say something personal?"

He put on his rimmed glasses and looked up at me. "Go right ahead," he invited.

"As I told you yesterday, my name's Owen Randall and I'm a research chemist. I was in an automobile accident. I came to Carson's Cove to rest up for a while. I'd never set foot in this place before. Last night I went to the Cove Inn for dinner. While I was there, a half-drunken fool named Vincent Webley came over to my table."

Barlowe nodded. "I saw it, Randall. I was at the Inn."

"All right," I went on, "then you saw what happened. So did a lot of other people. Just to set the record straight, I'd like to say that I never saw Vincent Webley before in my life. And what's more to the point, I'd never laid eyes on Mrs. Webley, either, before yesterday afternoon."

Barlowe nodded, lighting a cigarette. I couldn't tell whether he believed me or not.

"Living here, Mr. Barlowe, you must know quite a bit about the Webleys," I went on. "Frankly, I'm not sure how a crazy situation like this should be handled. What would *you* do?"

He peered up over the top of his glasses. "I wouldn't do anything, Randall. We've had other samples of Webley's jealousy over his wife. You know his business connection, don't you?"

"Yes, I've heard he owns the Surf Club," I answered.

"Well, if I were you, Randall, I'd simply forget it. Webley's a dangerous and unpredictable man, I'd say. I'd just stay away from him and let the whole thing die a natural death."

"That would suit me fine," I said. "Thanks, Mr. Barlowe."

I went on up the beach toward the old lighthouse at Reedy Point. There, I saw Norma Webley again.

I noticed a girl in a white beach-robe standing before an easel, busily sketching the wreckage of a broken-masted schooner, half-buried there in the tidal sands. But she had her back to me, and I didn't realize it was Norma Webley until I was quite close to her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Webley," I said.

Evidently she hadn't heard my approach, for she whirled around as if a gun had gone off. Her dark eyes stared at me, her face tense with sudden alarm.

"I can't thank you enough," she said. She looked so lovely and pathetic that I suddenly reached out and kissed her. It was the best way I knew to tell her I was truly sorry.

"Mr. Randall! Please don't stand there. Don't stop to talk! Please, go away as quickly as you can!"

The sudden outburst left me bewildered and embarrassed. "I'm sorry," I said, "I didn't mean to intrude on you."

As I turned on my heel, her voice came again in a breathless rush: "No, not that way. Don't turn back! Just walk on, the way you were going, toward the Point! I'll try to explain all this later, if I can manage it! But go now, please!"

There was such desperate urgency in her voice that I obeyed without question. I walked on, straight ahead, and I didn't look back. But I didn't understand her nervous panic in that lonely place, or her strange request to keep on going forward.

Anyway, I trudged on along the beach to Reedy Point and sat on the lighthouse rocks, smoking, watching the gulls, and thinking about Norma and Vincent Webley.

While I wrestled with the Webley puzzle, gray clouds rolled up and smothered the sun. I realized it was going to rain, and made tracks for the Dunes, but I was only halfway back when the rain came splashing down.

I stopped hurrying then, to save my aching knee from further strain, and by the time I reached the sandy hollow where my bungalow stood I was soaked to the skin.

As I headed for my porch a bit of white over on the far side of the hollow caught my eye. It was Norma Webley, sheltered from the rain under the jagged remains of the old pier. She beckoned to me.

I limped over to her shelter as fast as I could. She had her painting gear still with her.

"Mr. Randall, I've been waiting here on the chance you'd come back soon," she said. "I owe you some explanation about yesterday after-

noon—and last night, at the Inn. And then just today, on the beach."

Her dark eyes were grave and earnest. "I haven't much time; I'll have to be brief." She moistened her red lips. "Mr. Randall, I have a very jealous husband. It's almost a fixation with him. He accuses me of the most dreadful things, on the slightest provocation."

Her voice faltered, then she went on steadily: "Yesterday afternoon he happened to see us talking there at the wall. It sent him into a rage. He jumped to the fantastic conclusion that you were someone I was meeting by appointment. He made a dreadful scene over it."

"I overheard part of that, Mrs. Webley," I told her. "I didn't know whether I ought to wait, try to help straighten it out—"

"Oh, I'm glad you didn't!" she said. "That would only have made it worse. Vincent tried to make me tell him who you were, where we'd met, how long I'd known you. I couldn't convince him you were just someone passing by. So he called Mr. Thurlow's office to find out your name. And then came that awful scene at the Inn. I'm so ashamed, Mr. Randall."

"Don't worry about me, Mrs. Webley," I said. "But there must be some way to get this cleared up. Surely Thurlow mentioned that I'd arrived only yesterday. Perhaps if I talked to Mr. Webley—"

SWIFT alarm flared in her eyes. "Please, no! Anything but that! It would be worse than useless. My husband isn't open to reason. He has convinced himself that we've met before, that you're here by arrangement. That's why I was so upset when you happened to come along the beach while I was sketching."

"But why?" I asked. "That part of the beach was deserted. There wasn't a soul in sight."

"I have to live on a leash," Norma said. "Wherever I go, my husband tries to watch me. He spies on me through a pair of binoculars. From the terrace he can sweep the whole beach, and he'd recognize you at once by your cane."

"I'm terribly sorry about this," I said. "I seem to have brought you bad luck. Do you think he was watching today?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I won't know until I get home, and I dread going back. I dread it."

"Suppose he has seen us?" I asked. "What happens?"

Norma's voice deepened into huskiness. "Just more of *this!*" she said simply, letting the beach-robe slide from one shoulder. She had a bathing suit on under the robe, but it didn't cover the purple bruises on her shoulder.

I stood staring at the marks, not knowing what to say, feeling baffled and angry at my own helplessness.

"Now that you know about this," Norma said steadily, "you must wonder if I've ever given my husband any reason for his suspicions. I never have. Please believe that."

LOOKING into the depths of her dark eyes, so troubled, so candid in their level gaze, I was quite sure it was the simple truth.

"Do you *have* to stay and take it?" I asked tersely.

"I'm afraid to leave him!" she confessed. "Afraid to stay, but more afraid to leave." She gave a little shiver. "You don't know my husband!"

"All I know is that he runs the Surf Club," I replied.

"Yes," Norma concurred. "I didn't know that, before we were married. He told me he was a musician. He had wanted to be a famous concert pianist. But he didn't have enough ability to make the grade. It left him bitter and warped. He turned to professional gambling. I hate living on that kind of money."

She twisted the ring on her finger. "I shouldn't be telling you any of this, Mr. Randall. But you've been involved in my troubles by accident, and I feel you're entitled to know the truth."

She gave another shiver. "I've grown afraid of Vincent, really afraid. His insane jealousy, his drinking, his brooding fits. I'm afraid sometime his mind may give way."

"Are you alone in the house?" I asked. "No servants?"

"There's a woman, Mrs. Burton, who comes in every day to clean and cook," Norma replied. "But she leaves after dinner in the evening. I'm alone then with Vincent, until he goes off to the Club."

"You have a telephone?"

"Yes," Norma said. "It's in the living-room. But if—if anything were to happen, I'm not sure I'd be able to get to it." She made a despairing gesture. "This is a dreadful way for me to talk about Vincent, but he seems to be getting worse, and I'm really frightened."

We were silent a moment, listening to the beat of the rain on the rotted planking overhead.

"I can't help blaming myself for part of this, Mrs. Webley," I said. "But if I went back with you now it would obviously only make matters worse. On the other hand, if your husband did see us together out there on the beach today—"

"Mrs. Burton will be there when I go back," she said.

"Yes, but after Mrs. Burton leaves?" I asked. "There must be some way I can help if you run into trouble. Couldn't you arrange some kind of signal with a window-shade—or a lamp in a certain place? Something I could see from outside?"

"I—I have no right to impose my troubles on you," she protested. "A stranger—"

"Look, Mrs. Webley," I said, "you don't know this, but I was doing a little sentry duty last night outside your place. After what happened at the Inn, I was worried about you."

Her dark eyes swept up to mine. "Thank you!" she said quietly. "That was kind of you. I wish I had known."

"Then let's arrange a warning signal," I said. "In circumstances like this it's the only sensible thing to do."

She brooded over the problem a few moments. "Would this do? At the back of our house there's a flight of steps that go down to the beach. There's a light at the top of the steps, a brass ship-lantern. It can be turned on from inside the house."

"Fine!" I said. "I'll stroll down that way tonight and I'll keep an eye on that lamp. If you run into trouble, just turn it on."

Norma gave me a grateful look. "Thank you, Mr. Randall. I won't use the signal unless it's something really serious. And I want you to promise that if you find the light turned on, you won't try to do anything alone. Bring Captain Tyson from the police station. He knows about Vincent."

"But that might take too long," I protested.

"No," Norma insisted. "I want your promise on that. Vincent has a gun; he might be foolish enough to use it."

I lifted the hickory cane. "This makes a handy weapon."

"No—no!" She shook her head. "Besides the risk to you, if you forced your way into our house it would put both of us in an entirely false position."

"Yes," I said. "All right, I promise. Captain Tyson."

"I can't thank you enough, Mr. Randall," she said.

WHILE we talked, the slanting rain had slackened to a drizzle, and now the drizzle was petering out. Norma looked out at the deserted beach and began gathering up her painting gear. "I'll have to go now," she said. "The rain was my only excuse."

She stood there, her arms laden, her dark eyes burdened with trouble. She looked so lovely and so pathetic that suddenly I reached out and put my hands on her shoulders and kissed her.

"I suppose I shouldn't have done that," I said. "But it's the best way I know to say 'I'm truly sorry' and 'Count on me.' I hope you're not angry."

Norma looked at me, a straight, level look. "No," she said quietly, "I'm not angry." Then she turned to go.

"Remember, I'll keep watching!" I called after her. "At least until I see you again!"

She looked back at me over her shoulder, nodding, and then she was gone. I stood there under the broken pier, watching her walk across the wet sands on her way to Gunner's Ridge.

I thought about that impulsive kiss, the warm softness of her lips. I thought about those purple bruises on Norma's shoulder, and I muttered, "Webley, what a damned fool you must be!"

TWILIGHT found me moving cautiously through the dunes, making an oblique approach to the house on Gunner's Ridge, wondering if Vincent Webley had been watching the beach with his glasses that day, wondering what had happened when Norma returned home.

As before, the only lights showing were in the living-room, but this time there was no music. The angry piano was silenced. I circled around to the rear and located the beach stairs. Through the deepening dusk I could just make out the ship-lantern on its post at the stairhead. The lantern was unlighted.

I moved off into the shadows, found a seat on a stray log, and settled down to my vigil.

Nothing happened, nothing at all, and the unbroken silence made me more uneasy than the wildest hammering of Webley's piano could have. There was no sound of voices, no radio playing,. no figures moving briefly across the lighted windows.

Finally, near midnight, Vincent Webley left the house. I watched him drive off toward Brixton Beach, toward the Surf Club. I watched the living-room lights go out, and a light snap on in what was probably Norma's room. Even then I lingered for a while, just to make sure everything was all right.

The next morning I found a secluded spot along the beach and waited, hoping that Norma might be going up toward the old wreck to continue her sketching. I kept well back from the beach, in a pocket of the dunes, out of range of Webley's binoculars, in case he should be watching from the terrace on Gunner's Ridge.

While I was sitting there, flicking the sand with my cane, I heard Rusty's familiar growl. I didn't get up when the dog came dashing toward me because Nick Stroud was with him, and Stroud gave the snarling hound a whack across the rump that sent him scurrying out of sight.

"Well, I see you and Rusty haven't made up yet," he said, smiling as he dropped beside me on the sand. "You know, it might be that cane of yours that bothers him. Rusty was a pretty ornery pup; I had to pound sense into him with a stick. Maybe he remembers that stick in my hand."

"That's probably the answer," I agreed. And remembering Stroud's unexplained inquiries about me at Thurlow's office, I took an extra good look at the man.

Nick Stroud was a big blond fellow, with a rugged Viking head, broad shoulders, and a heavily muscled body. He looked as if he might have been a professional athlete at one time—professional football, or maybe wrestling.

Thurlow had told me Stroud wasn't a mixer, but certainly he was pleasant enough to me, leaning back on his elbows, laughing, chatting about Carson's Cove, offering me a cigarette.

"Going to be here long?" he asked.

"A month," I replied.

He nodded. "I think you'll like it here. Nice place and nice people. Everything quiet and friendly and informal. By the way, my name's Nicholas Stroud; I'm at Number 19."

"Owen Randall," I said. "I've got Number 7," and we shook hands.

Stroud gave no sign that he had already gathered that much information from Thurlow. He just kept talking, giving me friendly pointers about the Cove: the Carson House had the best steaks, Cap Gurnee's the best sea food, and the Anchorage Bar the best drinks. He talked about the fishing, the boating, the golf.

It was all very casual and friendly, and if it hadn't been for the Thurlow incident I would never have realized the neat way Stroud set about extracting personal information from me.

I saw through his game, of course, but I had nothing to conceal, so I played along with him. I talked about my work, my social life in the city, the auto accident that had saddled me temporarily with a cane.

Counting up the score afterward, when Stroud had left, I was amazed at the amount of personal data he had obtained with his quick, shrewd, oblique style of questioning.

Who was this Nick Stroud, anyway? After a half hour's talking, all I had in return was his name and bungalow number, a statement that he was a fellow bachelor, and a vague reference or two to "my office," and "my secretary." I still had no clue as to why he had asked Thurlow about me.

"Well," I thought, "if Stroud had an idea we'd met before, he knows now it wasn't so. And the mystery about Rusty is cleared up. It's my cane he hates, not me."

Twelve o'clock came, and still no sign of Norma anywhere on the beach. At one o'clock I gave up and went back to the Cove for lunch. I tried Cap Gurnee's place, on Stroud's recommendation, and it was a lucky chance, for as I came out I saw Norma.

She was sitting in the red convertible, which was parked in front of one of the waterfront shops. The seat behind the steering wheel was empty, and I gathered that Webley was inside the shop, with Norma waiting for him to come out.

As I cut across the street diagonally, Norma saw me but gave no sign of recognition, and I took the cue. But as I passed the car she read the silent question in my eyes, and nodded briefly in reply, without turning her head.

"Yes!" she was telling me. Yes, Vincent Webley had seen us together up there by the schooner wreckage. Her manner gave me the rest of the message: "Don't stop here! Don't try to talk!"

Looking back, I saw Webley come out of the shop, toss a package into the back of the car, and slide behind the wheel. The red car spurted off on the road to Gunner's Ridge.

I wanted a chance to talk to Norma again, to ask her what had happened, to get the details of this latest tangle with Webley's crazy jealousy. But if I spoke to her anywhere, and Webley saw us, it would only fan his suspicions into fresh rage, and Norma would pay for it.

Yes, Norma was a wife on a leash, as she had phrased it. If she were to gain even a few minutes' freedom it would require some chance circumstance, like the sudden rainstorm that had given her an excuse to wait for me under the pier.

I WENT to Gunner's Ridge again that night, but my vigil was uneventful, as before. No voices, no piano, no anything. Just the soft houselights, and silence.

After Webley had departed for the Surf Club I was tempted to end the suspense by simply going up to the front door and ringing the bell. But considering the hour and the circumstances, Norma might feel I was taking advantage of her situation to force myself on her.

Of course, I could go back to the Cove and call Norma on the telephone, but there was no privacy on the party lines and a call might be the worst thing I could do, from Norma's standpoint.

No, there wasn't any hurry. Norma knew where I was, and what I was trying to do for her. I could afford to leave the time and place of further communication in her hands.

The next day I kept watch for Norma again—in the morning, along the beach and in the afternoon, at the Cove. I had only a glimpse of her, when she was at the post-office collecting her mail, and Webley, of course, was at her elbow.

LATE that afternoon I had another encounter with Nick Stroud. Returning to my bungalow, I found him sprawled on the sand, watching a sailboat race through his binoculars. He told me he'd just happened along, looking for Rusty, but I noticed three or four cigarette stubs lying there in the sand.

Anyway, I found myself drawn into another long and rambling chat. Stroud was just as friendly and casual as before, but I noticed the same curiosity about little personal points.

For instance, he admired the pipe I was smoking. How long had I had it, he wanted to know, and how much had it cost? And my smoking tobacco; was it a standard brand, or did I blend my own mixture? He examined my cane. What kind of wood was it, and where had I bought it? And my wristwatch; was it one of the new self-winding kind?

It was a devious and detailed curiosity about trifles, and his prying began to puzzle and annoy me. I began to develop a growing dislike for the sociable but snooping Stroud.

"I'm on my way to the Cove," Stroud said. "Why don't you come along? We'll drop in at the Anchorage. I'll buy you a drink."

"Thanks," I said, "but I never touch the stuff before bedtime." I told him about my trouble getting to sleep with the bad knee, and how a shot of Scotch at bedtime seemed to turn the trick.

"Sure, I understand," Stroud said. "No use disturbing the *status quo*. Well, I'll see you around."

The next day Nick Stroud was missing from the beach, but on the following afternoon I discovered the reason for his prying curiosity about the personal details of my life.

I was sitting among some rocks when Stroud and Rusty came along the beach. Stroud had an old tennis ball, and he was throwing it around for Rusty to retrieve. Both of them were so absorbed in their game that they didn't notice me.

Stroud was wearing slacks, and his hip pocket bulged with what was obviously a thick leather wallet. Every time he went over to pick up the ball the wallet pushed up a little higher, until finally it fell onto the sand.

Stroud didn't notice his loss. Rusty ran off with the ball, and Stroud ran after him. I climbed out of the rocky place, crossed the beach and picked up the wallet. It was lying open. There was a sheaf of bills in the money compartment and a half-dozen glassine folders holding identification cards.

My curiosity was aroused, and without thinking that I was prying into someone else's affairs, I looked at those cards. At least, I looked at the first two. The top one was Stroud's driver's license, the second one an identification card from the Stroud Detective Agency.

Stroud was a private detective! I didn't bother looking any further. I dropped the wallet and went back to my rocks, guessing that Stroud would soon notice his loss and retrace his steps.

Sure enough, Stroud came trailing back in a few minutes, scanning the sands. He spied the wallet, snatched it up, gave it a quick riffle, and thrust it back into his hip pocket.

The Stroud Detective Agency! Suddenly a lot of things became clear to me. Stroud's snooping into my affairs was not mere idle curiosity. He was working on orders. But whose? Vincent Webley's, obviously. Jealous husbands and private detectives fit together like a key and a lock.

"Norma!" I thought. "I've got to get word to Norma!"

I hurried back to the Cove to keep watch for Norma. Finally I saw the red convertible come rolling into the Old Town. Webley was driving and Norma was with him.

Webley parked in front of the Cove Bookshop. He stayed behind the wheel, smoking, while Norma got out and went into the shop; and suddenly I thought of a plan to talk to her.

The bookshop had half a dozen screened windows, including two at the rear of the shop. Keeping out of Webley's sight, I walked around to the back of the building. Looking in at a rear window, I could see Norma moving from table to table, browsing over the books.

The baldish proprietor was at the front of the shop, talking to another customer. Norma finally reached the display table just inside my window.

"Norma!" I whispered. Her face flashed toward me, startled, wide-eyed. I made a warning gesture. "Keep looking at the books!"

She kept her head lowered, her hands opening books at random. "You shouldn't have done this! Vincent is outside, in the car—"

"I know that," I said. "I had to risk it. I've learned something you should know. Norma, your husband has a hired detective keeping tabs on you!"

The book slipped from her hand and clattered to the floor. She gave me a startled glance, a swift flush sweeping her face.

"The detective's name is Nicholas Stroud," I said. "He's at the Dunes—Number 19. A big fellow, blond hair, about my age. He has a dog, a big Airedale. Ever notice him around the beach?"

She shook her head, and I said, "I found Stroud's wallet today. He'd dropped it on the beach—and I had a chance to look it over before he came back for it. He has the Stroud Detective Agency."

Norma spoke in a tense whisper. "You must be mistaken! I can't believe Vincent would do anything as contemptible as that."

"Listen, Norma," I said. "Stroud started making inquiries about me the first day I was here. Thurlow told me that. Stroud's been going out of his way to make friends with me. He keeps asking me personal questions. I was suspicious of him, even before I found his wallet."

"I—I can't believe it!"

"Why not?" I said. "It fits in with the binoculars, doesn't it? Stroud is just an extra pair of eyes."

Norma drew a deep breath. "I don't know what to say. I have nothing to fear, from this Stroud, or anyone else. It's just that the idea is so hateful, so humiliating. It's more of this crazy jealousy of Vincent's, this insane idea that you and I—"

HER voice caught, and dismay leaped into her eyes. "Owen, you don't suppose Stroud could have seen us that day under the pier?"

"I don't see how," I said quickly. "It was raining, the beach was deserted. If Stroud had seen us, he'd have reported it to your husband, and there would have been fireworks."

"I don't know," Norma whispered. "Sometimes he broods about things for days, before it comes to the surface." She gave a nervous shiver. "I'd better go now. Suppose Stroud has followed you here?"

"Don't worry about Stroud," I said. "I'll show him that two can play at the snooping game."

"Please!" Norma pleaded. "Stay away from him. Don't make things worse! I need time to—to think this over. It means—well, this changes everything. I can't go on this way."

"Norma!" I said. "Whatever happens, and whenever it happens, I'll do all I can to help you. Remember that!"

Her face lifted, sudden color whipping into her cheeks, her dark eyes deepening. "I'll remember!" she said in her husky whisper.

"I'll be on the ridge tonight—as usual," I said.

