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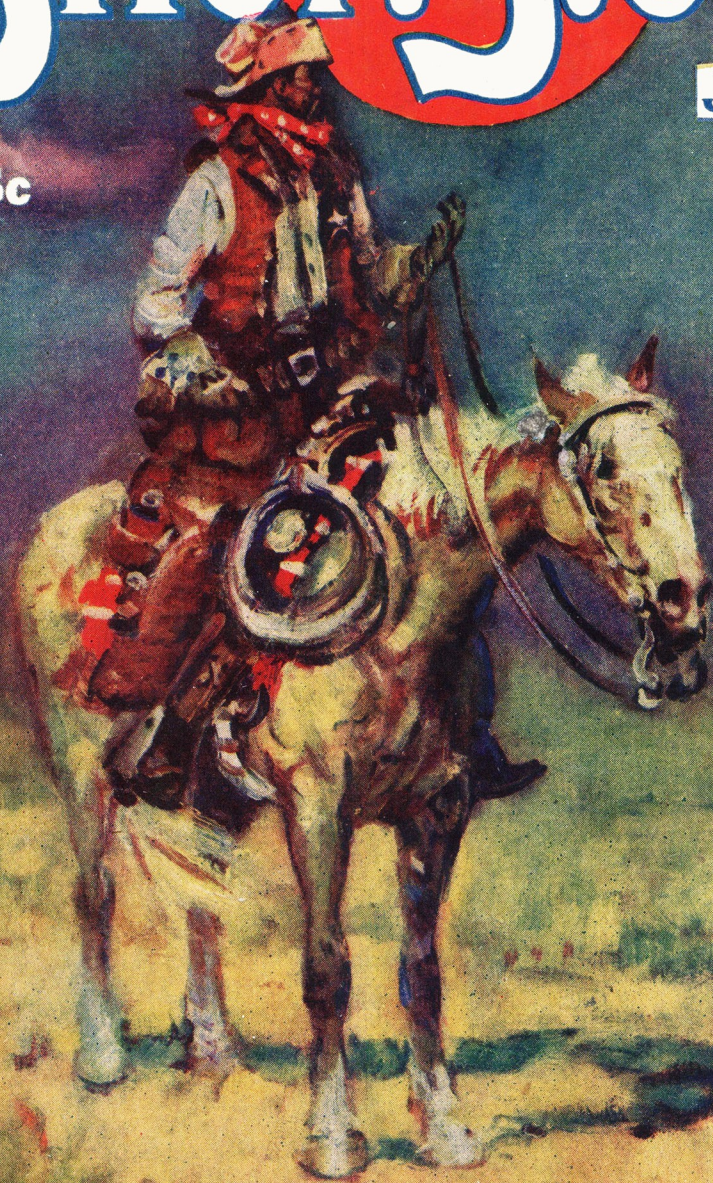
"Bury Me Deep in a Box Car"—WILLIAM L. ROHDE

Short Stories

ANC

June 25th

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"Dead Men Don't Need to Talk"

A Hashknife novelette

W. C. TUTTLE

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1948

June 25th, 1948

SHORT STORIES

A Man's Magazine



**GERMS
FLAKES
SCALES**



*Don't
neglect*
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DANDRUFF!**

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- THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE** 4
- DEAD MEN DON'T NEED TO TALK**
(A Long Novelette) **W. C. Tuttle** 6
Best Man with a Gun? Hashknife Had Often Been That.
Best Man at a Wedding? Well, That
Was Something Else Again
- WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME** **Wilbur S. Peacock** 34
After Tomorrow, I Could Ask if Anyone Would Give a Job
to a Washed-up Punch-Jockey. Who'd Take a Guy
Who Was Almost Champ and Let Him
Work for Peanuts?
- THE SHOOTER'S CORNER** **Pete Kuhlhoff** 42
- ISLAND FREIGHTER**
(A Novelette) **Charles Yerkow** 44
The Captain Had His Reputation on His Mind; the Agent
Had Loot on His Mind; the Beachcomber Had Gold on
His Mind—and Didn't Know What to Do About It
- CURIODDITIES** **Irwin J. Weill** 65
- YEAR OF THE FLOOD** **Crawford Sullivan** 66
The Wabash River in Flood; It Washed Away Some
Prejudices, Showed Up the Value of Professional
Training and Let Loose a Tiger
- THE JUNGLE SHAWL**
(Third Part of Four) **Frank Gruber** 74
Sam Cragg Said the Only Way Chickens Interested Him
Was Southern Fried. But Johnny Fletcher Thought
a Lot of Characters Were Interested in
Other Aspects

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EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

June 25th, 1948

CONTENTS

THE RIGHT TO COMMAND **R. W. Daly 93**

It Was a Command That the Treasure Ship Reach Home in Spain. It Was the Insolent Boast of the English That "A Spanish Ship Chased Was a Spanish Ship Captured."

FUGITIVE FROM INJUSTICE **Frank Richardson Pierce 103**

Grandfather Was an Oldtime Chechako; His Advice Was, "Pick Up Your Hand, Look at Your Cards, and Play 'Em the Best You Can. The Next Deal May Be a Better One. The Important Thing Is to Stay in the Game."

THE MAN WHO MADE IT RAIN **Sam Carson 116**

Banjo Shedd Was Over-awed by the Man Who Claimed He Could Make It Rain. And in the End the Faith of Banjo Shedd Vindicated Itself

BURY ME DEEP IN A BOXCAR **William L. Rhode 122**
(A Novelette)

Railroad Dicks Don't Rate G-Man Headlines, but They Die Just As Dead. Mo Daniels Tackled a Job—Complete with a Free Pass to the Pearly Gates

COVER—Benton Clark

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

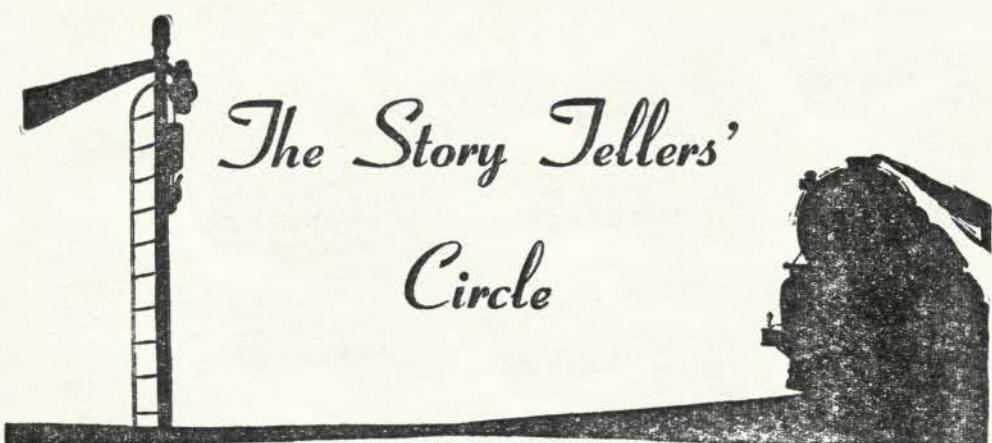
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AUTHOR'S
FINEST
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REPRINTS



The Story Tellers'

Circle

Patrolling the Railroads

"BURY Me Deep in a Boxcar"—and isn't that a neat title? At least we liked it—concerns the railroad and that hard-working creature the RR dick.