"Be careful, Owen, please!" she whispered, her dark eyes vivid as an unspoken promise. Then she snatched up a couple of books and hurried toward the proprietor.

I could see all the way through the shop to Vincent Webley's car outside. I saw Norma climb into the red convertible. I saw Webley flick his cigarette away and start the car rolling.

"Webley, you've cooked your goose this time!" I said to myself. "I think you've just lost yourself a wife, thanks to the Stroud Detective Agency!"

I remembered the look in Norma's eyes as we had parted. I remembered the soft fragrance of Norma's lips when I had kissed her under that tumbledown pier. I was willing to wait a long time for another kiss like that. . . . I could wait as long as necessary.

I had the rest of the day on my hands, and nothing particular to do, so I thought I'd take a walk over to Brixton Beach and have a look at this notorious Surf Club of Vincent Webley's, a look at the outside of it, at least.

From the Dunes you can see Reedy Point, with its abandoned lighthouse, and from Reedy Point you can see Brixton Beach, but shore distances are deceptive, and I found it a long, tiring walk.

When I got there, the trip was scarcely worth the trouble. The Surf Club was just a white clapboard house, with a wide veranda. It looked like a private home, not a gambling house.

Of course, at that hour it wasn't open for business. There was no sign of activity, or even of occupancy. All its windows were slatted off with closed Venetian blinds. I strolled past the place, and then turned back.

But I was only halfway to Reedy Point when my lame knee finally quit, and I had to sit down and give it a rest. Now and then cars went whizzing past, but I paid no attention until a sporty blue roadster skidded to a stop, tooting its horn.

"Hi, Owen!" a voice called. "Want a lift back to the Dunes?" It was Janet Barlowe, leaning out the car window, smiling at me.

"Thanks, Janet," I said. "You're a life-saver. I went over to Brixton Beach, and the trick knee went back on me."

"Hop in!" she said. Janet had on a gaudy Miami beach-robe over a yellow bathing suit, brief as always, and plaited straw sandals. With her bronzed skin, her deep blue eyes and glinting hair the youngster was quite a beauty.

Well, not exactly a youngster, either. You can't describe in that way a girl who has finished college. It was just a matter of contrast with me. Compared to Norma Webley's quiet poise and dark intensity, the laughing, light-hearted, teasing Janet Barlowe seemed a mere schoolgirl.

But Janet and I had grown by now to be pretty good friends. The girl was around the beach at all hours—she practically lived in a bathing suit—and we'd held long, lazy conversations, lying around in the sand. She once told me it was a wonderful relief to talk to somebody who wasn't all wrapped up in art.

"That's all I've heard, all my life," Janet had told me. "Dad wouldn't like to hear me say this, but I'll never marry an artist, never! Good or bad, their work always comes first. I intend to be an honest-to-goodness wife, not a spare-time hobby."

For all her laughing and teasing, Janet could be surprisingly direct and forthright when she chose.

Now, as we drove back to the Dunes, I told her why I had gone to Brixton Beach.

"The Surf Club?" Janet laughed. "The Cove's skeleton in the closet! We've had indignation meetings, citizens' petitions and special sessions of Town Council, but Vincent Webley goes right on doing business. Nobody can close up the Surf Club."

"What has Webley got?" I asked. "Political influence?"

"Better than that," Janet chuckled. "He's got geography on his side. It so happens that the Surf Club building is just about fifty feet on the other side of the county line. Mr. Webley must have known that, when he opened the place."

"*Mr.* Webley?" I said. "You sound impressed, Janet."

She shook her head. "No, but I don't see everything in life as being either black or white. Vincent Webley is the black sheep—poor, dear Norma is the little woolly lamb, stuck with a drunken, jealous husband. It might be interesting to hear Mr. Webley's side of the story."

I looked at her, and Janet grinned. "I know I sound catty, Owen, but I'm a little suspicious of the Lady Norma type."

"Why?" I asked. "Any special reason?"

Janet shrugged. "This is a summer resort, Owen. You see how informally we go around." She flipped a hand over her own skimpy attire. "But not Norma Webley. She's always swaddled from head to toe."

I smiled, teasing her. "So you think Mrs. Webley can't meet the local competition?"

"No," Janet answered, "she seems to have full standard equipment for the beach. I think it's a pose. Don't you see? One covered woman on a half-naked beach. It makes her a stand-out." She laughed good-humoredly. "That's a smart girl, Owen. She was born smart!"

I dropped it then. No use trying to defend Norma to Janet Barlowe. I couldn't tell Janet that Norma Webley might be covering up bruise-marks from the prying eyes of Carson's Cove.

Janet stopped the car at the hollow of the dunes near my place. We sat there a few minutes, talking about this and that, and then I climbed out.

It was then that I had my final and decisive brush with the hostile Rusty. Stroud's dog came galloping at me out of nowhere, circling around, growling, showing his fangs.

"Go away, Rusty!" I ordered. "Beat it! Scram!"

"Be careful, Owen!" Janet called. "He looks vicious."

By that time I was getting sick of Rusty's antics. It made me look silly, having to stand in my tracks, blockaded by the sullen, snarling animal. So I didn't waste time trying to coax him. I swung at him with my cane.

The blow thumped against Rusty's shoulder. He jumped sideways, snarling, and I whacked him again, on the ribs. He snapped at the cane, catching the end of it with his teeth.

I jerked the cane loose and swung again, harder. He caught that one on the rump, and it stung him plenty. He turned tail then, yelping, and galloped off.

"Wouldn't want you to think I'm the kind of guy who beats dogs, but I've had trouble with that blasted hound before," I told Janet. "He belongs to one of my neighbors, fellow named Stroud, over in 19. Stroud told me to whack him any time he bothered me."

"A dog like that shouldn't be allowed to run loose," Janet said indignantly. "I thought he was going to bite you."

"He tried," I said. "Look what he did to my cane." I held up the hickory stick, and we examined the marks left by Rusty's fangs—a series of dents, and a round hole where a long, sharp eyetooth had sunk into the wood.

"You'd better be careful, Owen," Janet said as we parted. "Suppose you run into him again on a dark night?"

"Oh, I won't have any more trouble with him," I said. "I think he's finally had his lesson."

Later, though, as I set out for my vigil on Gunner's Ridge, I had some uneasy thoughts about that hostile, sharp-fanged dog. If Rusty ever came at me in the darkness I'd have my hands full, cane or no cane.

But I had neither sight nor sound of Rusty on Gunner's Ridge. The

Webley house was the same as usual, with lights in the living-room, and tonight again piano music in the old angry bravura.

The piano did not stop until it was time for Webley to leave for Brixton Beach. Then I heard the terrace door bang and saw his shadowy figure crossing the terrace, his panama hat a pale blur in the darkness. And presently I heard the car backing from the garage.

As the red car reached the end of the driveway, the wheels ran over something brittle that crunched and crackled. It made quite a racket in the dark silence, loud enough to draw Norma to the window. I saw her looking out toward the road, one hand shielding her eyes.

Then she turned away and was gone. The red car whirled off at its usual speedy clip. In a matter of minutes the living-room lights went off, and then Norma's room lighted up. I could see her shadow moving to and fro, and then that last light winked out.

There was nothing more for me to do at Gunner's Ridge.

How well I remembered that last walk back to the Dunes: the cool night breeze from the water, the silver-plated moon playing tag with drifting clouds, a night plane droning across the sky, emphasizing the peaceful silence. The soft sand and the checkerboard shadows of the hollow in the dunes where my bungalow stood. The lights of the Barlowes' white house winking from the slope.

I stood there a moment, finishing my cigarette, looking up at the pleasant, friendly lights of the Barlowes' house, thinking of Janet, feeling a little guilty at my easy acceptance of Janet's frank friendliness, spending so many hours with her on the beach, but always steering clear of an evening date, to keep my night time free for the watch on Gunner's Ridge.

And then inside my quiet bungalow, massaging my aching knee before reaching for the bottle of Scotch, waiting for the usual quiet drowsiness to follow, and finding instead a swirling dizziness and a roaring in my ears as I slid headlong into oblivion.

But how well I remembered the awakening, that fantastic awakening, with Captain Tyson slapping a wet towel across my face, and Norma Webley standing beside him, looking at me with stricken, accusing eyes.

Nick Stroud standing there, too, and Sergeant Moran, and Dr. Harwood, and Andrews, the poker-faced cashier of the Surf Club. And Janet and her father staring at me from the doorway, while Vincent Webley himself lay sprawled out on my floor, battered and blood-soaked—clubbed to death with *my* cane!

AND here I was, sitting in a cell in the Carson's Cove police station, charged with Webley's murder. Sitting in a cell, trying to force my dazed brain to think, trying to dig my way out of this nightmare.

It must have been a full hour before Captain Tyson returned to the police station. When they took me to Tyson's office, there was a ruddy-faced policeman named Baker sitting off in the corner, a notebook open on his knee.

"Sit down, Randall," Tyson said briskly.

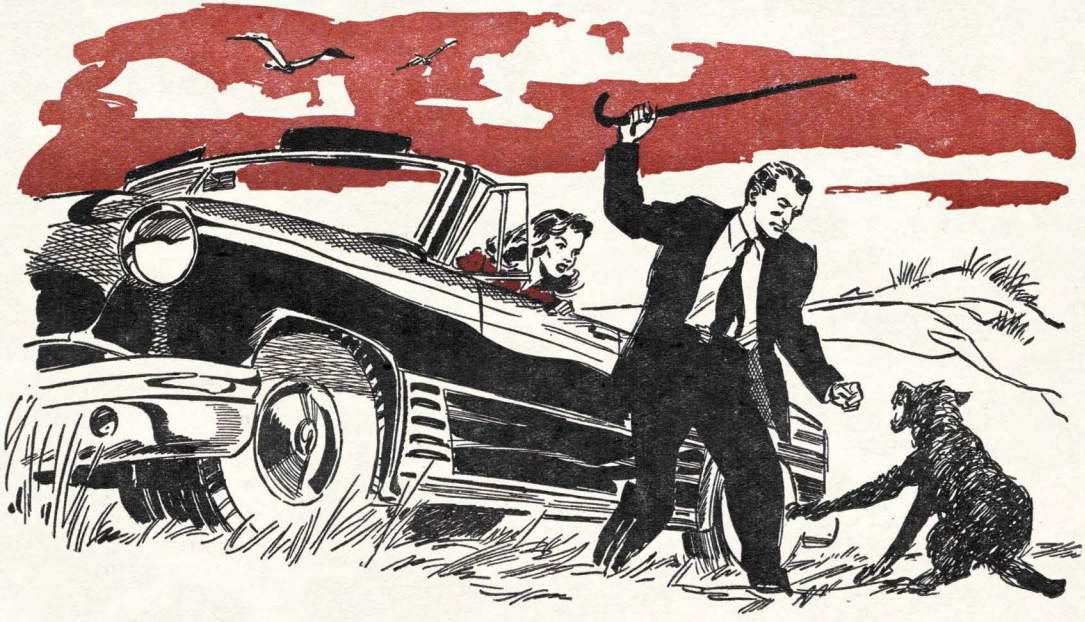
He opened up on me then, whipping out questions like machine-gun bullets—pointblank questions, then sly, oblique ones. He kept crowding me for the answers, trying to hurry me, throw me off balance by doubling back, by sudden traps.

My mind was still hazy. I was slow and sometimes I stammered, but I wasn't confused. And he couldn't trip me up, because I wasn't hiding anything or holding anything back.

Captain Tyson was a shrewd cop. He knew all the tricks of the trade, and he had Nick Stroud's penciled notations in front of him as a guide.

Stroud had my Cove history all written down, from the opening notation: "Look up man with cane—met Mrs. W. outside house this P.M." He had everything from then on, to my last conversation with Norma: "O.R. pulled smart trick—managed secret talk with Mrs. W. through rear window book-store."

Well, what could I do against a detailed line-up like that? I answered with the truth, the plain, unvarnished



"Be careful, Owen," Janet warned. "He looks vicious." By that time I was sick and tired of the sullen, snarling animal. I swung at him with my cane. He caught the end in his mouth and sunk his teeth into the wood. I hit him again, and he turned tail and ran.

truth, and stuck to it. But I could see Tyson didn't believe a word of it.

In fact, Tyson kept trying to dig back beyond my arrival at Carson's Cove. Like Vincent Webley, he was convinced I had known Norma before, back in the city, and had come to her at the Cove by mutual arrangement.

"We'll nail you down on that angle, too!" Tyson blustered. "We'll check you back on that. We'll turn up the truth!"

"There isn't anything to turn up," I told him. "I never saw Mrs. Webley before I came here."

Tyson bore down hardest, of course, on the last hours of Vincent Webley's life, trying to fill in the blank space between the time Webley left Gunner's Ridge in the red car, and the time his body was discovered on the floor of my bungalow.

During the course of Tyson's relentless grilling I picked up the details of that discovery:

STROUD, as usual, had followed me to Gunner's Ridge. But, again as usual, he had lost sight of me up there in the darkness. Stroud, too, had seen Webley leave the house near midnight and had seen Norma glance out the window as the red car sped off.

Still hoping to catch us red-handed in a rendezvous, he had redoubled his watchfulness after Norma's light had gone out. Then, about an hour later, a car had driven up and a man had rung the bell and hammered on the door until Norma opened.

Stroud recognized this man as Andrews, Webley's cashier at the Surf Club. Stroud noted that Andrews and Norma had talked for a few minutes, after which Norma had gone back inside, and Andrews had headed for his car.

Curious about all this, Stroud had come out of the darkness and asked Andrews what was going on. Andrews had told him that Webley had failed to arrive at the Surf Club at his usual time. Finally, Andrews had become uneasy and phoned Webley's house. Norma told him that Webley had left there at the usual hour, and so Andrews had driven over from Brixton Beach to investigate.

Stroud had offered to help, and he and Andrews had driven back along the Brixton road, keeping a sharp eye for any signs of an accident. Soon they had spotted the red convertible, parked on a side path to the Dunes.

Finding the convertible deserted, Stroud had immediately thought of my bungalow, and suggested to Andrews that it might be a good idea to walk over and have a look at Number 7.

They had found my bungalow lighted, and when they peered through a window they saw me lying across the bed. Vincent Webley lay sprawled on the floor, his hair matted with blood.

Leaving Andrews on guard, Stroud had driven to the Cove police station. After the police had taken charge, Tyson had sent Sergeant Moran over to Gunner's Ridge to notify Norma. And all this coming and going, the noise of cars in the usually quiet hollow, had awakened the Barlowes, who came down the slope to see what was going on at Number 7.

That was the official lay-out on the Vincent Webley murder. Captain Tyson hounded me until I was dizzy, but he couldn't shake my claim to being alone in the bungalow, completely blacked out from drugged whisky.

"You can't kill anybody when you're lying on a bed, dead to the world!" I kept telling him. "I was drugged! Somebody is trying to frame me for this murder!"

Dawn was creeping up in a pale silvery glow when Tyson finally called a halt. "That's all for now," he growled. "But we're going back over this, again and again, until your foot slips and we get the truth."

"You have the truth!" I said. "You don't have to take my word for all this. Ask Mrs. Webley."

Tyson gave me a crooked grin. "Are you kidding, Randall? Naturally she's backing your story. One slip on her part and she's locked up as an accessory. . . . Go get some sleep. You're going to need it!"

Strangely enough, I did sleep. I slept like a log. But when I woke up and saw those iron bars, I fully realized for the first time that I was a prisoner, caged like an animal, helpless behind bars while Tyson and his whole crew scurried around weaving a rope to fit my neck.

LATE that afternoon Tyson again sent for me. He took me over the same old ground, trying to trip me, trap me in my story.

"It won't work, Captain," I said. "If you kept this up for ten years you'd still get the same answers. I didn't kill Vincent Webley. I was alone at the bungalow. I was drugged."

"Drugged!" Tyson sneered. "Doc Harwood says you were drunk. And I say you were drunk. The smell of it was all over the place."

"Then it was spilled there, so you *would* smell it! You and Harwood made that 'drunk' diagnosis with your noses. That's not legal proof."

"So you want legal proof, Randall? Okay. I've got the lab report on that whisky that you're blabbering about. There's not a thing wrong with it. And your fingerprints are all over the bottle! Now what have you got to say?"

"I was drugged!" I answered stubbornly. "There was something in that whisky. If it isn't there now, then the bottles were switched afterward."

Tyson sat scowling. "Randall, you look like an intelligent man, but you talk like a fool. I've just knocked the props from under that drugged—whisky yarn. You tell that story to a jury, and they'll hang you! I'm telling you, Randall; I know juries!"

HE banged the desk. "Damn it, you've got a sure-fire angle staring you in the face, and you won't touch it. Mrs. Webley tossed you the line. Are you so dumb you didn't catch on? Self-defense, Randall—that's your best bet! You killed Vincent Webley in self-defense. He came to your bungalow. You didn't go looking for him. That's proven fact. And he had a gun in his pocket—another proven fact!"

Tyson slapped the desk again. "If you stand up in court and swear that Webley came there and threatened you, and reached for his gun—why, nobody can prove different. Any smart lawyer can get that murder charge cut down to manslaughter. Might even get you off clear, with Mrs. Webley's help. No doubt she'd back you up with a sob story of a brutal husband, show her bruises to the jury. It's a cinch, Randall!"

I could see what Tyson wanted. He was tired of all this questioning. He wanted to get the Webley case cleaned up and off his hands. What happened to me later, before judge and jury, was no concern of his.

But I shook my head. "Sorry, Captain," I said, "but I'm sticking to the truth. I didn't kill Vincent Webley."

"Okay, Randall, it's your neck!" Tyson snapped. "Who's your lawyer? He'd better be a good one!"

"I haven't any," I answered. "And right now, Captain, I think you could be of more help to me than any lawyer."

That stopped him in his tracks. "What do you mean?"

"Captain Tyson," I said, "I think you're an honest, conscientious policeman. I know you're convinced I killed Webley. But I didn't, no matter what the evidence shows. I've been framed. This whole story of Webley's death is a phony. It's got to be, since I had no part in it!"

"Now wait a minute!" Tyson cut in. "We've got a clear picture on how this murder happened, and why. I don't see any loose ends kicking around."

"Captain," I pleaded, "I've sat here by the hour, answering questions, not yelling for a lawyer. If I ask *you* some questions, will you get the answers for me?"

He looked at me suspiciously. "What kind of questions?"

"Nothing out of line with ordinary police routine," I replied.

"Give me a sample."

"All right," I said. "Just assume I'm telling you the truth about being doped. It had to be in the whisky. Okay. Bedtime is the only time I ever take a drink, so I can get some sleep with this bad knee. Now there's only *one* person in Carson's Cove who knew that fact—Nick Stroud! I'd told him about it myself. I'd even mentioned my particular brand."

Tyson frowned. "Still harping on doped whisky, eh?"

"Yes," I said, "because that's what sprang the trap on me. I'd like to know a lot more about Nick Stroud—and the Stroud Detective Agency. He says Webley hired him to check up on Mrs. Webley, but we have only Stroud's word for that. Were any of Stroud's reports found among Webley's papers? Any stubs in Webley's checkbook, made out to Stroud?"

Tyson looked at me. "You suspect everything, don't you?"

"I've got a murder charge hanging over me!" I said grimly. "My only chance of getting out of this mess is to take nothing on faith, take nobody's word for anything."

"Okay, Randall," he agreed. "I'll get you these answers about Stroud. No harm in that."

"One other thing," I added. "I'd like to know if Stroud bought a bottle of Scotch anywhere in the Cove recently."

Then I went back to my cell, back to the pacing that went in straight lines, and the thinking that went in circles.

It was the next morning before I heard from Captain Tyson. "Randall," he said, "I've got the answers to all your questions about Stroud, but they're not going to make you happy."

He told me then, in detail. Nick Stroud practically was the whole Stroud Agency. He had a tiny office run by a girl secretary, and hired freelance operatives whenever he needed help.

"The Stroud Agency is strictly small fry," Tyson conceded, "but there's nothing against it. I called up the city police and talked to headquarters. Stroud is okay in their books."

And Stroud had a written order for services from Vincent Webley. Tyson had seen the letter, examined it. Stroud was working for a weekly rate, plus expenses, and Webley had paid him by check. Tyson had found the stubs in Webley's personal checkbook.

"Did you find any actual reports from Stroud among Webley's papers?" I asked.

"Stroud says he made his reports in person, not in writing," Tyson replied. "He'd meet Webley in the back room of the Anchorage Bar." He looked at me. "Any reason to think he's lying? Sounds like a normal precaution for Webley to take."

"I hate to take Stroud's word for anything."

"The barman at the Anchorage says he often saw Webley and Stroud talking together," Tyson added.

I was silent then, trying to hide my bitter disappointment. "Any record of Stroud's buying a bottle of Scotch?"

Tyson shook his head. "Stroud hasn't bought any Scotch at the Cove. Or any other whisky—except drinks across the bar."

"He might have bought it somewhere else," I argued, "some place along the coast—or even taken a run back to the city."

Tyson was annoyed at my persistence. "Damn it all, Randall, stop a minute, and think! Vincent Webley was Stroud's Number One customer. Webley, alive, was a steady meal ticket for Stroud. Dead, he's worth nothing!"

"How do you know that?" I retorted. "Maybe Stroud was passing up his small weekly check for a big lump sum—in cash!"

"What are you driving at?"

"Look, Captain. Webley has this Surf Club. A regular gold-mine, from what I hear. Suppose one of these syndicate gangs decided to move in and take over? They might hire Stroud to get Webley out of the way."

Tyson snorted. "You've been seeing too many movies. Gangsters don't work like that. Those boys go in for direct action. If they wanted Webley out, they'd ride him off the road some dark night, or give him a dose of shotgun slugs from a fast car. They'd never use a local man for a job like that. You're just swinging wild, Randall."

"It's worth looking into," I insisted. "That Andrews fellow was with Nick Stroud all through this."

"I haven't been asleep, Randall!" he snapped. "I had Andrews on the griddle for two hours. He's clean. I'm satisfied the Surf Club set-up had nothing to do with this job. Any more questions?"

"Yes," I said stubbornly. "About Webley: According to your theory, Webley parked his car on that side road and walked over to my bungalow. But I think Webley was killed somewhere else, and his body dumped in my bungalow while I was lying there doped. Captain, did you look in Webley's shoes? Was there sand in them?"

Tyson snorted again. "Of course we checked Webley's shoes. And there was sand in them, plenty of it. Webley walked."

So my sudden hope had a sudden death. And I saw I hadn't made even a crack in the solid wall of Tyson's conviction that I had murdered Vincent Webley.

"Want that lawyer now, Randall?" Tyson asked grimly.

"No," I said. "Not yet. I want to get at the truth, Captain, and I'm satisfied you're trying to give me an even break."

"Thanks," Tyson said dryly. "By the way, Mrs. Webley's been on the phone a couple of times. Wants to get in to see you. I told her nothing doing. Later, maybe."

I didn't say anything, but I resented the sly, knowing glint in Tyson's eyes. All his questioning had failed to shake Norma, but Tyson only saw our matching stories as rehearsed evidence of a concealed love affair.

"Fact is, you had another visitor," Tyson went on, squinting at me. "Janet Barlowe. She's been here twice. She got pretty mad when I wouldn't let her in. How come, Randall? How does *she* fit into this?"

"She doesn't," I said quickly. "The Barlowes were my neighbors. I met Janet around the beach, that's all. It was nice of her to take the trouble, but she's just a kind-hearted kid; she doesn't realize how easy it is to start tongues wagging. I'm glad you turned thumbs down, Captain."

And I went back to my cell, back to my pacing. The only friendly break in the monotony was Sergeant Pete Moran. He kept me supplied with cigarettes, and even left a deck of cards, in case I wanted to kill time with solitaire. And when things were slack, he'd come down to the cell-block and talk to me.

At first I thought Moran was doing all this by Tyson's orders, trying to soften me up, draw me out, but Moran never mentioned the Webley case. I guess he just felt sorry for me.

All my thinking turned on Nick Stroud. But as Tyson had pointed out, I was just swinging in the dark. However, Stroud was the only one who had known about the whisky. That was my one key fact, and I clung fast to it.

Nick Stroud. . . . I tried to remember everything about him, and then reason backward, trying to fit him into the murder blueprint.

When Stroud saw me leave for Gunner's Ridge, he could easily have slipped into my bungalow and put drugged whisky into my bottle. A knife-blade or a piece of wire would unlatch the screen door.

And sand or no sand in Webley's shoes, I didn't believe he had come to

my bungalow alive. He had been carried there. Stroud was big and strong; he could easily have shouldered Webley's body, and carried it from the parked car.

But where, then, had Webley been killed? Not in the car, probably. It would be difficult to club a man to death inside a car. Webley must have been struck down in the open. Stroud must have flagged his car along the road and induced Webley to get out.

But there I ran headlong into a stone wall. How could it be Stroud? Stroud had been hiding near the house when Webley drove off, and Webley undoubtedly had driven off fast; he always drove fast. There was no possible way Stroud could have caught up with him, once Webley started for Brixton Beach.

"Stroud must have been there, as he claims," I muttered. "He couldn't have guessed that Norma would look out the window as the car left. She never did that before. Damn it, here I am, trying to hang it on Stroud, and I wind up okaying his alibi!"

Then the answer hit me. It jumped up and hit me right between the eyes. "Doubt everything!" I had warned myself. "Take nothing for granted!" All right, I would.

How did I know the man driving the car was Vincent Webley? It was Webley's car and Webley's panama hat, but I hadn't actually seen the face. *The man at the wheel might have been Stroud!*

Stroud could have waylaid Webley at the gara e, around on the other side of the house, knocked Webley over the head, and dumped his body in the back of the car. Then Stroud could have put on Webley's hat, backed the car to the drive, and driven away fast, so that neither Norma nor I would get a good look at the driver.

After that it would have been easy—drive toward Brixton Beach, turn off toward the Dunes, park the car. A lonely spot, no passers-by. Just sit there and wait. Give me time to get back from Gunner's Ridge, time to swallow the drugged whisky—

Then out with Webley's body, up on the shoulder, trudge over to Bungalow 7. Drop Webley beside my bed, leave Webley's hat on the floor, smear my cane with Webley's blood, empty the drugged bottle, put my own whisky back into it, and exit Nick Stroud, private murderer!

This new theory excited me. When I got to Tyson's office I poured out my reconstruction of the crime.

"Stroud did it! Stroud framed me!" I wound up. "Vincent Webley planted the idea for that, with his crazy suspicions about Mrs. Webley and me. Can't you see that? Stroud was trailing me: he knew all my movements like a timetable. And when I told Stroud about my bad knee, and the bedtime shot of whisky, that was all he needed to work out his murder plan."

"Sorry, Randall. I can't see it!" Tyson said crisply.

"Why not?" I shot back. "I was on Gunner's Ridge when Webley's car drove off. You have Stroud's own evidence on that, and Norma Webley's. Doesn't that give me an alibi?"

"Not for long," Tyson retorted. "Webley could have waited at your bungalow until you returned."

"Look here, Captain," I pleaded, "doesn't it strike you as peculiar that Webley should pick midnight to come hunting for me? He was due at the Surf Club. Why leave his club untended when he could find me easily enough any hour of the day?"

"Impulse!" Tyson put in. "Jealous impulse!"

"Then where was this jealous impulse before?" I argued. "When I met Norma Webley under the pier, and Stroud saw us, why didn't I get some quick action from Webley then? I'll tell you why! I don't believe Stroud ever reported that to Webley! Stroud had his own game to play. It wouldn't have suited his plans to have Webley stirred up to action."

But Tyson just went on shaking his head. "No dice, Randall. You're just grabbing at wild theories. You can't get around the facts."

"What facts?" I demanded.

"Well," Tyson said, "take Webley's car. We went over it inch by inch. No trace of blood, front seat or back."

"Stroud could have spread something on the floor!"

"And then your idea that Stroud carried Webley's body from the parked car to your bungalow," Tyson went on. "If that were so, how did Webley happen to get sand in his shoes?"

"Stroud put it there! He's a professional detective. Who would know better than Stroud how to frame all the evidence?"

"And then there's the cane," Tyson went on relentlessly. "That's the clincher. Webley was killed by a dozen blows of the cane, to the front and back of the skull. Your cane, Randall!"

"I don't believe Webley was killed with my cane!" I flung back. "I think Webley was brought there already dead! When the body was in place, Stroud smeared my cane with Webley's blood—"

"No, Randall!" Tyson shook his head. "We have ways of measuring wounds, for checking against the alleged weapon. Your cane was examined under a microscope. The polished surface shows cracks and mars, from heavy blows. Doc Harwood says it was done with *your* cane, Randall, and that's good enough for me."

"I don't care what Harwood says!" I shouted. "I'm right—I know I'm right! It was Nick Stroud!"

"So you're right, and science is wrong!" Tyson snapped. "You'll have yourself a job, selling that to a jury. You keep yelling 'Stroud! Stroud!' but you haven't even come up with any kind of a credible motive."

"Money!" I shot back. "There's money in this, somewhere. Webley ran a gambling house; he handled plenty of cash. And Stroud is just a small-time operator, working hand-to-mouth. Can't you even put two and two together?"

"Look, Randall," Tyson said patiently. "I've got nothing against you personally. I've tried to give you a square shake on this deal. But these screwball theories won't get you anywhere. You've got to come up with some kind of proof—sound, tangible proof, the kind you can pick up in your hand and show to a jury."

And there I was, back in my cell again, with all my newborn hopes shot down like clay pigeons. I had my fingers on the truth—I was certain that I had—but I couldn't actually prove it. I had no way of proving any part of it.

A man finds himself seven years older the day after his marriage.

—Bacon

I paced to and fro like a caged animal, and that night I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned, staring into the dark. I was burning with helpless rage, and in a cold sweat of fear, all at the same time.

"Stroud," I whispered. "It *has* to be Nick Stroud." The name was like poison on my tongue, poison in my blood.

Then, somewhere off in the night, I heard a dog howling. Listening to that long, lonely sound, I thought about Stroud's dog, Rusty, and the way he always came snarling at my heels. Rusty had hated me on sight, because I had a cane in my hand, and Stroud used to beat him with a stick when he was a pup—

And thinking about my different encounters with Rusty, I sat up suddenly, bolt upright. The howling of the far-off dog had reminded me of something—a vital point so simple, so obvious, that I had completely overlooked it.

The next moment I was gripping the bars, rattling the steel door, shout-

ing for Joe Daniels, the turnkey. He came on the run, hearing all that racket. I told him I had to see Captain Tyson immediately.

Tyson was off duty, Daniels told me. So I asked for Sergeant Moran. But Moran was off duty, too.

"Then let me talk to Captain Tyson on the phone!" I pleaded. "This is important!"

"Call the Captain at a quarter to twelve?" he said. "No, sir, I'm not getting him out of bed. Steve Baker's on the night desk. You want to talk to him, okay."

"Baker won't do," I said. "I've got to talk to Tyson."

"Then it'll have to keep till morning," he said, and went away.

I paced up and down, boiling over with impatience, my sudden new hope blowing hot, then cold, then hot again. Did I have something at last? That definite piece of jury proof Tyson had demanded of me?

Tyson gone . . . Moran gone. How could I wait through eight, nine, ten more interminable hours to put my hopes to the acid test?

Women are not much,
but they are the best
other sex we have

—Don Herold

Shortly after one o'clock in the morning, I heard Daniels' footsteps coming along the cell-block.

"You awake, Randall?" he called. "The Captain just came in, unexpected. I told him about you carryin' on, wantin' to talk to him right away. He says okay, come along."

The cell door swung open and I followed the turnkey to Tyson's office. Captain Tyson was in his street clothes and Sergeant Moran was there with him, also in street clothes. I noticed that they both looked at me in a peculiar way as I entered.

"What's on your mind, Randall?" Tyson asked.

I pulled myself together for the big plunge. "Captain, I think I've come up with something important! I'll know—if you'll let me have a look at my hickory cane!"

Tyson frowned. "We keep that locked away, Randall. It's official evidence."

"I won't try to touch it!" I promised. "I don't want to handle it! All I need is a good look at it!"

Tyson hesitated. "This is irregular, Randall, but I guess there's no harm in giving you a look."

He unlocked a metal-doored closet and brought out a long, narrow cardboard carton. Putting it on his desk, he lifted the lid, and there was my blood-stained hickory cane, lying in a nest of crumpled tissue paper.

I stood gripping the edge of the desk with my hands to keep them from trembling. I stared at the cane as only a man can stare who has one hope of salvation, and only one.

I had trouble controlling my voice. "Would you turn the cane over, Captain?"

Tyson picked it up gingerly and turned it over. I looked again, with a prayer in my eyes. Then I had to gulp and swallow hard two or three times before I could speak.

"I've got it, Captain! I've got it—that legal proof you were talking about! Take a look at this cane! It was found beside Webley's body, with Webley's blood on it! Dr. Harwood examined it under a microscope. He's tagged it as the murder weapon. *But that is not my cane!*"

Tyson and Moran closed in, staring at me, staring at the cane.

"Can you prove that, Randall?" Tyson snapped.

"I can! This looks like my cane. It's the same size, same shape, same color, but it's a duplicate, an exact duplicate. I can prove that, because this cane, as you can see, has no toothmarks on it!"

"Toothmarks?" Tyson repeated. "I don't follow you."

"Marks from a dog's teeth!" I explained. "I had a run-in with a dog. He snapped at my cane, dug his teeth into it. The dog was that big Airedale of Nick Stroud's. And I can prove all this—I had an eyewitness. Janet Barlowe saw it happen."

I poured out my story then—my ride back from Brixton Beach in Janet's car, how Rusty had come snarling at me, how I'd driven him off with my cane.

"Ask Janet Barlowe!" I challenged. "She was there; she saw the whole thing. I showed her the toothmarks on the cane."

Captain Tyson and Sergeant Moran exchanged a quick look.

"So Janet Barlowe is your eyewitness?" Tyson said. "And it was Stroud's dog that put the marks on your cane."

"I kept telling you Stroud framed me!" I shouted at Tyson. "You wouldn't listen. 'Get proof,' you said. Well, here's proof about Nick Stroud. I remember how he examined my cane, my real cane, one day at the beach. He handled it, felt it, looked it all over. And he asked me questions about it. He found out it was black hickory, and that I'd bought it at Harcum's, back in the city. I thought then it was just idle curiosity. Now I know he was getting set to switch canes on me, like he switched the whisky. You wouldn't believe me about the whisky, either—"

"Take it easy, Randall," Tyson cut in. "We'll go to work on this case. We'll try to trace it. If your story checks out, then we've got a whole new set-up to deal with. And I'll deal with it, Randall. I don't pull my punches. What I'm after is the truth!"

Sergeant Moran touched Tyson's sleeve. "Look, Captain, don't you think we ought to tell Randall?"

"Not yet, Moran," Tyson said sharply. Then he turned to me. "Randall, this may be your big break. I hope it is. And I'll do my best for you, count on that. Now get back to your cell and sit tight. Just sit tight. I'll take it from here."

I went back to my cell like a man walking in a dream. I sat down on the cot, limp and shaken, holding a cigarette in my fingers, forgetting to light it. It was still there between my fingers, unlit, when the rosy dawn came up.

Those were the worst hours I had ever lived through—that eternity of coiled waiting—waiting in the dead vacuum of a prison cell. Morning came and went, and there was no news for me, no summons to Tyson's office.

Captain Tyson was out; Sergeant Moran was out. The day-shift turnkey knew nothing, could tell me nothing.

I got the jitters, waiting. Fantastic ideas began to crowd in on me. Could I trust Captain Tyson? Tyson had held me guilty from the start. Would he be square enough really to work on this new evidence, or would he try to distort or suppress it to keep from reversing himself on the case?

But then I thought about Janet Barlowe, and I felt better. Janet—clear-eyed, straight-talking Janet—was my eyewitness, and neither Tyson nor anybody else would be able to budge Janet's evidence.

THE afternoon dragged on and on, and still no news came. Tyson still was out; Moran still was out. "What in God's name are they waiting for? What are they up to?" I muttered, gripping the iron bars until my hands ached.

And then about four o'clock the turnkey appeared. "Captain Tyson's back, Randall. He's ready for you now."

Tyson was waiting at his desk. Sergeant Moran was there, and Officer Baker, with his notebook open.

And Nick Stroud was there, tall and ruggedly handsome, his thick blond hair carefully brushed back from his bronzed face. His glance flicked over me briefly, as if he'd never seen me before.

Then I saw Norma, sitting on the other side of Tyson's desk. She was wearing the tailored slacks and pale yellow sweater she had worn at the time of our first meeting by the wall on Gunner's Ridge. Her dark eyes searched my face anxiously, but Tyson cut in before we had a chance to speak to each other.

"Sit down, Randall."

Captain Tyson didn't waste time on preliminaries. "I've sent for all of you today because there's been a major change in this murder case. New evidence has come to light."

I had my eye on Stroud. He looked quite relaxed and at ease, but a wariness came into his eyes as Tyson flipped off the lid of the cardboard box and lifted the cane with hooked fingers.

"This cane is the death instrument," Tyson said. "It was found beside Vincent Webley's body. It was identified as Owen Randall's cane. Randall himself acknowledged ownership—until he asked later for a second look at it.

"Now Randall claims it is *not* his cane, that his cane had certain marks from a dog's teeth along the tip. He has told us how and where those marks got on the cane, and he has produced a reliable eyewitness to substantiate that claim. Which brings up two very interesting questions: First, who is the real owner of this unmarked duplicate cane? And second, why was it placed beside Vincent Webley's body?"

I heard Stroud's breath catch, and then he seemed not to be breathing at all. He just kept staring at Captain Tyson.

"The answer to the second question is now quite clear," Tyson went on with grim deliberation. "The real circumstances of Vincent Webley's death were carefully covered up, as well as the real motive for the killing. There was a carefully organized plot to plant a mass of false evidence for the police, so that an innocent man would find himself saddled with the dead body."

Then Tyson's voice lashed out, dropping the measured legal tone. "Well, it didn't succeed! It came very close, too damned close! The only thing that upset the applecart was pure luck—the fact that a bad-tempered dog happened to dig his teeth into Randall's cane. And now we'll get to the bottom of this cane mystery. . . . Moran, bring in Mr. Coombs!"

Coombs? The name meant nothing to me. Apparently it meant nothing to Nick Stroud, either. He didn't watch the door; he just kept watching Tyson with that same concentrated intensity.

Sergeant Moran returned with Mr. Coombs, a thin little man of about fifty. His face looked faintly familiar to me, but I couldn't be sure until he stated his employment. Coombs was the clerk who had sold me my hickory cane in the Harcum store, back in the city.

But Nick Stroud had no such trouble recognizing Coombs. Stroud rose halfway out of his chair, his face as stricken as if he'd just seen Vincent Webley come walking into the room.

For the moment, though, Tyson ignored Stroud, turning to me. "Randall, stand up. Now, Mr. Coombs, this man's name is Owen Randall. Do you remember him as a customer?"

Coombs looked at me and nodded to Tyson. "Yes, sir. About three or four weeks ago I sold Mr. Randall a black hickory cane."

Captain Tyson held up the blood-stained cane. "Like this?"

Coombs bent over the cane. "Yes, sir. That's one of our canes."

"Have you sold any similar canes since then?" Tyson asked.

"Only one, sir," Coombs replied. "Last Tuesday afternoon." He turned slowly, pointed to Nick Stroud. "I sold it to *this* man!"

"That's a lie!" Stroud shouted. "I never saw you before in my life. I was never inside your store!"

"You came in Tuesday afternoon," Coombs said quietly. "You told me your brother had broken his foot, and needed a strong cane. I showed you our stock and you picked out the cane yourself—black hickory, with a plain handle. We don't sell many canes, so I remember the sale clearly. And I have a sales-slip dated Tuesday."

"You're crazy!" Stroud shouted. "I never bought a cane, anywhere!"

I jumped up then. "Quit lying, Stroud, you're through!" I yelled at him. "You wheedled all the information you needed out of me, and then went and bought a duplicate for the frame-up."

He swung around at my voice, his face twisted and scowling.

"And another thing, Stroud. The dog that sank his teeth into my cane was Rusty. Yes, Rusty, your own dog. You beat him when he was a pup. You made him hate sticks! Now he's even with you. And *I'll* be even with you."

That part about Rusty was the last straw for Nick Stroud. Cursing, he brushed Sergeant Moran aside with a sudden straight-arm and came at me, fists swinging.

I didn't duck or back away. I saw him coming, and I let him have one right on the chin. He had a jaw like concrete; I nearly broke my hand, and the blow only made his head bob. He clubbed me on the side of the head and I went down on my knees as if I'd been blackjacked.

I heard a scream from Norma. Stroud started another swing, but the blow never landed. Sergeant Moran got to him first—with the butt end of his police .38.

Moran hauled the half-stunned Stroud to his feet and shoved him into a chair. Then Tyson took over, gripping Stroud by the shirt, shaking him like an angry terrier.

"Stroud! That cane you took from Randall—where'd you hide it? Where? . . . We'll find it, Stroud! There's a man over in your bungalow right now, searching for it. We'll take the place apart, board by board!"

Stroud looked at him blankly, still dazed by Moran's blow. Tyson shook him again. "And we've got two men outside the house, digging up the sand. They're starting at the walls and working out from there. We'll spade up half the Dunes if we have to!"

That got through to Stroud's groggy brain, that part about digging up the sands around his bungalow. We saw the way he flinched, the flicker of fear in his still-dazed eyes.

Tyson's leathery face wore a grim smile as he stepped back. He knew where he would find that missing cane.

"It's all over for you, Stroud!" Tyson declared. "You're a dead pigeon. The cane only proves what we already know. *You* killed Webley, Stroud. You pulled off the job in his garage!"

Stroud's blond bead jerked up, with that same flinch of fear. Tyson chuckled harshly. "Thought you'd cleaned up all the traces in there, didn't you? Not quite! You scrub and scrub, but there are always a few spatters of blood that get overlooked. The city police laboratory is sending a technician here. He can tell us whether it's Webley's blood."

Tyson straightened. "And that's not all, Stroud. The night of the murder a couple of neckers happened to park themselves under that old pier near Randall's place. Want to hear what they saw?"

Nick Stroud staggered to his feet, clutching the chair-back, his eyes haggard and haunted. "You're not going to bang the whole rap on me, Tyson. I wasn't alone on this job!" He spun around, his finger stabbing toward Norma Webley.

"*She's in this, too!* Up to her neck! It was *her* idea to get rid of Webley!"

Norma sprang to her feet, staring wide-eyed at her sudden accuser, one hand pressed to her throat.