We're partial to railroads and heartily agree with author Bill Rohde that the good ones who patrol our highways of steel are really good.

They say house dicks have no honor in their own hotels. Well, Rohde tells us, for many, many years railroad policemen have been about as popular with railroad men and their friends as temperance workers at an Atlantic City convention.

"The breed sort of earned their bad reputation," he continues, "bobbing up now and then as stool-pigeons, spies, and what-have-you. The good apples in the barrel—the square-shooting, hard-working lads who earn their low pay and are ready to risk their necks in a tough job, just don't have the glamor to hit the headlines.

"The real Mohawk Daniels has been a railroad dick for twenty years, with time out for a hitch in the cavalry during the last Great Adventure, a tour of duty that carried him through the MP outfit and up to Intelligence. I knew him in the Thirties—and where do you think I saw him last summer? Pounding the macadam around the railroad station where I first met him!

"We very shortly repaired to the grog shop where we'd hoisted a considerable number in the old days, but I didn't learn much—except for the repeated suggestion that I stick around town for the evening and we'd 'have a time.' Maybe like the time we stole the fire engine and . . . but I digress.

"My friend did say, in a few short words, why he had returned to his job as a railroad dick—and to a beat in the sticks, apparently the only area he had seniority enough to hold.

"'I like it,' he said, 'and I know it.'

"So he took off his captain's bars and put on the railroad blue again! They let him wear three blue stripes now, a 'sergeant' . . . but don't ever weigh 'em up against a State Trooper!

"Well, as to whether he knows his job or not, let me tell you about the time a lad in Boston beat his girl-friend into a pulp and lit out. There was quite an uproar for three days or so, and then Mohawk Daniels called in and said that he had the wanted man in a station in western Massachusetts.

"The detectives who brought the fugitive in had their pictures in the papers with him. Daniels' beat was in Boston at the time—he had trailed the man because he used the railroad to leave town! If I'm not mistaken, Daniels name was not mentioned in the newspaper accounts!

"There were several other cases that Daniels stuck to like a bulldog and then surrendered the bone and the blue-ribbon to someone else. Daniels never mentions them—but other people do.

"Mo has never turned in a Rule G violation—he once told me, 'I wish the guys would understand that I'm a railroad man, more than a cop. I'd hate to think there was any rail wouldn't take a drink with me.'

"'Mohawk' will read this, so here's a personal—I'll be up to see you in August—and I'm buyin'!

"Once upon a time I tacked a note onto
(Continued on page 141)



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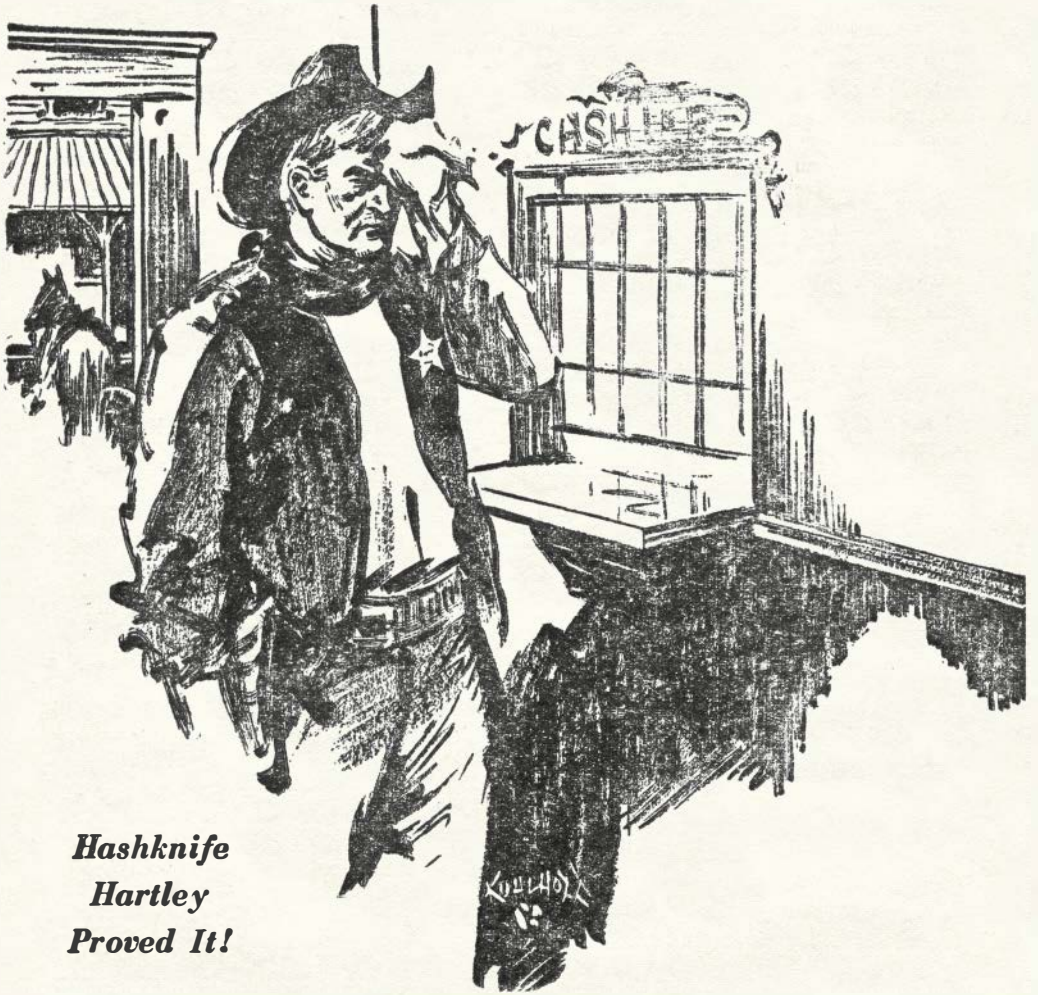
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DEAD MEN DON'T NEED



Hashknife Hartley Proved It!