Stroud kept talking, kept stabbing with his finger: "You hear that, Norma? I don't take this rap alone! *You* talked me into this! *You're* the

one that hated Webley! 'Let's get rid of him,' you said! 'We can fix it so they'll hang the job on somebody else! Then we can go away and get married and live high on Webley's dough!' "

Stroud swung around to me. "And you, Randall—you poor dumb sucker! How you fell for it! I didn't have to tail you to get all that stuff in my records! *She* told it to me; *she* handed it over."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I looked at Norma, standing there so poised, head proudly erect, an indignant flush on her cheeks. "Captain Tyson!" she protested haughtily. "This man has gone crazy! Of all the outrageous lies—"

"One moment, Mrs. Webley," Tyson interrupted. "Before you get started on the innocence act, let me warn you that we had a man posted outside your living-room windows last night."

Norma Webley shrank back as if she had been lashed. I had never seen a face with such a look on it before, such a sick crumpling of features into raw, naked guilt.

"It was Sergeant Moran, Mrs. Webley," Tyson explained crisply. "He was right up under the terrace windows while you and Stroud had your little talk. Would you like the Sergeant to repeat some of the choicer bits he overheard?"

Norma Webley was caught, cornered. She turned on Stroud then, glaring, and her voice venomous: "You stupid, blundering fool! I told you not to come! I told you it was too risky! You laughed at me, said nobody suspected a thing about us. You damned idiot, you've ruined everything! You and your loud-mouth bragging—"

"Get her out of here, Moran!" Tyson snapped.

And that was my final glimpse of Norma Webley as Moran thrust her through the doorway.

"Your turn, Stroud," Tyson said briefly, and motioned to Baker to take him away. And Nick Stroud, like Norma Webley, went out without even a glance in my direction.

Captain Tyson came over to me. "Well, that's that," he said. "Cigarette, Randall? Or would you rather have a drink? You look as if you could use a stiff one."

I shook my head. I didn't want a smoke or a drink. I didn't want anything except time to forget. I kept seeing a gypsy-eyed girl on a wall, calmly eating an apple, the sunlight warm on her midnight hair—and murder in her heart.

Tyson read my thoughts. "Hard to take, isn't it, Randall? Norma Webley! Her husband hires a detective to keep her in line. She wheedles the detective into teaming up for a murder. You know what, Randall? If they'd got away with it, I'll bet she'd have found some way to cheat Stroud, too. Women can be hell, once they get off the beam."

I didn't say anything. What was there I could say?

"I've got some routine forms to fill out now," Tyson said, "and then I can clear you out of here. You'll have to stay on at the Cove, of course, until we get everything wrapped up."

"Yes, I undertsand," I said. "And thanks for your share in all this, Captain. But you might have tipped me off sooner. Why did you let me sweat it out, when you knew about the Webley garage—when you had a pair of eyewitnesses who saw Stroud bringing the body to my bungalow—"

Tyson smiled. "So far we haven't found any actual blood-stains in the garage—only some wipe-up marks. And I invented those two neckers by the pier. I pulled a big bluff on Stroud, and it worked."

"But you had Moran watching them," I said. "He was outside the window while they were talking."

"Moran was there, all right, but he couldn't catch their talk. Their voices were too low. But just the fact that Stroud went sneaking over to Gunner's Ridge to see Norma Webley told me plenty. However, the bluff wouldn't have worked without the cane evidence to back me up. That was what really cracked the case wide open."

He nodded. "We're sitting pretty, Randall: We know Mrs. Webley and

The blood-stained cane was my only hope. I stared at it for a moment, and asked the captain to turn it over. "I've got it!" I said. "I've got the legal proof you wanted!"

Stroud teamed up to get rid of Webley. We know Stroud himself did the dirty work, at the garage, and at your bungalow. And we know he's got your cane buried somewhere near his place. We'll get the rest of it out of them. Just a matter of time, now, at playing each of them against the other. They'll talk their heads off now, trying to hang the blame on each other."

Tyson lit a cigarette, pleased with himself. "Carson's Cove will really have something to wag its jaws over, when this news gets out. Norma Webley arrested for murder! It'll be a knockdown surprise to everybody, except maybe Janet Barlowe."

"Janet Barlowe?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"She had Norma Webley pegged as a wrong number from the start," Tyson said. "I've known Janet since she was knee-high. She sure kept after me on this job, needling me, insisting that maybe Norma knew a lot more about her husband's death than she was telling. She finally talked me into putting Moran on watch at Gunner's Ridge. Woman's intuition, I guess. But it sure paid off."

I sat waiting in the squadroom until Tyson had my official release ready. "Good luck, Randall," he said. "I'm real sorry for what you've been put through. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"None," I assured him. I shook hands with Tyson, and with Moran. I walked down the long station-house corridor and out through the big doors.

A SPORTY blue roadster was parked at the station-house curb. A hand with a cigar waved to me from the driver's window, and then Lloyd Barlowe got out. He came to meet me, hand outstretched.

"I've heard the good news, Randall. I was talking to Captain Tyson on the phone a little while ago, and he told me he was signing your release. Thought I'd run down here and pick you up."

"That was kind of you, Mr. Barlowe," I said.

He waved away my thanks. "We're neighbors, Randall. You've had a rough deal. I didn't think you'd care much to have the town staring at you, at least not today."

I climbed into the car, and leaned back, relaxing, drawing in the clean salt air.

"Smells good, doesn't it?" Barlowe smiled.

"I never realized *how* good!" I answered. "Mr. Barlowe, you won't mind if I don't talk about the Webley case for a while? I think I'm still a little punch-drunk."

"I understand," Barlowe said. "But you're in the clear, and that's the main thing."

Barlowe kept the car rolling fast through the Old Town. "How about coming up to the house for a drink, a big one?" he invited. "And we'd be delighted if you'd stay for dinner. I don't imagine you're too anxious to hurry back to that bungalow."

"Thank you," I said. "You're right about the bungalow. I've got to stay on at the Cove for a while—Tyson's orders—but I'll shift over to some other quarters."

"We can phone the real-estate office from my place," Barlowe said. "Thurlow will dig up something for you."

I had a brief glimpse of Bungalow 7 as Barlowe cut through the Dunes and sent the car charging up the long slope to the blue-shuttered cottage.

Then we were out of the car, and the door opened wide and Janet was there, smiling at us, holding out her hand to me, saying, "Welcome back, Owen."

Janet was wearing a blue dress that matched her eyes, and I realized suddenly that this was the first time I had ever seen her in anything but beach clothes. She looked like the grown-up sister of the laughing, teasing, sun-tanned girl I'd spent so many hours with on the beach.

I guess I was staring a little, because she grinned at me teasingly, the other Janet laughing from her eyes. "Does a dress make that much difference?"

"You must be a mind-reader," I said, and we laughed together. "But it does make a difference. You look more—more—you know—"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about," she teased. "But come in anyway."

It was a beautiful house, comfortable and colorful. Everything was blended with an artist's eye for effect. But my mind was on other things that day.

"Janet," I said, "I want to thank you for all you did. I owe a lot to you. You believed in me, in spite of the evidence, and you stirred up Captain Tyson—"

"If it helped, I'm glad, Owen," Janet said simply.

"We're both glad, Randall," Barlowe said. "The night you were arrested, we sat here talking till four A.M. Janet was so sure you were telling the truth, that you had nothing to do with Webley's death. A conviction like that can be contagious, as Tyson found out when Janet went to work on him."

"Tyson tried to be fair to me," I said. "I have no complaints."

"He's a good man," Barlowe declared, "but not too much imagination. Tyson's happier with a straight line than a curve. But I promised you a drink, Randall. Be back in a minute."

"Janet," I said when he was gone, "what made you so sure about Norma Webley? Tyson says woman's intuition, but I think there must have been something more."

Her deep blue eyes studied me gravely. "Are you sure you really want to know, Owen? You might not like the answer."

"I'm sure," I said.

Janet crossed the room and pulled a large artist's portfolio from a shelf. "These are some of Dad's private sketches," she said. "He makes his living drawing beautiful girls, but for his own satisfaction he often sketches people the way he *really* sees them. Of course he never shows the sketches to any one but me. Portraits in acid, Dad calls them."

"And he made a sketch of Norma Webley?" I asked.

Janet nodded. "He did it last summer. Just her head. But Owen, I don't think I should show it to you. It's a cruel thing."

"I'd like to see it," I said. I looked into the blue depths of her eyes. "Don't worry, Janet. I can take it. You learn a lot of things, fast, behind bars."

Janet turned over the sketches in the portfolio, searching. Then she found it. "There!" she said, and stepped back.

Norma Webley's face stared up at me from the paper. A hard-eyed, hard-mouthed Norma, her features subtly changed and distorted by Barlowe's penetrating eye into the proud, medieval brazenness of a Borgia woman.

I STARED silently at Norma's unmasked face. Then I closed the portfolio and mechanically began to tie the ribbon binder. Janet was watching me with troubled eyes.

"Owen, I'm sorry I let you see it!"

I shook my head, smiling at her. "No, Janet. I'm glad I saw it. Your father is quite an artist. You can tell him sometime that Norma Webley's face looked *exactly* like that when they were taking her to the cells."

Barlowe came back then with a tray of tall cold drinks, tinkling with ice. He handed them around, not noticing the portfolio lying on the table.

"Well, Randall," he said, "how about a toast? You name it."

I held the tinkling glass in my hand, thinking it over. "Here's to learning things—the hard way!" I said.

Randall nodded to my toast. Janet raised her glass, and by the smiling look in her eyes I think she was pleased with my toast; I think she understood what I meant.

Before I tasted the drink, I lifted my glass to her in silent greeting. We both knew, in a way, that this was really our first meeting. •

A Complete Novel by JOHN D. MACDONALD

The Second Chance

They asked him to fight again. There would be no second chance at the crown, but a friend needed help, and it might be a second chance for the woman he loved.

THE BLUE-AND-SILVER BUS shouldered its way through the brawling, irritable traffic of the big Midwestern city. It turned slowly off a narrow street into the covered ramp of the terminal, and in the enclosure the heavy motor sounded louder. Lew Barry stood up, his tall hard body cramped from too many miles. The pest beside him stood up too, flashing his eager, terrier smile.

"Like I was saying, Champ, if you was to try a comeback now, you couldn't pick a better time. The division is full of bums. I know you the minute I lay eyes on you. Even if it

is five years. I sure'd like to see you back in there."

Lew had endured the chatter uncomplainingly. In a sense it had helped. It had kept him from thinking too much about what was waiting, from wondering too much and too long. Lew was a big man in his middle thirties, and he showed the indelible marks of sixty-three professional fights: Brown hair thinned by the arcs. Brows and lips thickened and white-laced. Big hands broken and mended too many times. The thickness of brows made his clear blue eyes look small, sunken, cold and remote. But he still carried his weight high, in chest and neck and shoulders, and moved his body with spare, effortless economy.

"It's been too long, friend," he said in his soft husky voice. "Too long. They'd knock my ears off."

"Aw, they don't punch any more, Champ."

"I never did get that title, friend."

"On you it would sound good, Champ. You got a trucking business now, so maybe that's better. Maybe it's a lot better. But a guy can dream. I'll never forget that second Louis fight. Never."

"He killed me," Lew said, smiling.

"But he didn't knock you out. Nobody ever knocked you out."

They stood beside the bus and he shook hands with the little man, and when the bags were unloaded from the compartment in the side of the bus, he surrendered his ticket and took his bag and walked into the waiting-room, feeling in his pocket for change for the phone. The phones were at the far end; as he walked toward them she appeared suddenly in front of him, and she looked the way she had looked in all the dreams of the past five years—a tall woman with a look of clean integrity, with an odd inner radiance that glowed in fine gray eyes.

She kissed his cheek lightly and quickly and stood back, her hands tight just above his wrists, a faint glimmer of tears in her eyes. "Lew, bless you!"

"It's . . . good to see you, Ivy. I didn't expect you to meet me."

"The car's outside. Your wire said you'd get in about three. I checked the planes and trains and buses. If you didn't come in on that bus, I was going over to the railroad station to meet the three-ten from the East."

They went out into the bright warm sunshine. She walked beside him in the remembered way, her stride long and good.

"How's Jack?"

"He's fine, Lew. Anxious to see you, of course. I'll let him tell you what's on his mind."

The car was a chartreuse convertible with dealer's plates. She said, "I'd better drive, Lew. It's tricky finding your way out of town."

While she was concentrating on traffic, moving deftly through the openings, he half-turned in the seat to look at her. The same Ivy or almost the same. Now there were perceptible lines at the corners of her eyes, a look of strain around her mouth, a trace of gauntness in her figure. In the sunlight he saw white hairs in the jet hair, just a few above her ear. Time goes by and things change. And he couldn't let himself think of her as Ivy Brownell. She was Mrs. Terrance now, Mrs. Jack Terrance, even if he couldn't rid himself of the pointless dreams.

After many turns through narrow streets, she turned left onto a broad boulevard. "There!" she said, relaxing a bit. "It's simple from now on. Jack's sorry he couldn't meet you. He should be back at the house by five, he said. Lew, why didn't you ever write?"

"I'm not much of a hand at letters, Ivy."

"But you've left us both in the dark. We don't know anything about you any more, except that you went into the trucking business. Did you get married?"

"No time for it, Ivy."

"How is the business going?"

"Fine," he said heartily. "It took a while to get established. Things are okay now." He wondered if he had sounded too confident. Ivy had always been able to tell, somehow, when he was lying. Business was dandy. Got up to five rigs a year and a half ago. Then two of them were gone within one week. One rolled down the slope of a Pennsylvania mountain and was pounded into junk, crippling the driver. One was smacked head-on by a drunk in a big Cad, killing both drivers and burning the rig. That eight-balled the best contract, and the bank took back the biggest, newest outfit. Somehow, after that streak of bad luck, he hadn't been able to climb back. Maintenance took too big a chunk of the gross. He'd driven one and Whitey the other, on a killing schedule, never getting ahead. And then the wire had come from Jack Terrance.

NEED HELP AND ADVICE. WANT TO SEE YOU. WIRE TIME OF ARRIVAL.

Very typical of Jack Terrance, he thought. No question of whether it would be convenient or even possible. "Come at once," and the blithe assurance that you would, that if your old pal Jack needed you, you'd drop everything and come running.

The wire had come at six, and by luck he had been there instead of off on a week-long swing, bidding on the wildcat loads. He had thought of Jack, and thought of Ivy, and thought of the endless ache to see her. And he had gotten drunk for the first time since losing the two rigs in a week, and the next day he had sold out his equity in both rigs, receiving twenty-one hundred dollars. He gave Whitey a month's pay, settled his own debts, and checked out of the small furnished apartment permanently.

He met Ivy's quick glance with bland assurance and said, "The business is doing well."

"I'm glad, Lew. Terribly glad."

The boulevard led straight into the flatlands, and she turned right toward gentle hills. She suddenly pulled off the road where there was heavy shade. "I want to talk," she explained.

"Sure," he said, wondering at the bitterness in her tone.

She tapped a cigarette on the back of her hand. He brought out matches and lit it for her.

"It puts me in a funny spot, Lew," she said.

"How do you mean?"

"I want to talk to you, yet I don't want to be disloyal to Jack. The three of us, Lew—we were a good trio. It was fun, while it lasted. You two were my date. Singular. I'll never know why you walked out, will I?"

"Maybe not."

"I married Jack." She touched his hand. "Lew, I don't regret that. And I know you were in love with me."

He managed a smile. "Still am."

"Please! This is hard enough to say without—"

"Sorry, Ivy."

"Jack is going to ask you something. I promised him I'd let him bring it up, so I can't tell you what it is. But I can tell you this much, Lew. I don't approve of his asking you this. It's too much to ask. He was always able to get around you, to get you to do things for him. You did too much in the past. He's very clever, Lew. I'm afraid he's going to make this favor sound as though you would be doing it for both of us. You're not. If you want to do it, you're doing it for him, not for me. I personally hope it falls through. But I can't be loyal to Jack and at the same time ask you to refuse. Because, you see, what he's going to ask you means a great deal to him."

"Sounds confusing."

"It will clear up when he brings it up. Don't give him an immediate answer; tell him you have to think about it. Then we can find a chance to talk it over, and I'll explain where I stand. Is that agreed?"

"Yes. I can do that. But it's been puzzling me a lot. I mean, trying to think of what I could do for him."

"I don't think you'll be happy about it, Lew."

Illustrated by MILLER POPE

"It can't make me mad. It gave me a chance to see you again, Ivy. And see my godson. How is he?"

"Husky and half-spoiled, I'm afraid. Lew, the presents you've sent have been too expensive, really. You shouldn't."

"They weren't much."

She started the car again and they began to pass impressive houses which all looked quite new. Then she turned in at a gravel drive. On the lawn sloped down toward the road sprinklers turned slowly.

"Some ranch," Lew Barry said.

"Isn't it, though! All complete, too. With view-windows and a wading pool for Chris and a first mortgage and a second mortgage." He looked at her tense face with shocked surprise. Her voice had been taut and angry.

"It's very nice out here," he said uncertainly.

"Very fashionable, they keep telling me."

She parked by the garage. They got out and Chris came charging across the lawn, whooping and waving a shining revolver. A teen-age girl followed slowly. Chris charged up to Lew, then suddenly turned shy.

"Chris, this is your Uncle Lew."

The boy did not speak and Lew picked him up, held him high and grinned at him, then tucked him under one arm. The boy began to writhe and yell with pleasure. It was painful fantasy to Lew to think that this solid warm wriggling kid could have been his and Ivy's—a part of each of them. Flesh of her flesh, and thus inexpressibly precious.

The girl said, "Mrs. Terrance, I got to go now, but I phoned Mother and she said I could be back at seven. You want I should eat before I come?"

"Yes, dear. We're going out to dinner. I'll have Chris all fed, of course, and it will be bedtime for him."

"Will it be okay if I have a girl friend come with me?"

"Certainly, Mary. And Mr. Terrance will drive you both home."

"Chris had a pretty short nap."

The girl was introduced to Lew; then she went off across the fields behind the house. Ivy said, "She lives on a farm a half-mile away. She's a darling. Sitters are at a premium out here. School let out last week and Mary will be available all summer. She's good with Chris."

Ivy took him into the house and showed him his room, while Chris stomped circles around them. She told him to come out to the pool when he had freshened up and there'd be a Tom Collins waiting for him.

The room was bright and clean and pleasant, and the small private bath was done in shades of green. The two windows looked out across the gentle hills. When he went out Ivy was sitting near the wading pool. Chris was trying to drown a rubber duck. Lew sat on one of the red enameled chairs across the round metal table from her, picked up his drink and sipped it. It was tart and good.

She said, "You haven't changed, Lew."

"Five years. Everything changes."

"Not you. You're too durable. Too tough, Lew."

The shadows were getting a bit longer. In the silence he could hear distant traffic, hear the sound of a brook in the ravine at the end of the yard.

"Jack has changed," she said suddenly.

He could think of nothing to say. Car tires complained on asphalt and then the gravel of the drive crunched and popped under the wheels. Chris took his attention from the rubber duck and looked quickly toward the station wagon which had driven in. His face was quite still. He returned his glance to the duck and drowned it again.

They got up as Jack Terrance climbed heavily out of the station wagon and came across the yard toward them, grinning expansively. Five years had been unkind to him. The years had widened his body, coarsened his features. He had a cigar clamped in his teeth.

"Well, well, well," he said, pumping Lew's hand, punching him on the shoulder, looking hard at him. "By God, you look good, fella. Really good!"

"Nice to see you, Jack."

"Appreciate the way you cut loose and came out here, fella." He took the cigar from his mouth; pecked at Ivy's cheek, replaced the cigar and stood beside his wife. He was beaming at Lew with the pride of ownership, and he had one heavy hand on Ivy's slim brown arm. "Sorry I had to make a mystery of it this way. Couldn't be helped. I told Ivy to let me lay the cards on the table. She didn't jump the gun, did she?" He turned to smile at Ivy, but Lew saw the heavy hand clamp down on her arm, saw the sudden pallor of Jack's knuckles. There was a quick grimace of pain on Ivy's mouth. It vanished quickly and she said in a steady voice, "I left it up to you to tell him, darling."

"Good," Jack said absently. He frowned over his shoulder at the pool, taking his hand from Ivy's arm. "Hey, come kiss your daddy, Chris!" he called.

The small boy trudged across the yard, his face cool and composed. For the first time it struck Lew how much the kid looked like Ivy. Chris suffered a kiss and obeyed absently when Jack, squatting, said, "Hug your daddy, boy," then headed back to the pool. Jack called after him, "No more pool, Chris. Go get yourself dry."

The boy turned flatly, braced his feet. "I won't!" he shouted. Lew saw Jack's face darken. He took two quick steps toward the small boy who stood his ground. But Ivy caught Jack's arm. She said, "Please. You talk to Lew. I'll handle it."

"I don't know who's going to teach him to mind if—"

"Please, darling."

She hurried off, sat on her heels by the boy. She said something in a low tone to the boy. They went off toward the house, hand in hand.

Jack said, "It's always up to me to discipline him. I have to be the one to fan his tail for him, and he holds a grudge."

"He's a good kid."

"Sure. Best there is. Smart as whips. Come on in while I climb out of these clothes, Lew."

They went into an obviously masculine bedroom. Jack said, with uncharacteristic shyness, "I got a snore to wake the dead. Ivy had to move out to get some sleep. Sit down. Little knock of Scotch? I keep a bottle here in the closet."

"Not right now, thanks."

Jack peeled off his jacket and shirt. His torso was soft, blue-white. He poured himself a drink in a shot glass, downed it, poured another and left the full shot glass on the bureau. He sat on a chair and grunted as he bent over and unlaced his expensive-looking shoes. He pulled the shoes off and sat up with a sigh, wiggling his toes. "It means a hell of a lot to me, Lew, to know that there is one guy in this wide world I can depend on, all the way down the line. But that stuff doesn't come for free. God, I know that! It works both ways. There are enough double-crossers in this town so you begin to appreciate a real friend when you've got one."