THE little shack smelled of stove-polish and tequila, combined with the odors from an oil lamp, which needed trimming. Rainy Knight, the sole occupant of the shack, was almost seven feet tall, and it was quite difficult for him to stoop all the way over to polish his boots.

Rainy Knight was "duded-up" for a special occasion, and his nerves were somewhat frayed around the edges. A borrowed frock coat and his own well-faded overalls might seem incongruous to a particular person, but to Rainy they were wholly adequate, as were the yellow shirt and the bilious-green necktie.

Rainy had slicked his hair down, shaved entirely too close, and now he surveyed himself in a cracked mirror, his brows lifted in interrogation.

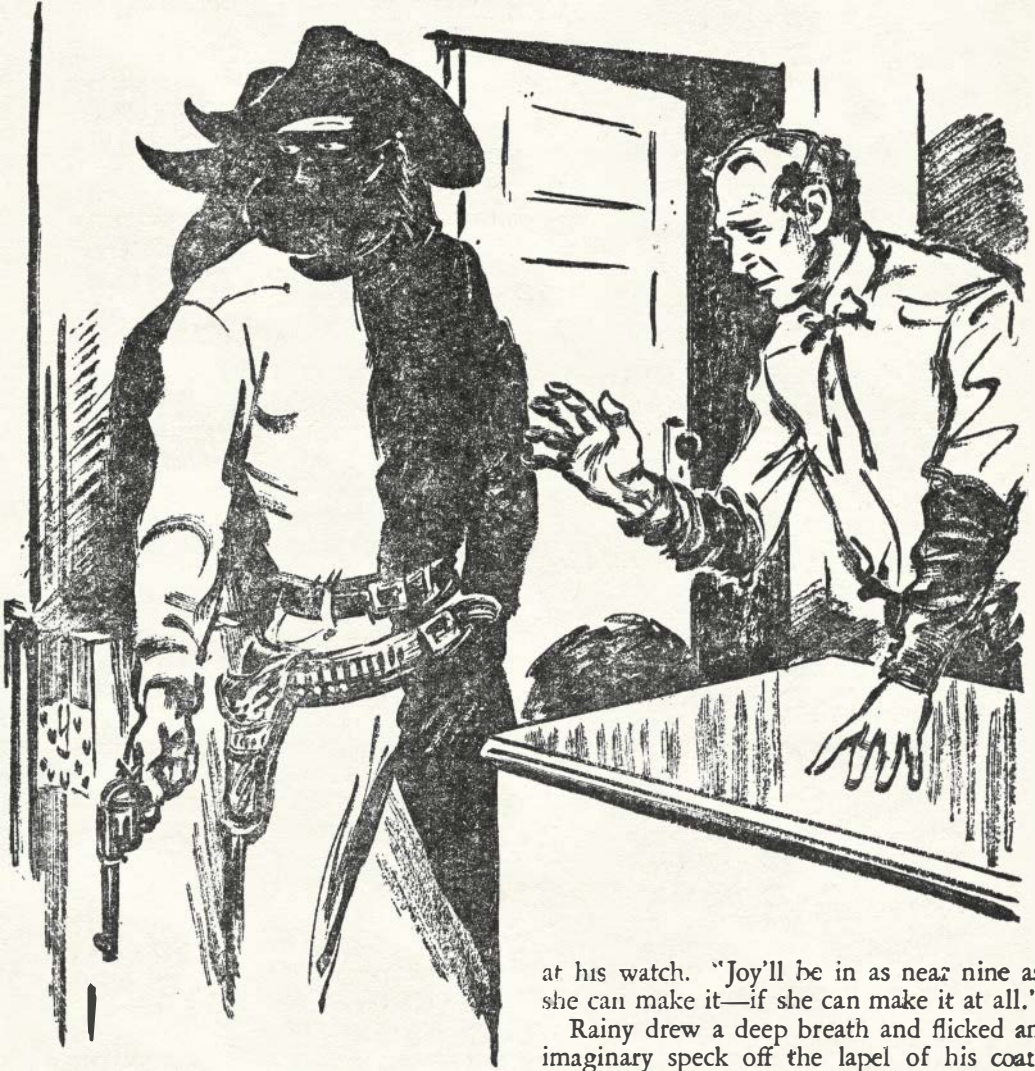
"Rainy Knight," he said aloud, "yo're a changed man, I can see that."

Someone knocked discreetly on the door. Rainy stepped quickly over to a table, where he had left his gun-belt and gun, slid his fingers around the gun-butt, and said, "C'mon on in!"

A young cowboy, also freshly shaven and shorn, stepped into the room and closed the door quietly. He was wearing a black suit, badly in need of an iron, a white shirt, black string-tie, and freshly shined boots.

TO TALK

By W. C. TUTTLE



He was Tommy Pierce, cowpoke, bronc rider, flushed of cheek.

Rainy said quickly, "You ain't been drinkin', have yuh, Tommy?"

Tommy shook his head, his eyes taking in the sartorial splendor of Rainy Knight, who said quietly:

"A feller hadn't ort to git soused on his weddin' night."

Tommy blinked, drew a deep breath and grinned slowly.

"I ain't had a drop," he assured Rainy. "Not that I don't feel the need." He looked

at his watch. "Joy'll be in as near nine as she can make it—if she can make it at all."

Rainy drew a deep breath and flicked an imaginary speck off the lapel of his coat. Tommy said, "You ain't told nobody?"

"I'd cross m' heart, if I knewed where to locate it under this coat, Tommy. Not even the preacher."

"Good," said Tommy. "You got the ring?" There was a note of anxiety in his voice. Rainy grinned and nodded.

Tommy perched on a corner of the table and rolled a cigarette with nervous fingers. He said, "Ed Harmon'll rise hell, Rainy, but he can't do a blamed thing, except cuss—after the knot's all tied. But me and Joy don't care. I'm gettin' a wonderful girl."

"I hope to tell yuh," agreed Rainy. "This is m' first try at bein' best man at a weddin'. Maybe if I'm good at it, I'll hire out for the job. How do I look, Tommy?"

"Well," replied Tommy honestly, "yuh did startle me a little, but I'm getting used to it now. What'd yuh shave with—sand-paper?"

"No, I swiped Otto's razor. Otto is allus braggin' about how he keeps his razor in shape. I think I pulled 'em all out. It kinda hurt—but I'm awful smooth. Do yuh want the ring now?"

"No, I don't. I told yuh that when the preacher asks who's got the ring, you give it to me."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. You still owe me three dollars and six-bits. I had to add that much extra over the ten yuh handed me."