"I guess you better turn the cards face up, Jack."

Jack gave him a quick, hurt expression. "That doesn't sound like you, boy. I'm not asking for any handout—get that straight right now. There's enough in this for you too."

"I just want to know what it's all about. I've had three days to wonder."

"Sure, I can understand that. But let me fill in the background for you. Is that okay? I got to show you just what kind of a spot I'm on."

Lew lighted a cigarette. It had been five years since he had heard the song and dance. It was always something. A big deal, a big angle. And most of them seemed to work, for Jack. Lucky Jack Terrance. "Okay. Fill in the background."

"You sound like a guy all ready to say no. That's discouraging. Here's the deal. In this town you got to have flash, or you're dead. I took my winnings out of that tanker deal right after I married Ivy and came here and put it into the automobile agency. It's a good franchise, a money-maker. You'll have to come down with me in the morning and look around. You'll see that it's worth protecting, all right."

"You about to lose it?"

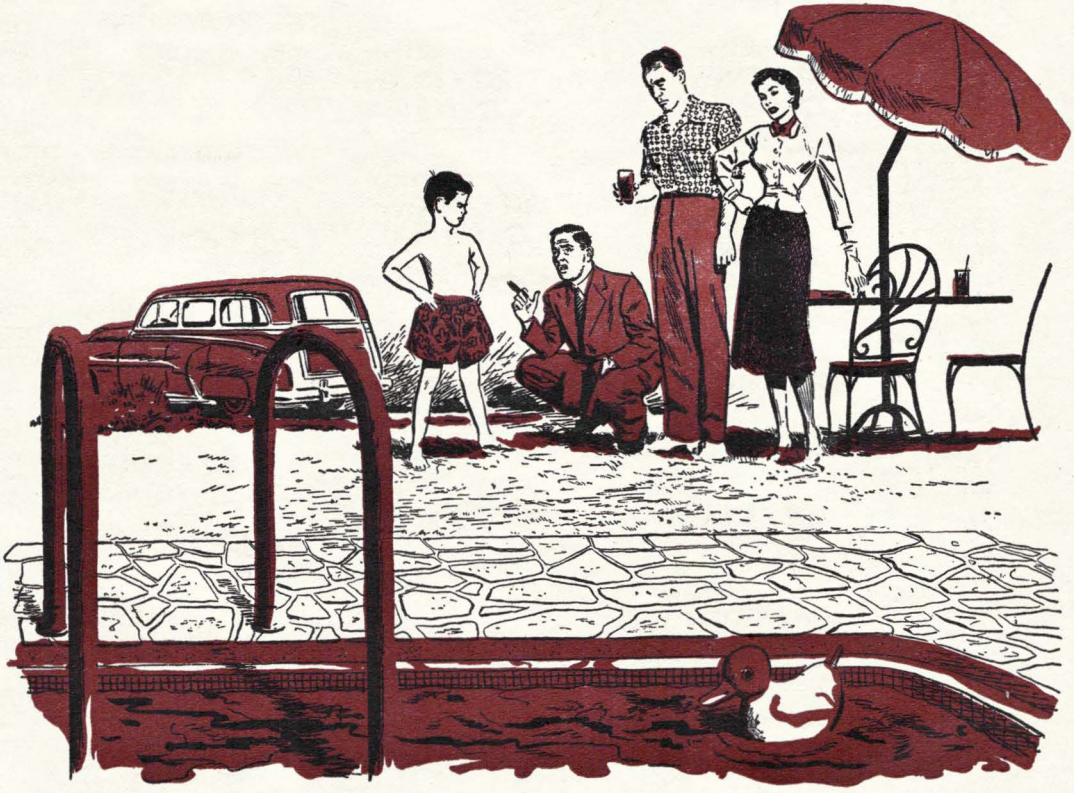
"That could happen. And it isn't my fault. Things looked better when I sewed myself up with this house. And of course, you have to belong to clubs. It takes money to live these days. A hell of a lot. And I've always felt you got to spend a buck to make a buck. Sports cars are pretty hot these days. About eight months ago I took on a line of them. It was okay with the regular outfit, you know, non-competing. Appeals to a different market. I extended myself. Went into hock to swing it. Then, about six weeks ago, everything went to hell in a bucket. All at once."

He counted on thick fingers. "One—the steel strike cut my new car deliveries. Two—the bottom fell out of the used-car market. Three—the Bureau of Internal Revenue jumped me with a tax bill for '47, '48, '49 and '50. It goes way back to those tanker operations, Lew, and it's a big debt. No question of fraud, you understand. Just a question of interpretation. My lawyers tell me I'm dead. Okay, I scrounged. I mortgaged everything on the floor, everything in the lot, got a second mortgage on this house, sold the kid's bonds, some jewelry I bought Ivy, and some business property I was holding. The agency is in hock. Man, I'm in hock all the way up to here, and the only thing I was able to buy with all that was time. I go around in circles, wondering what I'm going to do. I can't borrow any more. I've got to make some—make a bundle! And make it fast. I've even borrowed to the hilt on insurance. I'm forty, Lew. I can't let them lick me now. It would be too tough starting over. With you, it's different; you're only thirty-three and—"

"Thirty-five, Jack."

"By God, you don't look it. Anyway, you've got only yourself to look out for, and you got an edge in years. As I say, I was driving myself nuts trying to find some way to get hold of a good piece of money. I was too restless to sit still and worry. I went downtown six weeks ago. They were having a card at the River Stadium, so I wandered over and bought a ringside. Hell, it was like old times. All the prelims were punks. The main was a boy named Sammy Hode. I sat up when I saw that kid. A sweet build. The way he moved, it made me think of you. He was in there against Red Hacklin. He knocked old Red kicking in the fourth. Red could get up, but it was a TKO. I got into the dressing-room afterward and talked to the kid. It was his fourteenth pro bout, and he's taken twelve by knockouts, and it wasn't set up for him, either."

JACK poured himself another shot. His face was flushed with excitement. "By luck, I've walked in just right. Sammy is sore at his manager. It's like this. With the New York crowd, his manager is poison. He's a little screwball named Morgan. He won't sell to the New York crowd because he hates them worse than he loves money. The kid had told Morgan he was through. Morgan couldn't get him good heavies to knock down, and the



Jack called to the boy: "No more swimming, Chris. Go get yourself dry." The boy turned and braced his feet. "I won't!" he shouted. Jack's face darkened, and Ivy interrupted: "Please, Jack. You talk to Lew. I'll handle Chris." Jack consented glumly.

kid knew he was more than ready for the big time. I started a sales job on the kid and on Morgan. I walked out with a contract. It costs me eight thousand to buy it from Morgan."

"Where did you get eight thousand?"

"I'm glad you asked me that. I took my reserve—the last dime of it. It left me dead broke for cash."

"I don't like what I think is coming, Jack. I don't like it at all."

"Now give me a chance, dammit. From the old days I know the New York contacts. The next morning I was on the phone. Yes, they knew of the kid's record. Yes, he looked like a good boy, but he'd never been up against anybody who counts. You see my idea. I wanted to build the kid further and then unload all of my interest, or a good part of it for a decent profit. I know a good boy when I see one. The best I could get right away was an offer of ten thousand, and that's no good. That would have given me two thousand which, in my condition, is peanuts. Two weeks ago I matched Sammy with a local. He half killed the guy in the first round. My end was seventeen hundred. I phoned again. They upped it to twelve-thousand-five, which still wasn't sweet enough. Then, believe me, Lew, right there when I was talking over the phone, I said, right off the top of my head, 'What if I match him with Lew Barry and the kid wins?'"

"Now wait—"

"Let me finish. First they said it couldn't be done. You've been contacted, they said, and you won't fight. Then they remembered we're friends. I got a halfway promise. *If* I can arrange the match, and *if* we can give it enough publicity, and *if* the kid wins, they'll talk in terms of big money. And I mean big, Lew. They're starving for a colorful heavy. You know that. They've got nothing but zombies. Now here it is. The River Stadium, August first. That gives you six weeks to sharpen up enough to make it look good. Your end should be about eight thousand. I don't know how the odds will figure, but if we want to bet a specific round for a knockout, we can make plenty. When it's all over, I cut you in on the sale of the kid. There it is, on the line. I don't want to beg you to do it, Lew. But if you turn me down . . . well, I don't mind so much for myself. Ivy and the kid aren't going to have it so good."

"I'm out of it," Lew said hoarsely. "I've been out for five years. They've all forgotten. It doesn't mean a damn' thing if the kid knocks me out."

"Don't kid yourself. The public has a long memory. You're in the record books. And one thing. You've been knocked down, but you were never knocked out. That means something to them. It's a buildup for the kid."

"I was never knocked out, and I never went in for tank jobs."

"Wait until you see Sammy go. This won't be a tank job. The kid can hit."

"I can't get back in shape."

"You're in shape right now. You look like a rock."

"You know better than that, Jack. It's the timing, the reflexes. I can't get that edge back. It's gone forever. I quit before they had me talking to myself. No dice, Jack."

Jack brought the shot glass over and sat on the bed beside Lew. Jack sighed heavily and looked down at the floor between his stockinged feet. He said softly: "When you were up there at the top, I was just a guy hanging around the fringes, Lew. We had a lot of fun, a lot of laughs, you and me and Ivy. Then after that last fight you walked out. You let us read about your retirement in the papers. You know, boy, I always had it figured that you and Ivy— I mean, I was head-over-heels, but you always seemed to have the inside track. That's the way I had it figured."

"Drop it!"

"This is something I want to say. I got her on the rebound, Lew. She's never admitted it, but I know it's true."

"I walked out," Lew said harshly. "That's right. I walked out. I started saving money too late in the game. What the hell did I know? Nothing but box-fighting. Nothing else in the world. Louis took it out of me. He took all there was left. He came after me, stalking me the way he always used to work, and he got me in a neutral corner and he spoiled me. I didn't have anything left. She didn't want a beat-up pug with about eleven thousand bucks to his name, and no way of earning any more unless he let the kids on the way up knock him punchy and blind him and fix him up finally with a tray of dollar ties to sell at two bucks a copy in the Third Avenue bars. So I walked out and she married you—and it was a good thing."

"It *has* been a good thing. Correction—past tense. If I can get sixty thousand dollars together, maybe it can keep on being a good thing. But if I don't, I have to go through bankruptcy and they won't leave me the proverbial pot. Okay, you won't fight, you say. Can you raise sixty thousand? Can you mortgage those trucks of yours? Make it forty-eight thousand or so, and I'll unload the kid for twelve and see if I can work my way out of the hole and pay you back one of these days."

"I can't raise that kind of money."

"Then you have to help me. For Ivy's sake. For the sake of the kid. I'm like you were in that last Louis fight, Lew. If they lick me now, there's nothing left."

He remembered his promise to Ivy. "I'll think it over. I'll let you know."

Jack Terrance brightened up at once. He clapped Lew heavily on the shoulder. "Sure, think it over. Six weeks of easy workouts and about fifteen minutes of mixing it up, and you get eight thousand plus. What the hell, it isn't like you had a reputation to protect, or you were going after other bouts. This is the last one."

"I'm not saying I'll do it."

"Let's forget it for tonight. We'll go out and have some steaks, just the three of us, like old times. We'll tell lies and get tight, boy. Having you around again is just like a vacation for me, Lew."

While Jack showered, Lew wandered back through the house. Chris was in his high-chair eating busily and noisily. Ivy sat near him. She looked up at Lew and raised her eyebrows in question.

"He told me," Lew said heavily.

"It doesn't mean anything to him that you might be hurt, seriously hurt. All he can think of is getting out of his own jam. He got himself into it. Now it's up to you to get him out. I sound very loyal, don't I? The good, loyal little wife! Sometimes I get so damn miserable sick of—" She stopped suddenly, put her face in her hands. He went to her, put his big gentle hand on her shoulder, feeling the warmth of her, the faint shudder of sobs through the thin cotton fabric. Chris was looking at her, his underlip protruding and trembling, on the verge of tears.

"Hey, take it easy," he said softly.

She brought herself under control, stood up quickly. "Would you watch the animal eat while I change? Keep him from rubbing the food in his hair."

"I don't do that now," Chris said firmly. "I did that when I was *little*." The last word was said with lofty contempt.

Lew sat down while Ivy went back to her room. Chris eyed him solemnly. "Make a fist."

"Like this?"

Chris nodded. "That's big! Can I watch you hit somebody?"

"Just anybody?"

"Well, not anybody little! It wouldn't be fair."

"Keep eating there, or I'll be in the doghouse with your mother."

"She was going to cry."

"But she didn't, did she? Eat up, doc."

Chris went back to eating busily. Jack came whistling out into the kitch-

en, rumpled Chris' hair, went through into the small pantry and began to make himself a drink. "Something for you, Lew?"

"Tom Collins, I guess."

By the time he had finished it, Ivy was dressed. She looked cool and crisp and very lovely. Jack was well on his way to being drunk. The sitter came and they took off in the station wagon, with Lew driving, Jack raising his voice in tenor song.

They had planned to go to the club, but Jack decided he wasn't in the mood for "that bunch of stuffed shirts," so they went to a roadhouse he recommended. The place was hot and packed with a swarm of feral-looking teen-agers, but Jack insisted that it was fine, and kept insisting that Ivy dance, first with him and then with Lew.

"Jus' like ol' times," he kept saying.

THE steaks were astonishingly good, but Jack ate very little of his. By ten o'clock he was maudlin. They were in a booth and Jack sat facing the two of them, his coat off and his beefy arms on the table. His eyes swam into focus as he smiled at them.

"Two bes' people in the whole worl'. Bar none. Jus' a stranger here myself. Always thought she'd marry you, Lew, ol' pal, ol' pal. Did a dirty trick. Got confesh . . . confession to make to both of you. Checked on ol' Lew before sent wire. Ol' Lew's broke, honey. Busted flat—like me. Got two trucks and drives one of them himself. Checked up on him. Two ol' crocks and both busted flat! But we'll fool 'em all, won't we? We'll pull out o' this hole. Isn't she a sweet girl, Lew? Kiss her, Lew. S'all okay with me—all ol' pals, the three of us. She wants you to. Can't you see that, ol' pal?"

"Shut up, Jack," Ivy said icily.

"Go on, Lew, boy. I let an ol' pal kiss my pretty wife. Shouldn't tell you. She's colder'n Admiral Byrd's hip pocket, so there's no harm done. She got a yen for you, Lew. Big yen. Can't fool me. Married wrong guy. She can't have love, so we got to help her have pretty things, you and me." The warm maudlin tone had changed. Something small and evil looked out of his eyes.

"We'd better go, Jack," Ivy said sharply. "Pull yourself together."

Lew paid the check and they left. The avid, unlined young faces of the teen-agers made him feel older than mountains. As he was unlocking the station wagon, Ivy, behind him, gave a sharp gasp of pain. Jack giggled drunkenly.

Lew felt anger come up in him, filling his throat. He turned and grabbed Jack's arm and levered him into the back seat. Jack sang sleepily all the way home and leaned heavily on them as they helped him into the house and into his room.

"Get him into bed, please, Lew," she said. "I'll drive the girls home."

Jack made sleepy protesting sounds as Lew undressed him, rolled him under the sheet. Before he could turn out the light Jack had begun to snore stertorously. The evening had been rough and Lew felt emotionally exhausted. He looked in the boy's room. Chris was sleeping soundly. Lew took off his coat and went out into the warm night. He looked at the stars and at the city lights, and his cigarette-end glowed in the dark. Jack's plan would work. They still looked him up, once in a while, sending urgent letters to old addresses. The public had liked him. But once you quit you had to quit completely.

Headlights turned in the drive and Ivy parked by the garage, turned off the lights and motor.

"Lew?" she asked in a low voice.

"Right here. Jack passed out. I checked on the kid. He's pounding his ear."

Her dress was pale in the night. She came over to him. "I'm terribly sorry, Lew. He isn't himself."

"Now is as good a chance for us to talk as any. If you aren't too tired."

"No, I'm all right, Lew." They went over to the metal furniture. The seats of the chairs were wet with dew and he dried two of them off with his handkerchief. When she leaned forward for a light her cheekbones looked sharp in the match-flare, her eyes shadowed.

"Was that true, Lew? What he said about you being broke?"

"True enough. I've got a little less than two thousand dollars. But it isn't serious. I know the business inside and out now. One of the big lines has been after me. It will be a pretty good job. And a lot easier than trying to wildcat it."

"What did you tell him about fighting?"

"Just what you told me to say. That I'd think it over."

"Promise me you'll turn him down."

"Why?"

"You know why. I don't want you going back into that. I don't want you hurt. Sammy Hode is young and terribly strong, Lew."

"It will take six weeks of easy workouts and about fifteen minutes in the ring. My end will be around eight thousand. The kid can't kill me in fifteen minutes. You know that. And it will get Jack out of a hole."

"Will it?"

"Why do you say that, Ivy?"

"If he gets out of this jam, he'll just head directly into the next one. It's time he found he can't beg and wheedle and angle his way out of responsibilities. Maybe he ought to be flat for a while. Maybe it would do us all good."

"Even Chris?"

"There's no reason in the world why you should sacrifice yourself for Jack Terrance, Lew. No reason in the wide world."

"Unless I'm talking to one."

"Don't . . . please!"

He put his big hands flat on the cool damp table and leaned toward her. "I've got eyes. What the hell do you think I am? All this time I thought about you. I thought: Stay out, Lew. It's a good marriage; she is doing fine. A kid and all.

"I come here and I want to look at something good. I want to look at you and feel that it is fine for you. It's a small thing to want, but it was what I was telling myself. . . . But it stinks. Blind men could see that. It's in the air. Hurting you, needling you. What kind of husband is that? What kind of marriage is this? For you it should be the best, always. I thought he was giving you what I couldn't. What would you have had with me? Tough times — scrimping — dime-store dishes. But hell, more than here. Lots more. I have to come here and look at this and all of a sudden I find out I'm the biggest damn' fool God ever made."

He stopped suddenly. She had bent forward from the waist, her folded arms against her knees, her head on her arms. In the silence he heard her crying softly.

He went around to her, knelt on the damp grass, touched her shoulder. "I shouldn't pop off like that. I'm sorry. Forget I said it."

SHE straightened up. There was just enough light so he could see the glint-track of tears. "You're being honest, Lew. More honest than I deserve, I guess. You ran out and I had too much fool pride to follow you and say, 'Here I am; now what?' Too much pride—and I married him and it was sort of like getting even with something, like a little kid busting the candy-store window. It *was* better than this. You're seeing the worst. This past year has been bad. I'd made up my mind to leave him, and take Chris. It could have been managed easily. He has a little blonde friend, and he's grown a little careless about the details. I could have obtained custody. Then everything started to go sour, for him. You can't desert another human being when they're in trouble, Lew. So I've been coasting, hoping he'd come out of it somehow. Instead, it has become worse. He's like a crazy man most of the time."

"Would you leave him if he got back on his feet?"

"I—I don't know, Lew. Maybe it's too late."

"I could get him out of it."

"Not that way, Lew. Not at your expense, ever. Oh, Lew, this isn't going the way it was supposed to go. I had an act for you, Lew: The happy contented wife. He spoiled all my lines. You see, it isn't that he's *bad*."

"I know that. He's weak. I can understand that part of him, and I can still like him, in a funny way. It's something I can't explain."

"I can't either. But it hasn't been all bad. You have to know that."

He smiled ruefully in the darkness. "Maybe I'd like to hear that it had been all bad."

"No, you wouldn't."

"No," he said, suddenly very weary, "I guess not."

"Turn him down tomorrow, Lew."

"Even if it means you're trapped from here on in?"

She stood up, slim and tall in the night. "I will tell you one thing—and it is something I can't and won't change: If you go through with it and it helps him get back on his feet, I may leave him. I don't know yet. But if I *do* leave him, Lew, it won't be to come to you. I won't be bought—not that way. I'm not for sale, not at the kind of price you'd have to pay."

"Pride, Ivy?"

"Not this time. Something else."

"Don't people ever earn a second chance?"

"Not people like us, Lew. They only give us one chance."

"Maybe I'd just like to have the eight thousand. I can use it."

"Don't try to kid me or yourself. Good night, Lew."

"Good night, Ivy." She started to turn away in the darkness, struck her foot against one leg of the table and stumbled awkwardly against him. He caught her in his arms, held her that way for a frozen and measureless moment, then turned her slowly and bent and found her lips. She leaned warm against him in his arms and she was all he had ever wanted or hoped to have. In their kiss was the heat of longing, and all the sadness of too late.

"That's no good either," she said, stepping apart from him.

"I know."

"I could tell myself it was even-Stephen. Sauce for the goose. Turnabout. But, basically, no good. No good for either of us."

"Good night, Ivy."

"Good night, my darling."

In the morning Jack was full of jokes about bleeding from the eyes, and asking if he had had a good time. Aside from an obviously vicious hangover, he was full of abundant confidence that everything was going to turn out just right. At his insistent invitation, Lew went down to the agency with him.

It was a big establishment with a vast service floor, modern showrooms, and a large staff. Jack led the way into his private office. A petite blonde with a savage-looking mouth gave them a winsome smirk as they went through the ante-office.

"Come on in, Janice," Jack said as they passed her desk.

She came tilting in on four-inch heels, allowed as how she was thrilled to meet the famous Lew Barry—in a sugary Southern voice—and tilted back out again with a quick flash of a smile over her shoulder, a provocative canting of hip.

"Brains of the outfit," Jack said expansively. "Couldn't run the place without her. Little hair of the dog?"

"No, thanks."

Jack downed a lusty shot, heeled the cork into the bottle, and put the liquor back into the desk drawer. He frowned at his watch. "Sammy will be at the gym at ten and we can go over and watch him work out. Suppose you roam around. I've got some detail to go over here. Come back here to my office at about ten of ten. Okay?"

Lew wandered out onto the service floor. He watched a ring job on a truck, watched an overdrive being torn down. He looked through the body-and-fender shop, and watched a trade-in being fixed up for resale. He ambled back to the office at quarter to ten. The blonde was leaning over Jack's shoulder. She straightened up, gave Lew a slightly guilty look and brushed by him, leaving an almost visible trail of perfume.

"How do you like the place, boy?"

"Offhand, I don't."

Jack stared at him. "Hell, it's one of the best layouts in the city."

"Your service department stinks. I hope you aren't paying those plumbers top-mechanics' pay. It isn't laid out right."

"You could do better?"

"Much."

"Relax, Lew. This is my racket. The service department makes money. That's good enough for me. Come on, we got to watch a boy working."

The gym was on the second floor of a brick building that looked as though it had begun life as a warehouse. They walked up the stairs into the stink of sweaty socks and rubbing alcohol and liniment and sweaty leather, into the discord of the staccato bags, the skip-ropes, the electrically-timed bell ringing every three minutes all day long, the harsh yells of encouragement, the smoke haze hanging over a floor littered with butts and cellophane and gum wrappers.

Lew had had thirteen years of it. Thirteen years out of his life—from seventeen to thirty. The amateurs for gold watches and gold medals, and the golden gloves, and the tank towns with their dank basement dressing-rooms and rusty-water showers. Thirteen years of working and learning and dreaming. When you'd never seen the other boy work, you came out and you watched him with that same intentness of the matador watching the *banderilleros* lure the fresh bull into its charges. You felt him out, and you watched the flex of his thighs and the oiled shoulder joint. You slipped them, and rolled with them and blocked them and watched all the time because, though you had color, and a punch in each hand, you were careful and cautious—a workman. And when you saw what he had, then you went to work at the weak points: A right guard held too low, or a too-slow attempt at a counterpunch.

Those were the days of dreams when you were working over the unknowns, hammering out a record. Later came the big boys. You had moving pictures of them; you hired sparring partners who had the same style. And the top boys were rougher, smarter. Maxie, the clown, hit you with one of those wide sweeping rights and knocked you cleanly through the ropes and it took a full twelve count to get untangled from the press boys and climb back in. But the next time you had him laughing out loud, and Maxie always laughed when you hurt him.

You didn't bounce back so fast. The aches stayed with you for long days and nights after a bout. And your shift was a half-step behind, and the counterpunch a whisker slow, and the dreams had faded and it was brutal work. But there had to be money to settle the debts from the crummy investments, and settle a tax thing, and you knew the peak was well past, and yet you signed for the second Louis go, and that impassive chocolate soldier stalked you and caught and pulverized you.

Thirteen years and now it had been over for five years and all you had left was less than two thousand dollars, and a lot of fine print in the record books, and the thickness of scar-tissue on brow and mouth—and yet, luck had smiled a little and had left you with your brain and your eyes undamaged.

He walked up the stairs into his past and they saw him. The ones with the memories came over first and the others tagged along. Jack Terrance strutted massively and waved his cigar and made hints, while the others, pumping Lew's hand, gave him no chance to shut Jack up. He was sorry he had come.

"Lew! Lew!" Jack called. "Here's the next heavyweight champion. Lew Barry, meet Sammy Hode."

Hode was in purple tights. His tanned skin glistened with sweat, his dark hair was tousled. His hands were wrapped up but the gloves were off. The bridge of his nose was flattened, but except for that he was unmarked. Lew liked the look of him, as a person, as a man. He had dark direct eyes, a look of intentness, and yet there was a hint of good humor in his level mouth. He was one of those fighters built like a fire hydrant. Beefed from his ears to his ankles, but with a rubbery bouncy look about his muscles and head set tight to the wide shoulders. Hard to hurt, Lew decided, hard to cut or bruise, hard to hit solidly if he knew how to move.

"Jack gave you the big buildup, Sammy," Lew said, smiling.

"He can be right and he can be wrong, Mr. Barry. I'd just like to get a chance to find out."

"I want Lew to see you work, Sammy."

"Sure, Jack. Mastrik is dressing; here he comes now. Al, you want to ref us?"

They climbed into the center ring. Lew and Jack sat ringside. Jack was hunched forward with his cigar clamped tightly in his teeth. One of the hangers-on helped Sammy Hode strap the face-guard on. Mastrik was a big, strong-looking Polish boy, so blond he was almost an albino. They took corners, scuffed around, came out at the next bell. Lew watched closely. For the first thirty seconds the kid was too eager to make a showing. Then he settled down. His style was deceptive. He would do little bounce steps, gloves at his sides, able to flick either hand into jab, hook or punch. Then he would crouch low and do a flat-footed weave. His punches had snap. He was quick and a sharpshooter. Lew saw it coming in the second round. Sammy, moving to his own right, slammed a solid left hook an inch above Mastrik's belt. The taller man's arms dropped and, as they did, Sammy shifted, moving fast to his own left, measuring Mastrik with a short left jab; then he unleashed a right that Lew, sitting ringside, could feel all the way down to his heels.

Mastrik went down heavily onto his hands and knees, shaking his head. Sammy helped him up and they walked him back to the corner.

Lew found he was breathing hard. Jack leaned toward him. "Like?"

"How old is he and what does he go?"

"Twenty-two, one ninety-six, and he's no bum. College graduate."

"He might make it."

"Might?"

"He's almost too clean, Jack. Too good a kid. This isn't patty-cake he's playing. Can he get sore?"

"I haven't seen it yet. I don't know."

"He'll have to watch his weight. That build takes on fat easy."

"He works it off. He's a worker."

"Look, I didn't like you letting those guys think I might fight this kid."

"What have you got to lose? You scared of him?"

"That doesn't work, Jack. I'm too old for that and you know it."

"Okay, okay. Anyway, I lined up a good boy to train him—old Jud Brock."

"Jud! Is he here?"

"Right over there. Just came up the stairs."

Lew left Jack and went through the crowd. Jud was low-built and bald; his tired eyes tilted down at the outside corners. He had a W. C. Fields nose, and a deceptive look of low comedy.

"What grease pit did you crawl out of, Lew? Come on in here." Jud Brock took him into a small office and slammed the door in the face of a man who tried to follow them in.

Jud leaned against a battered oak desk and filled his pipe, while he stared steadily at Lew. "You working up to be a damn' fool?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Your old pal Terrance—all mouth and no sense."

"He likes to jump the gun, Jud. What the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm retired. I own this place. The poor-man's Stillman's. So I'm training the kid because Morgan gave him some bad habits and he's the best kid I've seen—since a kid named Barry."

"No kid any more."

Jud studied him. "But you haven't gone to slop like most do. You still got a flat belly. But that kid could kill you. I guess you know that."

"I know it. My eyesight is still fine."

"I'm sorry to see you here, Lew."

"Maybe I'm broke, Jud. Ever think of that?"

"Nobody is that broke. Come over here. Take a look."

Lew went over curiously. He recognized the glossy print on the wall at which Jud pointed: A victory booth at Lindy's. He had to think for a moment to remember which scrap it was. He was there in the picture, much younger, and with a fine shelf over his left eye. Six were jammed in the booth. They were all grinning at the flash camera. Jack and Ivy and himself on one side. Jud and Fallow, and on the other side a sports reporter whose name he did not remember. Jud snapped the picture with a horny thumbnail. "Remember what happened that night? Jack had a big deal lined up. I yelled like a banshee, but you turned over half your end of the gate. All he had to do was ask, and you give it to him. His big deal went over like celluloid fire-tongs. It paid off a dime on the dollar two years later."

Jud sighed; he went back to the desk and perched on it like a disabused gremlin. "Otherwise you're smart, Lew. But this one guy could re-sell you the Brooklyn Bridge. Why? I could never get it. He's all mouth; a week ago he tells me you're going to fight the kid on August 1st at the River Stadium. I told him to go back to smoking pod—this mainlining is bad on the imagination."

"What else did you tell him?"

"I told him that if you just happened to go crazy and sign up, it would be a good contest, like sending my maiden aunt in against Sugar Ray. She's only a little bit bedridden."

"Flatterer!"

"I mean it. You can't sharpen those reflexes."

"And if I said I'd risk it because I'm broke?"

Jud lighted his pipe with little popping sounds of his lips He shook out the match and tossed it over his shoulder. "I'd say there's another reason. A two-legged reason—a gray-eyed reason. And, don't forget, son, a married reason."

"I know that. I'm not forgetting it. Indirectly, though, it helps her."

"To get Terrance out of a hole? The whole town knows he's in over his head. The whole city knows he's on the skids for good this time. A temporary break? What good does it do him?"

"I'm already tangled up in all this, Jud. I don't know. Maybe it's a penance for being a damn' fool five years ago."

"She was your girl. Plain as the nose on my face, and I own the plainest nose ever seen in New York. Why did you let her go, anyway?"

"Nothing to offer. That's what I thought."

"If this wasn't my own office, I'd spit on the floor. It would express my opinion. So now you let the kid hospitalize you because you want to punish yourself. If I know you, son, the past five years have been punishment enough."

Lew smiled. "Well, almost enough. Anyway, I'm broke. We can plant a tree in the middle of the ring and I can dodge around it. Let me make a gesture."

"Do you want her?" Jud asked slowly.

Lew watched the boy they wanted him to fight. Young Sammy was good. He had style and deception, his pun hes were quick and hard. Lew, sitting ringside, could almost feel them himself.

Lew felt a mixture of irritation and anger. "That's a hell of a personal question, Jud."

Jud inspected his pipe, tamped the burning tobacco down with a calloused thumb. "Personal, yes. It will take a minute to explain. You got a minute?"

"Of course."

"Remember, Lew, how dirty it was five years ago? The tie-ins and the booking and the continual rape of the financial innocents?"

"I remember."

"Now it's worse. I had a shred of decency left, so I got to hell out of New York. They weren't kidding when they said the whole deal needs a Congressional investigation. It's tighter. You can't wedge your way in. They lay it on the line. If they don't own a piece of your boy, directly or indirectly, and a fairly generous piece, he can't get booked into the big time anywhere in the country. And they've got the dough to buy in, and they've got the muscles, just in case somebody needs their mind changed."

"How does that affect me?"

"I keep my nose to the ground. A very sensitive mechanism, my boy—it picks up all the earth tremors. A damp little specimen named Clyde Sheniver is in town. He's a front for important money. The important money wants a piece of Sammy Hode. He brought two sets of muscles with him—a pair of kids with the wrong-size pupils in their eyes, and the usual touch of acne. Jack needed an advance, so he made a deal with this Clyde Sheniver: Sixty thousand bucks for four-fifths of Jack's contract with Sammy Hode *provided* Sammy knocks out one Lew Barry in the River Stadium on August 1st. Jack took half in advance. Thirty thousand. He has to give it back if it doesn't go through. In plain and simple language, he can't give it back. So, I am an old man and maybe I'm getting tired of the human race. But if you want the lady, just say no. I understand that the current fashion is to make it look like suicide. They got a new gimmick where they run an extension off the tail pipe of a car. You lost her on a rebound and you can get her back the same way."

"It doesn't make sense. Why didn't they just muscle him into selling out at a low figure?"

"Because the big money has tried to get you back in there to help build up the reputation of their punks from time to time and it was always no dice. If Jack can work this, it puts Sammy Hode close to the top in one jump. It's well worth their sixty thousand. And, as I said, this is a real good kid. The best in too many years, I think. See what a sucker you are, to Jack's

way of thinking? He's sold the deal before you ag eed. He knows he can talk you into anything."

Lew sat down quietly, arms on his knees, chin on his chest. Jud kept quiet. After a time Lew heard him knock the ashes out of his pipe; he looked up then.

"It all means this, Jud: It means I've got to go through with it."

"For God's sake, why?"

"He's staked too much on it. He's staked his life on it. I can't let a man down when he makes a bet that big."

"And you'll throw the bout?"

"Don't forget. I just watched the kid out there. All I want to do is stay alive. I'll settle for a knockout. I won't exactly hold my chin out, but I have a feeling he'll find it."

Jud sighed heavily. He slid off the desk, walked around and opened the drawer. He took out a key, walked ac oss the room and handed it to Lew.

"What's this?"

"A place I've got. It's on Lake Gloria fifteen miles out of town, south on Route 80. My name is on the mailbox. All the equipment is there. I'll train the kid right here. You know how to pace yourself. I'll send a good man out tomorrow to cook and clean up, and you can phone me here by the time you're ready for sparring partners."

"You sound as though you knew I'd go through with it before I walked in here."

"I had a visit from a lady the other day. We talked about you. We made a few guesses. She'll drive you out there. You see, I guess we both know you too well. Now get the hell out of here and I'll be in Hode's corner on August 1st, with my hand over my eyes. I sure hate the sight of bloodshed."

Lew walked out steadily, stood flat-footed in front of Jack Terrance and told him he would go through with it. Jack climbed on a chair to announce it. As his harsh excited voice filled the smoky room, Lew saw Sammy Hode over near one of the heavy bags. The boy's face was expressionless. His mouth tightened a bit. He turned, tapped the bag with his left, hit it viciously with a right. The stitches burst and the sand began to pour onto the wooden floor. The boy turned and their eyes met, held, across thirty feet of the smoky room. Lew was the first to drop his glance.

During the first few quiet days at Brock's camp on Lake Gloria, Lew Barry thought often of the strange trip from the city when Ivy had brought him out in the convertible. She had brought Chris along and he had spent his time "killing" all the other cars with a plastic ray gun.

When he had gone back, alone, to the house after agreeing to the bout, leaving Jack to call up the papers, she had taken one long look at him, and turned quickly away, saying, "I knew you would. I hated to think of it, but somehow I knew you would."

"To arrive at any decision, you weigh all the factors as judiciously as possible. That's what it said in the correspondence course on executive training that I took a couple of years ago. About last night, I'm sorry."

"It wasn't your fault or mine. It just happened. It can be forgotten."

"I want you to think over what you said. I keep thinking that maybe you said it too fast. If he gets back on his feet, I want you to leave him. Then take some time—a half-year, or a year. Then we'll be together."

"Don't build up a dream, Lew. We had one chance."

"And I muffed it."

"It was partly my fault, too. I could have put my pride in my pocket for once. But it isn't pride this time. It's something else. Can't you see it? It's a way of buying my freedom. And I don't want it bought that way."

"But now I've told him I'll do it. I can't back out."

"That's too bad."

"You sound so damn' cold."

"Think of it the other way, Lew. Suppose I agreed to that. They kill old men in the ring. In the ring you're an old man. So I pin that in my memory-book. I killed him because that was my price."

"Not your price, but mine. You and Jud, you both seem to think I'm some kind of a zombie. Jack pulls the string and along I come. Don't either of you ever think of the reason for that? You both know the reason. I was nineteen and he was twenty-four and just an acquaintance, a guy who hung around, good for some laughs. And then there was that night when that crazy man came into the dressing-room with a cannon. I was the one who froze. Not Jack! He made the dive, slamming me out of the way, diving at that crazy guy and taking that big slug right in the shoulder, and his momentum piled the crazy guy up against the wall. His arm still doesn't work perfectly. You know that. And the slug would have got me dead center. Everybody who saw it knew that."

"Don't be a shiny-eyed little boy!"

"What does that mean?"

"Suppose it were reversed. You'd have done the same. And forgotten it. You wouldn't have expected Jack to keep paying and paying for the rest of his life just because he happened to be alive, would you?"

"No, but—"

"When he could have paid back the money he chiseled out of you, he made no effort to do so. When you walked out, he was perfectly happy to pick me up on the rebound, without the slightest twinge of conscience. Good old Lew—good old sucker! You make me sick!"

"I'm not doing this for Jack."

"And I insist that you're not doing it for me. I won't allow that."

"So I'm doing it for myself. So I'm broke. Jud said you'd drive me out there. Let's put the show on the road."

He had expected that the fifteen-mile ride would be grim and silent. Instead, Ivy chattered with pleasant, formal gayety all the way. The fight was not mentioned. The quarrel was not mentioned. They found the mail-box and turned down the steep drive-way to the camp on the lake shore. The lake was small and blue and pretty. The camp itself was small and rustic, with a big front porch. Near the camp was a barnlike structure which Lew guessed must contain the equipment. The electricity was turned on and the water was hooked up. Inside was the smell of dust and spring spiders and closed windows. There was a carton on the kitchen table, a stock of canned staples.

They went out onto the porc and he said softly, forgetting the quarrel and the tension, "It's like shutting a door behind you and thinking you'd never open it again, and then you're back in the room you left. But I feel like an—I can't think of the word."

"Impostor?"

"That's it. But it's work I know. It's something I learned to do."

She turned quickly toward him, both hands resting light on his fore-arm. "Lew! Lew, don't try to—to prove anything. Don't try to prove you're as good as you ever were."

"I know I'm not."

"Luck, Lew! The best."

She left. He stood and watched as she backed the car around in the nar-row place, watched as it dug slowly up the hill in low, disappearing around the bend, the small bright face of the boy turned to watch him, ray gun waving in the late afternoon sun-light. He stood there long after he could no longer hear the car, wonder-ing why it never seemed possible to do anything in life with a clear and uncluttered motive, why all actions had to be compromised by strange and conflicting intangibles. He was a big man, and thickened tissues had de-stroyed the original mobility of his features, so that he seemed to be filled with a somber, watchful reserve. He thought of Ivy and his heart turned over, but his face did not change.

That first evening he sat on the porch and watched the lake until the black flies drove him inside. He ate

sparingly, found the bedclothes, made up his bed. The sheets had a damp smell of winter about them. A nightmare awakened him, cold and sweating: He was in the ring with Sammy Hode. Hode had iron gloves, and each blow tore through Lew's body, rending it as if it were damp paperboard. . . .

He took it easy the first few days. The man came out from the city by bus and walked down to the camp. He was a round, impassive Negro, an excellent cook, a relentless housekeeper. His name was Oliver.

Lew gave a lot of thought to how he should train. He was powerful enough. The meaty fibrous layers of muscle rolled hard under his skin. He weighed two hundred and seven on the camp scales, and it would not be much of a problem to bring that weight down to around one ninety-eight without weakening himself. The problem was that of too much intractable toughness in the muscles. He had to limber them, loosen them, make them slide more easily under the skin. With a more resilient muscle tone his arms and legs would respond more quickly and lithely to the messages sent by the brain along the nerve threads, messages that had to be answered in the quickest possible fraction of a second.

He saw that the orthodox training methods would do him little good. Road work would stiffen his legs, would hamper mobility without increasing stamina. Yet it would improve his wind. He compromised by substituting swimming for road work. He gave up cigarettes with an abruptness that left his nerves on edge. The swimming loosened his muscles, improved his wind. He needed to improve his quickness of eye and of reflex. With a certain grim amusement at himself, he sent Oliver into the village to buy tennis balls. Then, doggedly, he started to teach himself to juggle. His hands were slow and clumsy at first, the tennis balls bounding away in all directions. But he persisted, hour after hour, while Oliver would shake his head and mutter and raise clouds of dust with a violent broom. He had no way of measuring improvement in quickness, but he thought he could detect a quickening response.

He phoned Jud Brock. "Jud, I could use one good man."

"One?"

"A good fast light or middle with no punch and a lot of class. He doesn't have to know Hode's style. Can do?"

Jud was silent for a time. He said, "I've got one—an Italian kid. I see what you're trying to do. Pretty smart, son."

"How much will he cost?"

"It's on the house, Lew."

"No. I want to pay."

"Hell with that! How's it going?"

"I can't tell yet."

"Expect him tomorrow. Nice kid—his name is Rillo, Jimmy Rillo. Newspaper guys have been haunting me and Jack. I told Jack to keep his mouth shut about where you are, for a while."

"Good. I'm not ready to show off yet. And start lining up a heavy with the kid's style."

"A hitter?"

"By then it won't matter. But let me pay."

"We'll talk about that. Oliver okay?"

"Fine. He's helping me set up the ring. Send up a new turnbuckle, will you? The threads are stripped on one we have."

"Sure."

THE next day Jud Brock arrived with Jimmy Rillo. Jud said, "Decided to come at the last minute. I'm here as a spy. Boy, you look brown enough."

"In the ring I have to look healthy, Pop."

"Jimmy, take it easy on this old man Barry. He's fragile."

"He sure doesn't look it, Mr. Brock. Nice to meet you, Mr. Barry. I saw you fight Mickey Noonan in Cleveland. It was the first big fight I ever saw. I guess I was about seven years old then, Mr. Barry."

"You better call me Lew, Jimmy. You okay to try a few minutes right now? I want to find out a few things about myself."

"Sure, Lew. I got my stuff right here."

"This I have to see," Jud said softly.

Oliver taped their hands and they put on the big gloves, the headguards. The ring took up two-thirds of the floor-space in the big shed. Sun shafted golden through the high windows, and dust motes drifted in the beams.

Five years, Lew thought, and here you are back in the ring. And that last time you had the right all waiting and ready, waiting for that big brown left shoulder to drop so you could slam it in on the unprotected right cheek, which was the only way anybody ever got to Louis, and you got your chance—but your timing was off and you missed and he killed you.