"Dunnin' a feller on his weddin' night kinda takes the romance out of things," complained Tommy.

"Sorry," said Rainy. "Also, and what is more, I gave that feller in the courthouse a dollar to keep his mouth shut today. Didn't want him to blab about that license. That makes four dollars and six-bits. Tommy, I shore hope Ed Harmon ain't found out. He'd shoot yuh right on the spot."

"Oh, I don't believe he'd do that, Rainy."

"He's plenty salty. He said that he'd never let Joy marry a cowpoke, as long as he lived. I'm goin' to be jumpy, until that skypilot says, 'I pronounce you man and wife.'"

"Well," grinned Tommy, "he won't shoot the best man."

"If he does, I hope he aims low. Slim Conover said that if I hurt this coat in any way, it'd cost me five dollars. What's the time?"

"Fifteen minutes of nine," replied Tommy. "We better watch for Joy."

THEY left the shack and cut across the town to the little home of the Reverend Clay Merriam, the only minister in Arroya City.

He was a tall, severe-faced person, who scorned the devil, but did a lot of warning against him. Tommy said, "When this is over, Ed Harmon is goin' to hate yore half of the sheriff's office, Rainy."

"Stop fussin'," said the deputy sheriff.

"After all, I'm hired to uphold the law—and it's lawful to git married."

"Yo're sure yuh got that ring, Rainy?"

"Aw-w-w, of course. I've got it stuffed in m' hip-pocket. Listen!"

They leaned against the old picket fence in the shade of some cottonwoods, as a horse came galloping along the hard street. It drew up in front of the house and Tommy called, "Joy! Is that you, Honey?"

"Be awful embarrassin' if it ain't," whispered Rainy.

But it was. Joy Harmon was not clad for wedding—she didn't dare take a chance on being seen leaving the ranch, clad in other than her regular clothes. Tommy put his arm around her and Rainy marched behind them to the front door. Tommy knocked sharply, and the minister's wife opened the door.

"Well, bless my soul!" she exclaimed. "Come in. Joy Harmon! Why, this is just grand. Tommy Pierce and—and—oh, it is Rainy Knight! I just didn't recognize you. Come on in."

They came inside and stood there awkwardly. The minister came in, sans coat and tie, peering at them over the top of his glasses.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "This is a surprise!"

"We—we came over to borry yore hitching post, Parson," said the lanky deputy. "Here's the license."

The minister peered at it close to the lamp, and shook his head.

"Sorry," he said quietly, "but this is a bill-of-sale, Rainy."

"Oh, yeah—wait a minute."

Rainy managed to find the proper paper, which the minister read carefully. His eyes shifted from face to face. Rainy said:

"I'm the best man, Parson—that's all."

The good minister was rather at a loss. He said, "Joy, you are not of age, and—"

"I am almost eighteen, Mr. Merriam."

"But your father is not here and—well, I'm at a loss just what to do."

"Clay, these children are eloping," said his wife.

"I've got the ring right here," added Rainy, digging deep into a hip-pocket.

"Just a minute, Parson—I've got it—"

"Well," said the minister, "I suppose—"

The door banged open and Ed Harmon,

almost as big as one of his range bulls, barged into the room. He stopped short, hunched tensely, and looked over the tableau.

"Who told you?" said Rainy huskily.

Ed Harmon didn't say who told him. He moved slowly forward, grasped Joy by the arm and shoved her behind him.

"Please, Mr. Harmon—this can be explained. I'm sorry—" the minister began.

Tommy Pierce didn't move. He wasn't afraid of Ed Harmon, even if Ed was twice his size. Suddenly Ed Harmon's left hand shot out, his fingers twisting into the front of Tommy's shirt. Tommy tried to twist away, but Ed Harmon yanked him forward, off balance, and smashed him squarely in the face with his right fist, which was about the size of a picnic ham. Most of the blow struck Tommy on the point of the chin, and he went limp.

Then Ed Harmon grasped him with both hands and flung him through the partly open doorway. Joy screamed and started toward the doorway, but her father caught her sleeve and yanked her back.

"Mr. Harmon," said the minister, visibly shaken by the incident, "that was a cowardly thing to do, sir."

"You mind yore own business!" snapped Harmon. He turned his head and glared at Rainy Knight.

"As for you, Knight," he said harshly, "I'll remember—"

"Don't worry about me, Ed," interrupted Rainy. He was leaning against the fireplace, his cutaway coat flung back, uncovering his holstered gun. "Cut yore wolf loose any time yuh feel like it."

"I'll remember that, Knight," growled Harmon.

"If yuh don't," said Rainy coldly, "I'll remind yuh."

Ed Harmon shoved his daughter ahead of him, and closed the door behind them. The minister's wife sat down in a rocker, her face a bit white. No one seemed to know just what to say, until the minister remarked, "Well, my goodness! I can hardly conceive such a thing—in my own house!"

Rainy Knight dropped to his hands and knees, crawling in circles around on the carpet. Both the minister and his wife stared at him in amazement, and the min-

ister whispered, "Rainy, what is the matter?"

"That dad-blasted ring, Parson—I dropped it when Harmon came in!"

"I—I don't believe this is any time to worry about a ring."

"Maybe you think so, but I don't. I've got three dollars and six-bits invested in it, Parson."

HASHKNIFE HARTLEY and Sleepy Stevens stood at the bar in the Silk Hat Saloon in Arroya City, talking with Slim Conover, the bartender. Hashknife was several inches over six feet tall, lean as a wolf. Sleepy was shorter, broad of shoulder, bowed of leg. In garb they were as alike as two peas; faded shirts, tight overalls, high-heel boots and battered sombreros. Even their gun-belts and holsters were hand-made, scarred and worn, and their plain, wood-handled forty-fives bore the polish of years. They had drifted into Arroya City only an hour ago.

"I'm scared that I told somethin' a while ago," said Slim Conover.

"Told somethin'?" queried Sleepy curiously.

"Yeah." Slim glanced toward the open doorway. It was dark outside. He shrugged his shoulders and turned back to them.

"Remember that big man who came in here a while ago, askin' for Otto Myers? I told him Otto was up in San Miguel, and then he asked for Rainy Knight—remember?"

"Yeah," replied Sleepy. "What about it?"

"Otto Myers is the sheriff and Rainy is his deputy. Yuh see, I loaned Rainy my coat."

"That makes everythin' as plain as mud," nodded Sleepy. "So yuh loaned him yore coat. Can they start criminal action for that?"

"You told that big man that Rainy was actin' as best man," said Hashknife. "He asked where, and you said at the preacher's house."

"You're awful observin'," sighed Slim. "I—I kinda hoped I didn't make it that plain."

"Gettin' down to cases," said Sleepy, "is somebody gettin' married?"

Slim nodded slowly. "Yeah, I think they

are. Rainy Knight said he was goin' to be the best man. It's either a weddin' or a fight."

"You act nervous," said Sleepy.

"Well, I'll tell yuh—" Slim stopped, as footsteps rattled on the wooden sidewalk, and the same big man lurched through the doorway. He was Ed Harmon, stopping short in the doorway.

"Do yuh know if Otto Myers is back yet?" he demanded.

"We ain't seen him, Ed," replied Slim.

"If I see him—"

Ed Harmon had turned, when the first bullet smashed into him. He grasped the side of the doorway, trying to steady himself, when the gun blasted again, and he went down in a heap, half-in, half-out of the doorway.

"Ain't that hell?" asked Slim blankly. "Imagine that!"

Hashknife was running toward the doorway. He leaped across Harmon and landed on the sidewalk, but there was no one in sight, until folks began appearing, attracted by the sound of the two shots.

Ed Harmon was dead, there was no question of that. Both bullets had hit him dead-center. Hashknife saw Joy Harmon, her eyes filled with terror, standing back, unable to say anything, as one of the men tried to question her. One man was saying, over and over again:

"Where is the sheriff? Why don't yuh get the sheriff?"

"He ain't in town," said another. "He's in San Miguel."

Rainy Knight showed up, looking slightly disheveled in his wedding finery.

"What's goin' on?" he asked huskily.

"My God, it's Ed Harmon! Why, who—who shot him?"

No one could answer that question. Rainy said, "Dead, huh?"

A man said, "I better get the doctor," and walked out.

"Who seen it done?" asked Rainy.

"Nobody seen it," replied Slim, the bartender. "Three of us was standin' here, when Ed Harmon came into the doorway. He asked me if I'd seen Otto Myers. I started to explain that Otto ain't back yet, but Ed turned around. Somebody out there in the street shot him twice."

Rainy nodded. He took off his coat and

laid it on the bar. Slim folded it carefully and put it away. After a few moments Rainy said, "Slim, how come Ed Harmon knowed there was a weddin' goin' on at the preacher's place?"

Slim was on the spot, but he had to tell the truth. "Well, when Ed Harmon came in first time, he asked for Otto. He asked where you were, and I—well, I told him that you was actin' as best man at a weddin' down at the preacher's house. I didn't tell him who was gettin' married—or didn't they, Rainy?"

"They didn't," sighed Rainy. "Another five minutes—"

"What occurred?" asked Slim. Rainy drew a deep breath, and his prominent Adam's-apple jiggled his green necktie violently.

"Well, it was thisaway," he said. "Ed Harmon busted in on us, grabbed himself a handful of Tommy Pierce's shirt, yanked him loose from the floor, and smashed him on the chin. Then Harmon throwed Tommy out into the yard, took Joy by the arm and yanked her out of the house. That's about all, except that I had quite a time findin' the weddin' ring, 'cause the preacher was standin' on it."

"Punched Tommy on the chin and throwed him out, eh?" remarked one of the men. "Tommy might resent that."

THE men stood around the bar, looking at each other. They were all thinking the same thing. Rainy shook his head, like a fighter trying to shake off a numbing punch. Tommy was his particular friend. He said, "Maybe the shooter yelled at Ed, huh?" He asked, "Maybe Ed was goin' for his gun, and—huh?"

"Nobody yelled, Rainy," said Slim, "and Ed wasn't reachin'."

"Uh-huh. Well, Tommy wouldn't deliberately shoot him thataway."

No one confirmed nor denied the assertion.

"A hard punch on the chin, like that—" said one bystander.

"Here's Otto!" exclaimed Slim.

Otto Myers, sheriff of Arroya City, was a big, hard-faced man with road-dust all over him. He strode in, looking back at the body.

"I got a little of it at the stable," he said.

"Where is the doctor? Why don't yuh get—will yuh give me the facts?"

"There ain't no facts," said Rainy. "Joy Harmon and Tommy Pierce and me was at the preacher's house, where Joy and Tommy was aimin' to get hitched. Ed Harmon barged in, knocked Tommy out, threwed him outside, and took Joy away. He stopped here, asked for you, and—well, somebody gunned him down right there."

"Short and sweet," remarked the sheriff. "What was you doin' at the weddin'?"

"Best man. At least, I was, until Harmon came in. He got runty with me and I told him to cut his wolf loose. He said he'd remember that remark."

"Where was you when the shootin' took place, Rainy?"

"I was on my hands and knees at the preacher's house, lookin' for that blasted weddin' ring."

"What became of Tommy Pierce?"

"Oh—him! I dunno, Otto. I never seen him, after he was throwed out."

"The best man is supposed to look after the groom," said one of the men soberly.

"Yeah?" queried Rainy. "I'll have yuh know that I've got three dollars and six-bits interest in that ring, and I don't like to mourn no loss."

"Here's the doctor!" exclaimed one of the men.

The elderly Doctor McBride seemed a bit unsteady on his legs, and his right eye was swollen almost shut. The man with him was giving him a bit of assistance.

"Doc, what happened to you?" the sheriff demanded.

"I—I'll take care of this—first, Otto," replied the doctor.

His examination of Ed Harmon was brief.

"He is quite dead," he said and sighed deeply as he managed to get to his feet and look around.

"But, Doc, you've been hurt!"—this from the sheriff.

Doctor McBride felt of his sore eye. "Yes, so I have," he said. "Rather difficult to understand. You see, a while ago—I don't know how long ago, Ed Harmon came to my place.

"He was carrying a wounded man, but made no explanation. He—he merely said to me, 'Take care of him, Doc,' dumped the man on my sofa, and hurried out.

"Well, I—it sounds rather ridiculous, I know. The man's face was covered with blood. I—I couldn't recognize him. I got water to wash him off, and he hit me. Yes, I guess he must have hit me, because when I regained consciousness, he was gone. Perhaps he hit me more than once, because my jaw is very sore."

"You don't know who he was, Doc?" asked the sheriff.

DOCTOR McBRIDE shook his head painfully. "Too much blood on his face, Otto. In another minute or two, I would have recognized him, had he been someone I knew."

"In another few minutes, Joy Harmon would have been Mrs. Pierce," said Rainy soberly. "It shows yuh what can happen in a minute."

"Did this man have a gun on him, Doc?" asked the sheriff.

"I—I am not prepared to say, Otto. I didn't see any."

The sheriff turned to Rainy. "Did Tommy Pierce have a gun?"

"I—I'm not prepared to say, Otto; I didn't see any on him."