Jimmy Rillo was nervous. They touched gloves; Jimmy flicked a light jab and Lew tried to knock it away,

Their quarrel was forgotten. "Lew," she said, "don't try to prove anything. Don't try to prove you're as good as you once were." He answered, "I know I'm not."

a third of a second too late. His own jab, in contrast to Jimmy's, seemed like slow motion. Jimmy began to gain confidence. He moved superbly, and hit Lew almost at will. Lew had the strange feeling that he was standing, fighting in water that came up to the bridge of his nose. Only his eyes were out of water. Water slowed his every move. He could see what he should be doing and he tried to force his muscles to respond, but they were always late. Too late. Finally he broke it off and leaned on the top rope, breathing deep and hard. He rubbed the sweat from his eyes with a towel and, tossing the towel aside, met Jud Brock's cold glance.

"It's about what I expected," Lew said, keeping his voice steady.

"Timing will come back. And don't forget, Jimmy is as fast as light. If he had a punch I'd have got him up where he belongs long ago."

"Don't kid me, Jud."

"Okay. I'll tell you. Maybe I'm doing you a favor to tell you: In there you look like the Primo looked in his best days. A jab like an old man throwing a medicine ball—footwork like a dairy horse. You'll improve before the bout, but not enough. When he hits you, son, stay down. If you don't stay down, he'll hurt you. Because you're not quick enough any more to slip them and roll with them. He'll hit you solidly, and he'll hit you seven more times before you hit the floor. It won't be pretty, and I wish to hell I was a plumber or a bird-watcher—anything but this racket."

Jimmy was looking down at the floor in shy silence. Lew walked to the car with Jud. There wasn't much left to say.

EACH day he swam and juggled and went as far as he could go with Jimmy. He did better with the kid, but he knew that it was because he was out-thinking the kid, not moving faster or better. He hit where he planned that the kid would be, and Jimmy, each day, seemed to be moving into the right place oftener. Once, in his eagerness to improve his speed, he hit the kid squarely and solidly. The kid wavered, took a half step, and went flat on his face before Lew could catch him. He was out for over five minutes, and when he came to, he was sick to his stomach. It gave Lew a bitter satisfaction to know that the punch was still there, that even with the big gloves and the protecting mask, it was a numbing jolt.

Each day he tried to pace himself, and he found he could not go more than seven or eight rounds, no matter how careful he tried to be. And he knew that he would be no better by the night of the fight. Just twenty-four minutes of fight left in the thirty-five-year-old body. Twenty-four minutes of all-out effort. From the first bell there would be twenty-four minutes of scrap, with fourteen minutes of total rest between rounds, and it wouldn't be enough.

At the end of eight rounds with Jimmy, his knees trembled and shook like the legs of a foundered horse. His arms were leaden; a vast pain constricted his left side; his mouth was cottony. He could not suck enough air into his lungs. He was quicker, but not quick enough. He sent Jimmy back and another kid came out, a bouncy, arrogant, loud-mouthed kid named Riker. He was a heavyweight and in the first minute of the first workout with him, Lew sensed that the boy wanted to knock him out so that he could go back to the city and strut and crow. The boy was fast. Lew grimly took his punishment, waiting, angling, plodding after the boy, shaking off the heavy punches, feeling his sight grow dim. Then, blocking the boy in a corner, he found his target, went to work, beat the boy to his knees. That ended the arrogance. That closed the loud mouth. That made the boy a suitable, co-operative, wary sparring partner. It earned Lew, from Oliver, a wide, white, appreciative grin.

On the afternoon of the eighth of July, Jack Terrance came out in a big car with two nationally-known sports writers and two reporters from local papers. The bottle had been passed freely during the ride. They were all warm, sweaty, loud and opinionated.

One of the nationally-known writers got Lew aside, and said with drunken solemnity: "That's the trouble with you pugs. None of you know when to quit. Tunney was the only guy with sense. You made your pile and now you got to come back and get your ears batted off. You're kidding yourself, Barry; you were through five years ago. You'll be doing yourself a favor to call this whole thing off right now."

Jack had come within hearing distance. He swaggered over and said: "Listen, you. I didn't bring you out here to talk Lew out of fighting. Hell, this is the only chance I get to show the country how good my boy is."

"So he licks Barry. Does that make Hode good, Terrance?"

Jack grinned. "I know some people who think so."

"Those people you mean, Terrance, they aren't thinking of fighting. They're thinking of the gate. It gives your boy a name. That's all."

"Nobody ever knocked Lew out. Don't forget that."

"And he's your old pal. You two got it fixed which round Barry dives in?" The tone was full of amused contempt.

Lew reached out quite slowly and wrapped his left hand in the material of the speaker's pale sports jacket. He pulled the man close to him, and smiled at him. "You're all mouth, friend. Maybe you better stick to tennis matches."

"You hit me and I'll take every dime you've got."

"I can't hit you, friend, because my hand is bare and I got a fight coming up—but one thing you should know by now, if you've been around. I never took a dive—and I never will. Jack's got a good boy and I'm going to try to lick him. You say anything else in your column, friend, and I'll sue hell out of you." He released the man.

"Will you go a couple rounds with Riker for the boys?" Jack asked.

Lew agreed. He went three rounds. After he showered, Jack came into his bedroom and sat on the bed.

"What did they say about it, Jack?"

"They're down on the porch, yakking. Frankly, you didn't look so good."

"I've never looked good in training. You know that from way back."

JACK leaned back on the bed. "I guess I don't feel right about all this, Lew. I shouldn't have got the ball rolling this way. Watching you out there, I got to thinking it could be bad if Sammy tagged you too hard. I guess I haven't thought about your end of it enough."

Lew could see him in the bureau mirror. "Call it off?"

"I'd like to. But I can't. Not now. Too much on the line now to call it off. It's my only chance to get out from under. I explained all that." He shrugged and grinned weakly. "Ivy won't talk to me. But, Lew, as long as we're in this, we might as well play it smart."

Lew pulled his belt tight and turned. "How do you mean that?"

Jack looked uncomfortable. "I like the way you handled that hint about a dive. That was just right. The way those boys write this up will mean a lot in the odds department."

"Go on."

"Lew, the kid is going to lick you. You know that."

"Probably."

"Let's be practical. The kid *is* going to lick you. I don't want him to hurt you badly. Ivy doesn't want him to hurt you. You've never been knocked out. I got hold of some dough. Say I put up a few thousand for you, Hode to knock you out in the fourth. The worst odds I could get would probably be four to one, calling the round like that. And the kid is a hitter. It won't have to look bad.

Just give him the clean shot and then, even if you don't go out all the way, take too long getting up. It could mean another twelve thousand. Twenty altogether for you."

Lew kept his voice quiet. "How about the kid?"

"I wouldn't want to try to let him know the fix was in. Hell, you can last three rounds. I can do it this way: I can tell him that it will be smart to keep out of your way, keep you working hard for three rounds and then go after you in the fourth. Lew, you've got nothing to lose. It isn't your career any more. And I'm in a hell of a jam. Every nickel counts. I'm in as bad shape as you were that night that hopped-up kid had his finger on the trigger. Remember that night?"

"I remember it."

"I want to get out of the automobile business. I'm getting sick of it. I can keep a piece of the kid. I think we'll move back to New York. It's going to take money. I sell the agency tomorrow, and it just about balances out—debts against my equity in it. And those tax boys are sniffing at my heels. I had to pay something, to stall for time—and now the balance is due."

"If he can get me in the fourth, Jack, he gets me in the fourth."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. If he can't get me then, he can't."

Jack stood up quickly. "You're a damn' fool!"

"Sure. I'm a white knight. I got a shine on my armor. And every morning I shave this face. I turn crooked, and I have to shave with my eyes shut. I might cut myself."

"The world isn't like that. Wake up! You got to make things pay off. The kid is going to knock you out anyway. Calling the round brings in gravy. What's the difference?"

"None, to you. A lot, to me."

There was a grayness about Jack's mouth. "But look! The kid *has* to knock you out. I already—"

"I know about that. Fighting the kid is the last installment I owe you on a debt. Laying down would be something else again. I fight, and the books are clean. All you can do is pray the kid does what you promised. So you can collect the rest of your money, the other thirty thousand, and then sell him to the racket boys."

"Brock told you!" Jack said accusingly. "How did he find out?"

"I'll make a little bet. I'll bet you already told Sheniver the fix was in."

Jack nodded wordlessly.

Lew tucked his thumbs in his belt. "I'll see you around. Better get a ringside ticket. It ought to be an interesting fight."

Jack smiled uncertainly. "It's a rib, isn't it? You'll make it the fourth, won't you?"

"Buy a good seat, Jack."

Jack went out. Lew had kept himself calm. But he could feel cool sweat trickle down his ribs. In a crazy way, that might be the answer. Let it be the fourth. Make it look good. Save yourself a beating. Keep your brains unscrambled.

The girl arrived three days later, at ten in the morning. Lew was two hundred feet out in the lake. Oliver called to him. He swam lazily back to the dock, hoisted himself, dripping, up onto the weathered boards. He guessed her age at about twenty. She was slim and very blonde and quite pretty and very nervous. She clutched a red purse in both hands. There was a battered deck chair on the dock. Lew said, "Hi! You look too nervous to be a sports reporter. Have a seat, and stop jittering."

She sat down, smiled gratefully. "I really don't know what I'm doing here. It's all sort of crazy. It's really advice I want, I guess. And Mr. Brock said you could give me advice better than he could. My name is Marilyn Schantz. I'm—well, I am or I was, engaged to Sammy Hode. We went together in school. Would you—like a cigarette?"

"Go ahead. They're off my list. Just what did Jud say?"

"He said that you'd been through the mill. I don't know what to think. It was like a joke—in school, I mean—Sammy fighting. But he was awfully good. Winning the intercollegiates and all, and he was half-joking about it. That Morgan man got him thinking about the money, and now Mr. Terrance. We talked, and he said in just maybe three years he could make so much money it would help us the rest of our lives. I agreed, sort of. Now it scares me, Mr. Barry, because he's changing. He's different. He thinks about it all in a different way, and there aren't any jokes about it any more. Last week we quarreled about it, a nasty quarrel. You see, I keep thinking it will change him. And I'm not— I don't feel safe any more. I talked to Mr. Brock. He said you know as much as anybody."

She looked at him and a lot of her nervousness was gone. He said, "You mean, is Sammy doing the right thing—that's what you want to know, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Lew studied his knuckles. "My folks were good sound people. But I was a tough, wild, unruly kid. I gave them a bad time. I got in with the wrong crowd. I broke their hearts. I was sent to a reform school. I came out and all the doors seemed to be closed. I fought for peanuts. Jud Brock saw me and took over. He's a good man. Fighting took the bitterness out of me. I guess I needed it. For me, it was a good thing. For me it did something that perhaps nothing else could have done."

"But Sammy—"

"That's just it. I don't see how it will serve any purpose for him. Can he get a job?"

"Oh, yes!" she said eagerly. "He had two good offers and I know he could still—"

"Jack Terrance will sell his contract to some rough people. They'll see that he doesn't get rich. What they won't take, taxes will."

"He won't stop now, though."

"He said that?"

"He said he was the best, and he would prove it and then he'll stop."

"When you're the best, they make you go on proving it until you can't prove it any more. Then you're second-best and you got to keep trying to get to be best again until you get smart enough to realize you're done, or get pounded around the head long enough so you don't realize anything any more, at least not clearly."

"That won't happen to him!"

"It might not. I give you that. Maybe he isn't mean enough."

"What do you mean?"

"He looks like what they call a nice, clean-cut kid. I'm going in there with him. I'll look at him, and before a punch is thrown, I'll hate him. I'll want to kill him. I'll want to smash his face to a pulp. Maybe he won't want to do that to me."

She looked at him almost in horror. "He isn't like that!"

"Maybe you've got to be like that. Maybe he can't be like that. Maybe life has given him too easy a time. You've got to want to smash things."

She bit her lip, looked out across the lake. She turned toward him. "Can you beat him? Can you? Jud says if you do, he's through. He's all done."

"I don't think I can beat him. I might hurt him. I'll try to hurt him. It's my trade to try to hurt him. But he'll win."

She stood up quickly. "Thank you."

"I haven't done anything."

"I found out what I want to know."

"What will you do?"

She smiled. It was a twisted, wry, self-knowing smile. "Stay with him, no matter what happens. I guess that's all I can do."

He watched her go up the path. He slid back into the lake and swam hard for a time, swam with all his strength, winding himself badly. . . .

Ivy came out alone on the last day of July. It was early afternoon. He was sitting on the porch, reading. He

recognized her step, though he hadn't heard the car. He tossed the book aside and stood up.

She smiled at him. "Such concentration, Lew! You look fit."

"A man lives alone and he learns to get drunk on liquor or drunk on books. I'm a reader these days. Sit down—here."

She sat and crossed her legs neatly and lit her cigarette and looked at him over the long exhalation of smoke. "I've read the papers," she said.

"So have I. A lamb going to the slaughter. Nobody comes back. A tired old man fighting youth."

"How is it, actually?"

He sat gingerly on the porch railing. It creaked under his weight. "Rough estimate, half as good as I was five years ago."

"Will you make it a fight?"

"It won't be orthodox, if that's what you mean. I can't outhox him and I can't out lug him. The only thing left is to out-think him. And he is a bright boy."

"Are you scared, Lew?"

He looked at her soberly. "Every time I think about tomorrow night I get knots in my belly; my throat dries up; I sweat; my hands shake. I guess I'm scared."

"But he'll have to work for it?"

"He'll have to work for it, Ivy."

She smiled and some of the tension went out of her. "I don't know why I should be glad to hear that. It would be safer for you if I believed Jack. Something primitive in me, I guess. I didn't like the taste in my mouth when he said you'd lie down. Yet half of me wishes you would."

"How is Jack?"

"I wouldn't know."

He stared at her. "What does that mean?"

She looked away, flushing. "It got a bit impossible--it isn't important."

"You know how important it is."

"After he was out here a few weeks ago, he started drinking heavier than ever. He brought some very unsavory people out to the house. There was a man named Sheniver, and some prime juvenile delinquents. Jack brought them in one day during Chris' nap. They were making too much noise. I tried to quiet them down. Jack hit me and tore my dress. I told him, when he was sober, that he'd better move out until the fight was over. He made an issue of it, but he moved out."

"You'll take that?"

She lifted her chin. "No. Sometimes you come to the end of an obligation. You don't owe anything any more. I've got a little money. My mother will take Chris while I get the divorce. I'm leaving the day after tomorrow, Lew."

"I'll follow along."

She shook her head. "No, Lew. It's like a book. You're in it, and Jack is in it, and Jud, and the crazy years. I'm closing the book. For good."

"You can't make it work."

She stood up. "I came out to wish you luck. Like the old days, Lew—that's all. You put me out of your life; I'm strong enough to do the same thing."

"Will you see the fight?"

"Yes."

"You never saw one in the old days. You said you couldn't."

"I'm seeing it to prove something to myself, Lew."

"Thank you for wishing me luck."

"You're very welcome." She turned on her heel. She did not say good-by. He did not walk to the car. He heard it leave. After a long time he picked up his book again. He could no longer follow the story.

After the weighing-in, Lew went back to the hotel and astonished himself by falling dead asleep. It was a sultry afternoon; the hotel draperies hung limp by the open windows. A pounding on the door woke him. He felt drugged by sleep; it took him a moment to remember where he was, remember what he faced at nine o'clock. There was a sour taste in his mouth, and the sky outside looked like brass. He opened the door. The man was lean and florid and overdressed, and he had a false air of joviality.

"Just checking, Lew. Just checking."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Why, I'm Clyde Sheniver! I got a nice option on Hode. We can give that boy a great future. Too bad that dinky stadium only holds seventeen thousand. It's a sell-out. They're scalping tickets in the street. Hope the rain holds off."

Sheniver had slid inconspicuously into the room. He fanned himself with a cocoa straw hat.

"Is there something special on your mind?"

"Lew, I don't agree with the newspaper punks. I like the look of experience. It tells every time. You got a couple of damn' good fights left in you. Damn' good fights!"

"What's the pitch?"

"Lew, you've got a hell of a reputation for honesty. I don't want to see you lose that."

"Am I going to lose it?"

"It is awful tough to dive with experts watching you. It will make a stink. The kid thinks he can lick you. I do too. But in a square fight, I don't think the kid can knock you out in the fourth."

Lew began to sense what was coming. He decided to play along, to test his guess. "You think I can do better?"

"A good scrap makes the money roll in. Two good scraps make it roll in faster. I sounded the kid out. He's got a wholesome respect for money, just like we have. A good smart kid. Now Terrance has some money riding on a knockout. In fact, the kid has to get a knockout, or we get him cheap from Terrance. That's in the option. I've got a hunch Terrance is wrong. You know how the kid and me see it?"

"How?"

"A nice long fight here, to a decision or a TKO. No knockout. And then a nice fat rematch back East where the big money is. Look how it shapes. I pick up the kid for peanuts—in fact I get a nice bundle back from Terrance, and I know how to take care of people who do me a favor. You get your end out of this, plus a bonus. Then in the big deal back East you get a lot more. You, me, the kid—we all make out. And the public gets two nice bouts."

"And Terrance gets cleaned?"

"Not at all. He makes a profit on the kid. He isn't hurt. Maybe he loses a couple bets. But he still owns a small piece of the kid, so he makes all of it back on the New York fight."

"How does Hode stand on it?"

"You know how the green kids are. I put a little doubt in his mind. I told him Terrance wasn't smart if he asks for a knockout. I told him you're still dangerous. It's a better deal for him to outpoint you, and let the bout go the limit and get the decision. I get your okay and I'll make the talk stronger yet."

Lew looked at the man cautiously. "Nobody likes getting knocked out."

"A deal?"

"I'll put up a good fight. I've said that right along."

"That's good enough for me. Here. Take this."

"Hold onto it. Give me a present later if you feel like it."

"Sure thing." Sheniver eased toward the door. "One thing though, Lew. You still got one hell of a right hand, Riker tells me. Suppose you tag the kid. By accident, maybe. Don't push it. Don't get ideas. We'll have all the ideas, and we got plenty of ideas for the kid's future."

"Now I'm supposed to look scared?"

Sheniver showed a mouth full of oversized teeth. "That's isn't a bad idea, Lew. Not only do you maybe get worked over, but you never get another bout anywhere."

"That would be bad," Lew said, unsmiling.

Sheniver left. Lew took a shower. He ordered a small rare tenderloin, toast and tea. He was eating when the seconds Jud had recommended arrived. It was just five-thirty. . . .

Lew looked cautiously at Clyde Sheniver. "Is it a deal?" Sheniver asked. Lew answered, "I'll put up a good fight." "That's good enough for me," Sheniver said, holding out a sheaf of bills. "Hold on to it," Lew said. "Give me a present later, if you want."

He went through the long concrete tunnel and dressed for the bout—shoes light and tight, black trunks fitting snugly, hands in binding white tape. He sat on the table, his legs swinging. Over the table was a green shade, a bright bulb. The reporters had left. He tried the mouthpiece, bit hard on it, then dried it off and handed it to his second. The man tucked it in the pocket of his white shirt. Lew wiped his face on the towel that hung around his neck. Once he thought he had heard more thunder. It had rumbled almost constantly just below the horizon ever since eight o'clock. But thunder was lost in the surf-sound of the crowd as they cheered the preliminary bouts. There was a calendar taped to the concrete wall. It was a picture of a pretty girl climbing over a fence; her skirt had caught on the fence, exposing an improbable area of pink, curving thigh. He looked at the girl on the calendar and tried to think of something besides the fight now at hand.

Jud Brock came in with an official to inspect the tape job on his hands. Jud winked dourly at Lew, gave his bare shoulder a quick shy pat.

"You like the salts between rounds?" the tall second asked.

"Only if I got a pair of glass eyes. Keep plenty of water on me."

"Hell of a hot night for it."

"Take it easy with the collodion. A little bit is plenty."

"You a bleeder?"

"I cut easy over the eyes."

"Here. I'll rub some vaseline in your eyebrows. We'll try to keep you greased. I—I don't suppose you want no advice?"

"Only if you see something I seem to be missing. I'll pace myself."

They waited in silence. The crowd roared louder than before. He knew what it meant: A knockout in the semi-final. The back of his neck felt stiff as he waited for it: it came sooner than he expected: A loud hammering on the door.

"Okay! Front and center."

Lew swung his feet up onto the table, stretched out, closed his eyes. "That's us," the tall second said in a worried tone.

"Take it easy. Let the kid sweat out there."

"Sure."

He tried to relax, but he was tight all over. He let the minutes go by. There was another irate hammering on the door. "Snap it up in there!"

"Coming right out," Lew yelled. He didn't move. He waited until he heard the heavy stomp of thousands of feet in unison, that time-worn gesture of crowd impatience. Then he stood up slowly, and faked a stretch and yawn. The tall second hung the lightweight robe across his shoulders. The other one picked up the pail and the bottles. The tall second took the kit. They went out.

The sound was enormous in the corridor, like being inside a drum during parade. He went ahead, down the long, long aisle between the customers, hearing the rhythmic stomping falter and die away to be replaced by hooting and catcalls and a cheer much feebler than it would have been had he come out on time.