"You and Doc talk alike—and yo're about the same amount of help," sighed the sheriff. "Get the horses—we're goin' to find Tommy Pierce."

"What about the whippoorwill who pecked Doc McBride?"

"He's an unknown quantity, Rainy. Get the horses."

"Will some of you men please carry the body down to my place?" asked the doctor.

Hashknife and Sleepy helped them. There was blood on the sofa, water on the carpet in the doctor's house.

"Yuh didn't notice how bad the man was hurt, did yuh, Doc?" asked one of the men.

"No," replied the doctor dryly, "but I felt how badly he was."

They went back to the Silk Hat Saloon, where Slim Conover was mopping up the floor at the doorway.

"Slim, do you think Tommy shot Harmon?" asked one of the men.

Slim shrugged his shoulders and put away the mop and bucket. He came back to the bar and shoved out some glasses. The house was standing treat.

"Hadn't Harmon any enemies in this country?" asked Sleepy.

"I don't reckon he had any killin' enemies," said one of the men at the bar. "Yuh never know about folks."

"Mad and hurt thataway," said a man. "Might make a feller kinda forget etiquette."

Hashknife and Sleepy went back to the little hotel. Old Jud Howell, the proprietor, hobbling around on a bad knee, wanted more details of the murder.

"I seen Ed Harmon and Joy stop here in front of the hotel," he said. "It ain't very light out there, but I kinda thought Joy was cryin'. Ed looked in here, but turned and went across the street. Joy jist stood there, lookin' over toward the Silk Hat Saloon, and when I heard them shots, I think she went runnin' over there."

"I wonder if she saw who done the shootin'," said Sleepy.

Jud Howell shrugged his shoulders, and said, "I believe them shots came from over by the hitch-rack. It seems t' me that I remember seein' the flashes."

"That must be about sixty feet from the doorway. Good shootin'. The doctor said that either shot would have killed him," commented Hashknife.

"Well, that Tommy Pierce is a good—oh-oh! What am I sayin'?"

"The sheriff and deputy are huntin' for Pierce," said Sleepy.

Jud Howell shook his head slowly. "I'm shore sorry about that. It'll be hard on Uncle Hoddy and Aunt Em; they're salt-of-the-earth. They don't make 'em finer, and they think the sun rises and sets in Tommy. I'm awful afraid he's in bad trouble now."

HASHKNIFE leaned against the desk and rolled a cigarette, his level, gray eyes studying the wizened face of the hotel-keeper. Then he said quietly, "Did Ed Harmon have any enemies?"

"No, I—well, I dunno." Howell blinked and shifted his eyes. "Mebbe he did. Most men have, don't they?"

"Is his spread a big one?" asked Hashknife.

"The Circle H is the biggest in this range. Harmon made money. He owns the Arroya City-San Miguel stage line."

Hashknife turned around, resting his

elbows on the desk, as he said quietly, "What do yuh know about this character they call El Pintado?"

Jud Howell shook his head quickly. "Who does?" he asked.

"Has he operated around Arroya City?"

"No, he ain't, Hartley. At least, not yet. He robbed the bank in San Miguel, and he stuck up the Verde Vista stage twice. Then he stuck up the express office at Aztec Springs, and robbed a gamblin' house in Yucca City. He's made money, I'll say that for him."

"We heard about him in Yucca City," said Hashknife. "Rides a black-and-white horse, they say."

"Yeah," nodded Jud. "The officers have checked every horse of that color in the country. In fact, there ain't a black-and-white horse on this range. This El Pintado is also pinto. He wears a black hat, a shirt that's half-black, half-white, and they say that one leg of his pants is white, the other black. Sounds silly."

"Yuh see, the descriptions of him, at first, showed that he wore a white suit. The next one said he wore all black. Finally, they discovered that he was a pinto, like I said. It was all accordin' how he was standin'. Most of the stage lines got scared to haul money, but Ed Harmon said that he'd haul what he darn pleased, put a shotgun man on the seat with the driver, and defied El Pintado."

"Is he a killer, along with bein' a thief?" asked Sleepy.

"He shore is! He killed the cashier at San Miguel, winged a man in the express office, and shot a stage driver, who reached for a gun. Yeah, I'll say he ain't bluffin'. But he ain't done anythin' rash for at least a month. There's a three thousand dollar reward for his scalp—if anybody wants to go and get it—I don't."

They went upstairs to their room. Sleepy spun his hat over a nail in the wall, slipped off both boots and sat down on the edge of the bed. Hashknife sprawled in a chair and began manufacturing another smoke.

"Well," Sleepy said, "I can't say I like Arroya City too much, but I reckon I'll have to endure it for a while. All we have to do is poke our noses into a peaceful community, and all hell busts loose."

Hashknife smiled slowly over his cigar-

ette. "It seems like it—lately, Sleepy," he admitted.

"Lately? This has been goin' on for years."

"Ever since Cain slew Abel," said Hashknife quietly.

"Well, anyway, we didn't get in on that one—or we'd prob'ly still be back in the Old Testament, lookin' for Cain."

"Yea-a-ah," sighed Hashknife, "I reckon so. But we've been mindin' other folks' business too long to start monkeyin' with our own now. Yuh know, Sleepy, that El Pintado kinda appeals to me. Black-and-white clothes, black-and-white bronc."

"Some knot-headed showoff!" snorted Sleepy.

"He's a killer, too, pardner."

"They say he is—and that there ain't a black-and-white horse in this country. At least, the law says there ain't."

"Since when has the opinions of the law been good enough for us?"

Sleepy grinned slowly and reached for a match. Since these two wanderers had ridden away from the old ranch, which gave Henry Hartley the nickname of Hashknife, the opinions of the law had meant little. Long ago they had decided that there was a vast difference between law and justice. They had no aims in life. Long ago they had given up the idea of "money for a rainy day" or a stake for their old age.

Their wants were very few, and money meant little, as they drifted over the ranges, from the freezing winters of the northwest to the desert reaches of the Mexican Border land, always seeking what they might find on the other side of the hills. Any range mystery was a challenge to the gray-eyed Hashknife, who honestly believed that a criminal could no more help being a criminal than another man could help being honest. It was his fate—his place in the scheme of things. Both of them were confirmed fatalists, believing that no man died, until his number was up—his name checked off in the Big Book, by the pen of fate.

Their services were in demand by law enforcement agencies, but they avoided any and all assignments. They had been called Soldiers of Fortune, but Sleepy said, "We're Cowpunchers of Disaster," and let it go at that. They had heard about El Pintado in

Yucca City, fifty miles to the north of Arroya City, and, while this bandit had not been discussed between them, by mutual consent that had ridden south.

THEY found out next morning that Tommy Pierce was in jail. Men were talking about it in the little hotel restaurant, and the consensus of opinion was that Tommy was guilty. A rather crestfallen Rainy Knight came in for breakfast, saw Hashknife and Sleepy and sat down with them, after introducing himself.

"I 'member you two—in the saloon last night," he said.

"You look a little sad this mornin'," said Sleepy.

"I didn't sleep very good. We went out and arrested Tommy last night. That don't sound like much to you, but it was a lot for me and Otto. Yuh see, Tommy is my friend, and Uncle Hoddy and Aunt Em are my best friends. It's shore an awful chore, gents."

"What did Tommy Pierce have to say?" asked Hashknife.

"Denied it. Said he didn't remember much. Got hit too hard. Said he went over to my shack and got his horse. Yeah, he remembered that. Got home all right, kinda bloody on the face, and went to bed."

"Bloody on the face?" asked Sleepy. "Say, yuh don't suppose Ed Harmon took him to the doctor's place and—"

"Nope," interrupted Rainy. "We thought of that. We seen Joy this mornin' and she said they left the preacher's house, went up to the front of the hotel, and she waited while her father went over to the Silk Hat Saloon to see if the sheriff was back yet."

"Yuh ain't figured out who that feller was who hit the doctor, 'eh?" queried Sleepy.

"Too recent," replied Rainy. "Why, we ain't even figured out what caused the Boer War yet. When it comes to figurin', we've got more darned unfinished business!"

"Including El Pintado," said Hashknife quietly.

"Oh, him!" snorted Rainy. "Well, yeah, I reckon so. But he's been out of sight for quite a while. Maybe he's done quit actin' up—I hope."

While they were talking in the dining-room of the little hotel, Horace Pierce,

known as Uncle Hoddy, and Lance Kelsey, owner of the Tumbling K outfit, came into the hotel. Uncle Hoddy was a little, gray-haired cattleman, slightly bow-legged, and owning an explosive temperament. Kelsey was of medium height, slightly gray at the temples, quiet-spoken, well liked by everybody.

Jud Howell, the hotel man, said to Hoddy, "I'm sorry, Hoddy."

"Much obliged, Jud," replied the little cowman quietly. "Slim Conover tells me that a couple strange cowpokes was in the Silk Hat last night, when Ed Harmon was shot in the doorway, and that one of 'em was the first man out on the street after the shots."

"I heard that," admitted Howell. "In fact, I talked with 'em. They've got a room here, but they're eatin' breakfast now."

"They are, eh? What's their names, Jud?"

"The tall one is Hartley and the other one is Stevens."

Uncle Hoddy stared at Howell for several moments.

"Hartley and—hu-u-uh?" he said sharply.

"I said they're Hartley and Stevens—not huh!"

"Hartley and Stevens," repeated Uncle Hoddy, and grinned.

"What's eatin' you, Hoddy?" asked Kelsey curiously.

"Jud," said Uncle Hoddy, ignoring the question, "yuh didn't happen to hear—well, Hartley's first name, did yuh?"

"Why, shore, Hoddy; I heard him called Hashknife."

"That's him!" blurted Hoddy. "Hashknife Hartley."

"Is that wonderful?" asked Kelsey.

"Listen, Lance," said Uncle Hoddy soberly, "you mean to say you've been a member of the Cattlemen's Association as long as you have, and never heard of *him*?"

"I don't reckon I have, Hoddy. Does he work for them?"

"Does he work for them! Does he work—no."

"That's kinda confusin'," said Jud Howell.

"That's the trouble," said Hoddy. "Them two are the best cow-country detectives on earth—but they won't work. They'd rather drift over the hills. Oh, I ain't so smart—I got it all from Bob Marsh, the secretary.

Yuh see, he's a relate of my wife—and he writes us once in a while. Well not exactly a relate. Yuh see Bob Marsh is my wife's kid brother."

"Do yuh reckon Bob Marsh sent 'em down here?" asked Howell.

Uncle Hoddy shook his head. "No, I don't reckon he did. Yuh see, I've done some letter-talk with Bob about El Pintado. That ain't association business. But he said that if I'd keep m' eyes open, he'd bet me better than even money that Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens would be poking their nose into El Pintado's business at most any old time. By golly, he was right! They're here."

"Why would El Pintado interest them?" asked Kelsey.

"Don't ask me," sighed Hoddy. "Bob said it—and they're here."

HASHKNIFE, Sleepy and Rainy came from the dining room, and Rainy introduced them to Uncle Hoddy and Lance Kelsey.

"Slim Conover, over at the Silk Hat, said you was the first man out on the street, after the shots were fired," said Hoddy.

"That's right," nodded Hashknife, "but I didn't see anybody. It was pretty dark out there.

"There was two saddled horses over in front of here, and a girl came running across the street."

"We know about that," said Uncle Hoddy quietly. "Yuh see, I'm Tommy Pierce's father."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pierce."

"Mr. Pierce? Huh! Oh, yeah, that's me. I ain't been called nothin' but Hoddy for so long that I don't recognize my registered brand when I see it. Would yuh mind talking to me for a few minutes? We can go out on the porch."

"I'll be driftin' along, Hoddy," said Kelsey. "Glad to have met you, gentlemen."

"See yuh later, Lance," said Uncle Hoddy. "Come out when yuh can."

The three men sat down on the old porch, and Hoddy filled his pipe. With it smoking to his satisfaction, he said quietly, "So yo're Hashknife and Sleepy, eh?"

Both men looked curiously at him. Uncle Hoddy grinned.

"Do yuh know a feller named Bob Marsh?" he asked.

"No!" exclaimed Sleepy quickly. "Never heard of him."

"What about him?" asked Hashknife.

"He's my wife's kid brother."

"Well, don't brag," advised Sleepy quickly. "I'd keep that a family secret, if I was you."

"Yuh see," grinned Uncle Hoddy, "he was her brother before I married her."

"I reckon that excuses yuh," said Sleepy. "After all, you can't be responsible for what yore wife done, before yuh married her."

"That's the humane way to look at it," said Uncle Hoddy. "But the fact remains that I got a letter from Bob two weeks ago, and he said I could expect yuh mest any time now."

"That's kinda funny," said Hashknife. "We ain't heard from Bob for two months."

"He was writin' about El Pintado, Hashknife. And do yuh know what else he said?"

"He said, 'Give my best regards to Sleepy,'" replied Sleepy.

"Are you a mind-reader, Sleepy?" gasped Uncle Hoddy.

"I can read *his mind*, if that's what yuh mean."