He went up between the ropes, saving his strength, sitting heavy on the

stool, noting with grim pleasure that Sammy Hode was bounding nervously around in his corner, yanking at the ropes, grimacing at the crowd. The arc lights were blue-hot, and a swarm of dazed moths spiraled endlessly. A flunky attacked them with a DDT bomb while the crowd jeered. The moths, poisoned, banged senselessly around the ring. Lew made a mental note to maneuver Hode into the insects whenever he could. Make every break and take every break.

He closed his mind to the formalities, the announcements, the fighters and civic figures who clambered up to bow and then prance to each fighter to wish him luck. Lew sat with his eyes half-closed. It had been a long time since he had been stirred by the crowd or by the crowd noise. They were a necessary evil. To him it had always seemed as though all fights were conducted in dead empty silence, and only between rounds, or during a knockdown, did he become partially aware of the great breathing roaring beast beyond the perimeter of the lights.

He ambled out and listened to the "break when I say break" routine, and kept his eyes focused on Hode's middle, noting with pleasure that the kid was breathing too fast, too hard. His big chance—a great big deal! Knock out old Lew Barry for the people! A punk kid—a wise kid. Smack him down where he belongs! Not up here with the pros, up here with the workmen. . . . He felt the slow anger moving and turning inside of him. He felt the tightness of his face, felt with pleasure the alive weight of the slabbed muscles of his shoulders and arms. *This is my business, sonny. Tonight you take a lesson. Tonight you yell for Mother.*

The referee shoved the mike out of the way. The lights along the perimeter fence faded out. He went back to his corner. The tall second yanked off the robe and stuck out the mouthpiece. Lew tapped it in place with the tip of his new glove, broke the padding a little more across the knuckles, took two long slow pulls at the top ropes, bending his knees deep; then turned at the bell, shuffling out, chin safely behind his left shoulder to touch gloves with the eager bouncy kid.

The kid danced and pranced, and Lew shuffled stolidly after him, knowing that these first few moments would set the pattern of the bout. Five years dropped away as though they had never been. He knew that he had handled the training right. He had hit the best peak he could achieve, and hit it right on the button. The kid rapped him in the forehead with two brisk jabs and Lew, waiting for the right, saw the flicker of motion in time to stab it away with his left and thump his own right under the boy's heart, solidly enough to make the crowd yell.

Sammy danced back, tried too fancy a shift and stumbled. He covered himself again with grotesque, ludicrous haste. Lew stepped back, lowering his arms, a grandstand play which got a cheer from the crowd. Hode danced back and darted in, and hit Lew one solid disconcerting smash before Lew tied him up in a clinch. In the clinch Lew found that the kid was no infighter. So Lew leaned contentedly on him, tying him up tightly, then working one arm free to hammer down onto the boy's kidneys, two solid chopping blows of the kind that wear a man down. Yet it worried him that the boy had tagged him so readily. He had felt the blow before he had seen it. And hitting that sturdy opponent was like hitting hard rubber. His hands seemed to bounce off the rubbery interlaced muscles. A tough kid—no doubt of that.

They circled each other with sudden mutual caution, then Lew tried to open the boy up. He let the right go and saw, too late, that he was outsmarted. The boy came up inside with a hard left hook to Lew's middle. It made him grunt. He touched Hode with two long harmless left jabs and at the bell they were circling.

Lew plodded over and slumped onto the stool, eyes half closed. He filled his mouth with water and let it run down his chest into the waistband of his trunks. It felt cool and good.

He stood up at the warning buzz, and, at the bell, let Hode come across the ring to him. Lew tried a classic foot-feint, pivoted, caught Hode a fraction off balance, and drove his best left home to the jaw. Hode bounced and shook his head and came in hard and fast. Lew tied him up in the corner after taking a hard smash under the eye. He leaned on the kid and felt dull discouragement. The kid could be tricked, but he was too fast to hurt. He hammered the kidneys again, then made a grandstand play of breaking clean.

The kid came in and suddenly Lew was sitting on the seat of his pants on the floor, his head ringing, his eyes temporarily unfocused. His head cleared quickly and he could have gotten up at the count of four. It bothered him that he hadn't seen the punch coming. The kid was in a neutral corner, breathing hard, looking happy and confident. Lew took the full nine, came up, let his gloves be wiped on the referee's shirt. He was conscious of the crowd's roar. He moved away stiff-legged, and it suckered the kid into coming in fast for the kill. Lew moved to meet him with a right and a left and a right that were hard but seemed to do little damage. The kid bounded back uncertainly, circled and came in again. Another unseen blow rocked Lew badly and he hung on, forcing the referee to pry him loose from the clinch. The kid was coming in again as the bell sounded. Lew slouched gratefully onto the stool.

"What did he hit me with?" he said to the tall second.

"The knockdown? A left. And when you hung on, it was a right."

"He's too damn' fast."

The second grunted. *Keep this up,* Lew thought, *and you're going to take a hell of a licking.* Nice clean fun. Nice sport for the youngsters. He thought of the slim, blonde, nervous girl. He remembered one of his first important fights, when an aging pug had worked him over neatly.

He was up just before the bell rang. Ivy was out there some place. Jack was watching his good old pal. This was a slick kid. A well-trained kid. He knew the whole book; learned it in college. Well, kid, we now give you a post-graduate course. We give you a master's degree in the fight game. All from yours truly, Lew Barry, who has just decided that chivalry is dead.

A slip of a wife roasts her husband, stout-hearted though he may be, without a fire, and hands him over to premature old age.

—Hesiod

He let the kid storm over to him and he covered up quickly, moved into a clinch. In the clinch he worked his left free, brought it up inside, rapping his wrist against the kid's throat, then wiping the inside of the glove and laces up across the kid's face, forcing his head up, using the leverage to force the kid away from him out of the clinch, then crossing the right hard against the kid's cheek, twisting the glove in the moment of impact, splitting the flesh cleanly. The referee stormed in, shouldered him over to the ropes and bawled, "Fight clean!"

The kid was bleeding. Lew made himself smile and ceremoniously insisted on touching gloves. The kid looked puzzled. He bounced in, jabbing stiffly, and bringing the right hand home. Lew moved his head a fraction of an inch and the blow that would have felled him for the night missed. Lew groped his way into a clinch, and, letting himself go slack, he banged the cut cheek with his head.

He heard the kid gasp. He hammered the kidneys, then trod heavily on the boy's instep, wiped his glove upward across the kid's face again.

The referee shouldered him over and said, "One more little deal like that and you lose the round."

"Dear me," Lew said thickly around the mouthpiece.

He smiled broadly at the kid and went out, both gloves outstretched. As the kid started to touch gloves, Lew banged him hard in the mouth, then muscled him back into a clinch, laying him against the ropes, leaning against him, hearing the irate boo of the crowd. He suddenly broke the clinch himself and, grasping the top rope in his left glove for leverage, hooked Hode hard with his right, hooked him on the injured cheek. Stung, Hode came after him. Lew bounced off the ropes and came forward, arms high, protecting his face, throwing himself into a clinch again as the kid tried futilely to get one clean punch home. In the clinch he spun the kid back against the ropes, burning his back. The bell sounded as the referee was yammering and prying at them. Lew

> There is one thing more exasperating than a wife who can cook and won't, and that is a wife who can't cook and will.
>
> —*Frost*

had his shoulder comfortably tucked under Hode's chin and he brought it up sharply after the bell.

Lew padded slowly to his corner and eased himself onto the stool. The crowd was booing him with a single voice. He decided mildly that he was unlikely to win any popularity contests. He looked idly across at the kid. They were pouring advice into both of the kid's ears, but he didn't seem to be listening. He was staring across at Lew and looked likely to break into tears. Hode had taken a humiliating roughing-up. He'd been hurt and outraged. Lew thought of all the times it had happened to him, of the times he had taken it and weathered it and refused to let it anger him beyond the point of caution. It was something Hode had to learn sooner or later, and this was as good a time as any. He checked his own body, felt the hint of putty in his legs, and the beginnings of pain in his left side.

At the fourth-round bell he let the kid come to him, as before. Lew blocked an overeager left, took a jolting right and fell into a clinch, working his elbows and shoulders against the kid, saying, over the crowd-roar, "May I have this dance?"

Hode cursed him and wasted his strength trying to break free. The referee pried them apart. As the referee went between them, Lew slammed a long looping right flush against the kid's nose. Again the referee warned him. Lew smiled at the kid. Hode was close to tears. He came flailing in, all science forgotten, all skill ignored, intent only, like a small boy in a schoolyard, on inflicting maximum damage in the minimum length of time, wasting three wild roundhouse swings to land one. Lew could dimly hear the kid's crew in his corner yelling to him to take it easy.

Lew let the slapping punches make dramatic sounds on his shoulders and the sides of his head. He smiled inwardly, planted himself flat-footed, picked his spot, and dropped the right on the exposed jaw of the maddened Hode. It dropped the boy and he scrambled up at the count of two, his eyes wet, his mouth contorted, windmilling his way in again, intent only on killing the mocking man who had humiliated him and knocked him down.

Lew rode the punches, and he was now in his element, now in control, now in the driver's seat. The boy's right eye was puffing shut. His mouth was cut. Lew dropped his weight onto his heels and made no attempt to feint or jab. He just kept himself covered, picked the spot again and dropped the short smashing overhand right on the exposed shelf of jaw.

Hode stood still, eyes, blank, arms dropping slowly. As he wavered, Lew coldly, clinically, put the right hand in exactly the same place, turned his back and walked to a neutral corner —hearing behind him the sudden tumble of heavy limbs and body onto the taut canvas. He turned in the corner and rested his arms along the top ropes, sucking the hot August air deep into his lungs through his open mouth.

At the count of seven, Hode, surprisingly, got his arms under him, pushed his shoulders up off the floor. At nine his arms crumpled and he fell back to lie still. Police came into the ring. Lew was comforted to see them. His band was raised and the announcement was made:

"In two minutes and seven seconds of the fourth round—"

A cigar butt, thrown in fury, snapped against Lew's forehead and the shower of sparks stung his left arm and shoulder. He showed no expression. He stayed well inside his cordon of police, and his seconds huddled near him. After the interminable walk, the dressing-room door closed off most of the subdued mutterings of the departing throng.

He said to the tall second, "Lock the door and find out who wants in each time. I'll tell you who to let in."

Lew stretched out on the table, listening to the gradually slowing thud of his heart, the diminishing tempo of his breathing. He rolled over and the other second worked with hard, deft fingers on the calves of his legs, on his shoulders and the nape of his neck. A long hot shower would help keep away some of the stiffness.

"Jud Brock outside," the tall second said.

"Let him in alone."

Jud came in. Lew sensed him standing by the table; he craned his neck and smiled up at Jud.

"The most popular man in town," Jud said.

"I'm crying because nobody loves me any more."

"It was the only way you could do it, wasn't it? You're an evil ol' man, Lew."

"If I hadn't, somebody else would. You know that."

"Are you making excuses?"

"No, Jud. It's a man's game, they tell me. And he turned out to be a boy."

"A sad, wise boy at the moment. Going to stop in?"

"I guess not. Give him my love. Tell him to pick a new business."

"He will. You lost me a good boy."

"Not you. You wouldn't stick after Sheniver took over."

"No. So there's no beef. That girl of his, she'll probably send you Christmas cards from now on. Right now, you know, you could swing a title shot. Louis isn't around any more. It might work."

Lew sat up and waved the second away. "Thanks—that felt good. . . . No, Jud, not me. And a funny reason I've got. I wasn't having any fun out there. I was damn' near bored. Know what I mean?"

"You mean the racket is a game for boys, and you grew up late. I haven't any idea what I'm thanking you for, but thanks anyway. I got to go back and hold the kid's hand." Jud went toward the door and turned. "What's with Jack?"

"I don't know, Jud, and for some reason I don't care."

He took his long hot shower, and dressed slowly. It seemed a great effort to tie his shoes. He inspected himself in the mirror, fingered the swollen areas of soreness. His right hand was badly puffed. There were dimples where the knuckles should be. As he opened the door into the corridor, Jud came in quickly. His eyes were uncertain and the W. C. Fields nose was the only color in his face.

He said, "Better stay in here a while. Jack is coming along with company."

"Why didn't he beat it home?" Lew demanded angrily.

"He was waiting for a chance. They outwaited him. Here they come."

Lew stood still for a moment, then stepped slowly out into the corridor. The scuff of shoes on concrete was a hollow sound in the corridor. Another fifty feet and they would be out in the dark night.

Jack Terrance walked reluctantly. Clyde Sheniver held one arm. The two strange young men were hulking, soft, sullen. One walked on the other side of Jack, and one directly behind him. Jack's face was pasty gray and he tried to smile at Lew, but his lips trembled and the smile died out quickly.

Lew said easily, "Come on in here a minute, Jack. Want to have a word with you."

Sheniver said, in his jovial, big-toothed way, "Jack's got a date with me, Lew. And then maybe later you and me, we could have a little talk. What do you say?"

Lew moved over in front of them. The corridor was narrow. He saw Jud Brock swallow hard, then move gallantly out to stand near him.

"I'd like to talk to you now, Jack," Lew said.

"You better get out of the way," Clyde Sheniver said. "We got a little talk about money coming up."

"Let him keep the money and you take the kid," Lew said, trying to sound reasonable.

"Thirty big bills for a kid you spoiled? He won't fight again."

"You've got to give me a little time," Jack said in a low earnest confidential tone, smiling into Clyde's face.

Lew saw that the big, sullen kid behind Jack stood very close to him—a bit too close. In the cold glare of the corridor lights, Lew could see the pin-point pupils, the granular look of the skin of the soft face. He managed to move a bit closer. As Sheniver started to speak, Lew reached out fast, grabbed the front of Jack's suit, yanked him, spinning, away from the trio, to trip and fall somewhere behind him. The naked blade of the switchknife was exposed, the blade that had been held against the small of Jack's thick back. The soft white face contorted and as the blade flickered up, Lew kicked him as hard and as quickly as he could, spun and smashed his swollen right hand into the face of the other one.

Jack was on his feet again, and making a thin whining sound. Sheniver had put his back against the corridor wall. His mouth worked. Lew looked down into his face and said, "No—not this time. You had the word: I told you I'd put up a fight. I—"

But Sheniver's eyes had switched to a point down the corridor, and Lew heard Jud's hoarse yell of alarm, Clyde's shrill yell of protest, the hard slap of shoe leather against concrete. Then Jack's shoulder hit him and spun him away and he heard an odd sound. He turned. The creature he had kicked was on one knee, empty hand extended in a follow-through after having thrown something. The face was as empty as the hand, and it was a nightmare emptiness, more vicious than any expression could be. Jack stood in the harsh lights, feet planted, the haft of the knife protruding incongruously from the white fabric of his shirt just above the waistline, between the unbuttoned suit jacket.

He had an odd, proud, laughing look. Clyde Sheniver cursed the knife-thrower in a shrill panicky voice. Then Jack said, and his voice was like a voice from long ago, "How many times do I have to save your neck, you stupid box-fighter?" And the echoing clamor of police whistles drowned the rest of his words.

JUST after three A.M. Ivy came down the hospital corridor to the waiting-room and Lew got up stiffly. She looked at him almost without recognition, then came over and stood in front of him.

"They . . . they said it shouldn't have been enough to . . . cause death, but it was his heart. Too much weight, too many cigars, late nights, drinking. And they said nobody should have let him walk to the ambulance."

"There was no stopping him. He was like a kid proud of a black eye."

"Oh, Lew, I—"

"Easy, now. I'll get you home."

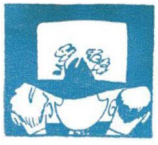
She looked up at him, a child's solemnity in her level eyes. "I can't cry." She touched her throat. "All knots, Lew. Right here."

She leaned forward and, like a tired child, pressed her forehead against his chin, eyes downcast. He put his big arm around her shoulders with great gentleness. He turned her slowly; then, shortening his stride to match hers, he walked her slowly out of the hospital to the car. The rainstorm had come at one o'clock. The stars were out again. The air had a washed smell, incredibly new and clean. He knew she had been wrong. Sometimes there was a second chance. Somebody had to buy your second chance for you. The price was dear, and only a fool would waste it. •

". . . only a moose trying to get in the door. Can anybody beat three jacks?"

RELAX and ENJOY

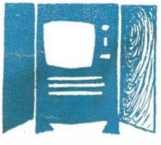
MOVIES



Western: ***The Redhead from Wyoming*** *(Universal)*. Take one range war, some villainous rustlers, a dancehall queen and a strong hero, for the story ingredients, add Maureen O'Hara and Alex Nicol to bring the story to life—and the result is an entertaining evening of the weight-off-your-feet variety. There's plenty of violent gunfighting and Miss O'Hara at her gorgeousest to provide excitement, plus color to give everything the Hollywood touch, which is appropriate and pleasant here.

Action Love: ***The Pathfinder*** (Columbia). Based on James Fenimore Cooper's classic novel of colonial war and romance, and filmed in color, this action story is as good on film as it has been in print—and much easier to "read." George Montgomery in the title rôle as a scout is sent by the British to do espionage in a French stronghold and learn the plans to regain control of the Great Lakes region. Helena Carter, posing as a French girl, is sent along to make sure there are no slip-ups, and of course the couple finds time for romance along with their spying. Things progress smoothly until they are exposed and condemned by a renegade Britisher, Bruce Lester, to whom Miss Carter was formerly engaged. Rescue arrives in the nick and everyone except the French and the renegade live happily ever after.

TELEVISION



Miscellaneous: Now that ***Omnibus*** has gotten over its self-consciousness, it has turned into a consistently first-rate show. Avowedly trying to be what its name implies—something of interest to everyone—it must, as a result, offer some things that are of little interest to certain viewers. You'll find, however, that these items become fewer as time goes by. For example, after enough exposures to the excellent ballet sequences which are a fairly steady part of the Omnibus diet, it's easy to see that there is plenty of excitement and drama in the dance and that it's not the esoteric fiddle-faddle so many people think.

Mystery: The ubiquitous ***Boston Blackie*** has been gumshoeing around the TV channels for quite a while now in a filmed series with a picture quality as murky as some of the plots. Kent Taylor, in the title rôle, plays out each episode with an intent grimness that sometimes seems more trouble than it's worth. The "action quotient" is up to par, however, and very often there's plenty of excitement in this half hour. Boston Blackie is especially notable for the presence of the slickest custom-built hot-rod this side of Captain Video.

BOOKS

Adventure: ***The Velvet Doublet*** (Doubleday, $3.95) by James Street. Written with an amazing understanding of the great Age of Discovery and the true state of Christopher Columbus, this vivid novel of a young Andalusian sailor catches all the fire and color of the flamboyant Spain that existed 350 years ago when the scimitar of Islam flashed across North Africa. Constantinople had fallen to the Turk, old Quimadore was burning the infidels, and a few far-sighted men looked westward across the ocean in hopes of finding a new and shorter route to the wealth of the East.

Adventure: ***Killers in Africa*** (Doubleday, $3.00) by Alexander Lake. Here are perhaps the most hair-raising tales ever written about hunting in Africa, told with zest by a professional "meat hunter." With a good-natured, wry humor, Alexander Lake debunks the amateur big-game hunting yarns with his own true thrillers, and explodes many of the misconceptions about African animals. Did you know, for instance, that the lion is dangerous only about twice a week, when he is hungry? Mr. Lake drives home the little-known facts about animals through anecdotes and exciting stories in this, the perfect book for the armchair hunter and the wild-eyed tourist bound for Africa.

RECORDS

Classical: Victor's latest operatic release from its great HMV catalog is the complete ***Boris Goudonoff***, with Boris Christoff in the title rôle turning in a magnificent performance . . . Some of the world's greatest solo artists are available on other Victor recordings, including violinists ***Heifetz*** and ***Menuhin***, pianists ***Rubinstein***, ***Kapell***, and ***Solomon***, and singers ***Flagstad*** and ***Lehmann***, all performing outstanding selections from their repertoires.

Movie Music: MGM comes up with a triple threat, offering the great Sousa marches from the sound track of "***Stars and Stripes Forever***" and the dramatic music of Miklos Rosza from "***Ivanhoe***" and "***Plymouth Adventure***." Good listening.

Popular: The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, which we've praised before in this column, is represented by a Victor album called ***New Directions in Music***. Don't let the high-falutin title scare you off. This is the finest dance-band music to come along in years.

NOTE: All records reviewed are available on all three speeds.

Bluebook

ADVENTURE IN FACT AND FICTION

25c
MARCH

BIG SPRING FICTION BONUS

TWO great thrill-packed novels for men, all complete in this issue:

1: *For mystery fans, "Mark of the Beast," by Walter C. Brown. A vivid, compelling story about a man who wakes one day to find himself charged with murder!*

2: *For sports followers, "The Second Chance," by John D. MacDonald, top writer of action stories for adventure readers. A whale of a story of a fighter on the comeback trail.*

PLUS THESE OTHER GREAT FEATURES

THERE IS A SHANGRI-LA! *by General Victor Gordon*—**ESCAPE,** *by Philip Ketchum*—**WOULD YOU CALL HIM FRIEND OR ENEMY?** *by Oreste Pinto*—**HOW TO MAKE A MILLION DOLLARS,** *by Lester David*—**PIPELINE TO ARABIA,** *by Lee Sheridan*—**RELAX AND ENJOY IT,** *by George Scullin*—**THE HIGH COST OF SWORDFISH,** *by Arthur Marx*—**FLIGHT INTO FLAMES,** *by John Rhodes Sturdy*—**WHIPPLETREE,** *by Frank O'Rourke*—**HERMIT ON BIKINI,** *by John Langdon*—**HANGING SPREE,** *by Hascal Giles*—**THE SPECIALIST,** *by Brian Moore*