"Anyway, that's what he said in the letter. Why don't you two pick up yore war-sacks and come out to the ranch. No use spendin' good money for a place to sleep—and we do eat well. I'll tell yuh another reason—my wife needs somebody to talk to, except me and Brazos Miller and Harp Harper. We ain't had a fresh subject to talk about since Geronimo quit scalpin'—and she needs somethin' to talk about—except our own troubles. How about it?"

"Personally," said Sleepy, "I'm half-way there now."

RAINY KNIGHT wasn't too happy. He sat alone in the sheriff's office, listening to drone of voices back in the jail. The sheriff and prosecuting attorney had warned him to not let anybody see Tommy Pierce, unless he was there to hear what was said. But there they were, Aunt Em, mother of Tommy, and Joy Harmon, daughter of the murdered man. As far as Rainy could hear Tommy hadn't had a chance to speak a word in twenty minutes.

Hashknife, Sleepy and Uncle Hoddy came into the office. Otto Myers, the sheriff, came in behind them, as Aunt Em and Joy came down the corridor. Aunt Em was a big, raw-boned woman, twice the size of Hoddy, her gray hair drawn back severely and tied off in a pug at the back of her head. Joy Harmon was a little thing, barely over five feet tall, slender, a decided brunette. She was pretty, in spite of red eyes.

"Em, I'd like to have you and Joy meet Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens," said Hoddy.

Aunt Em looked severely at both of them and remarked to Hoddy, "For any particular re—who did you say they are?"

"I told yuh and you heard me," he grinned. Aunt Em drew a deep breath and held out her hand to Hashknife.

"You boys are friends of my brother!" she exclaimed.

"Not me," denied Sleepy and put his hands behind him.

"Don't you want his best regards?" she asked soberly.

"No, Ma'am, I don't want no part of him. Miss Harmon, I'm pleased to meet-cha."

Joy smiled faintly, as she acknowledged the introductions, and said, "Aunt Em, I'll have to go now—there's so much to do."

"All right, Honey—you run along."

After Joy went out on the street, Aunt Em said, "That kid's a ring-tailed wonder, if I ever seen one. Hoddy, you better have a word with Tommy, before we pull out—I'm all talked loose."

Hoddy went back to the jail, accompanied by the sheriff. Aunt Em looked at Sleepy and said, "Bob Marsh said you'd show up."

"That's why I hate him," said Sleepy seriously. "If he can't hire us, he'll sic us into trouble through perjury, and now the darned rannahan got us into this through mental telepathy. Blast his hide, he *wished* us into this deal."

Hoddy came out, his mouth a bit grim, and they all left the office.

"Hashknife and Sleepy are movin' out to the ranch, Ma," said Uncle Hoddy. "Bein' as they're such good friends of Bob, it kinda makes me feel like they're related to us."

"Such good—" Sleepy hesitated. "Well, if yuh don't mind, just treat me like a poor relation. I hate false pretenses."

THE H Bar P ranchhouse and surroundings were typical of that part of the country. The ranchhouse was part adobe, part frame. Both the house and the yard showed the feminine touch. Brazos Miller and Harp Harper, Hody's two cowpokes, met them at the house.

Brazos was a little, bow-legged person, lean-faced and rather cold of eye. Harp was not tall, but he was wide of girth. Hody told them what was being said in Arroya City, and Brazos bristled like a bobcat. "They better not let me hear 'em say Tommy's guilty," he declared. Harp looked him over soberly.

"What'd you do?" he asked.

"I—I'd take 'em to task," declared Brazos. "I'd bend 'em all out of shape."

"Like yuh did Dud Haley, 'eh?" Harp turned to Hashknife and Sleepy. "Yuh know," he explained, "him and Dud got into a fight one day. They was both on the ground, kinda locked in mortal combat, as yuh might say, and Brazos was inchin' around, feelin' for a wrasslin' holt. He said to Dud, 'I'm a-goin' to bend yore legs so you'll never use 'em again.' Dud didn't say nothin', so Brazos started bendin'."

"That's a lie, if I ever heard one," declared Brazos hotly.

"It ain't no lie either, Brazos. They was tangled up so bad that Brazos got his own legs by mistake, and he bent 'em until he felt one of his knee-caps fall off."

Brazos grinned wryly and shook his head. "It didn't fall off," he said, "but it did git unhinged on one side."

"Fighting don't prove anythin'," declared Aunt Em.

"It proved one thing, Aunt Em," said Harp soberly. "It proved that Brazos Miller can shore take a lot of punishment. Either that, or low order of mentality. Yuh see, he comes from a race of hill folks, down in the backwoods of Oklahoma."

"That's a di-rect imposition," declared Brazos soberly. "I was borned in Texas, where folks are so smart that they don't have to go to school. But what's to be done about Tommy?"

"I wish they'd turn him loose," sighed Harp. "I'd like to kick him right where he sets for not invitin' us to the weddin'."

"That's my sentiments," agreed Brazos heartily. "Imagine him havin' Rainy

Knight for best man! I can lick him on a sheepskin."

"You?" jeered Harp. "Why, Rainy would put one hand on top of yore pointed head, press down real hard and make a complete O of them two legs of yourn."

"Truth crushed to earth will rise agin," quoted Brazos.

"But ignorance stays put. Remember that—and don't brag."

The two cowboys always ate their meals with the family, and when they were all seated Aunt Em said soberly:

"We won't discuss our troubles during the meal. You can't ask the Lord's blessing on food, and discuss ungodly affairs while eating it."

It was a wonderful meal, and Sleepy grinned with great inward satisfaction. He loved to eat. They were about midway of the meal, when Lance Kelsey came in, quickly accepted an invitation to partake, and sat down with them. He knew Aunt Em's rules, and refrained from any talk of their troubles.

"I was just driftin' by," he explained lamely. "You see," speaking directly to Hashknife and Sleepy, "I have no cook. At least, none worthy of the name. Bliz Hale and Red Jackson both take a hand in our cooking, with my assistance—and it's bad. Mostly, I take my meals in town, except when I happen to be passin' here."

AFTER supper the talk naturally drifted to a discussion of the predicament of Tommy Pierce.

"The fact remains," Hashknife said, "that Ed Harmon brought a wounded man to the doctor's place, thinkin' that the man was unconscious, I reckon. The wounded man, so plastered with blood that the doctor didn't recognize him, knocked the doctor out and got away."

"Do yuh figure that this man might have killed Harmon?" asked Kelsey.

"That," replied Hashknife, "doesn't take smart thinkin'. Why Harmon brought the man to town, and why Harmon came to the Silk Hat Saloon twice, askin' for the sheriff, might solve the whole deal—if we knew."

"Well, I feel the same way you do, Hartley," said Kelsey. "If there was some way to find out those things. I talked to the

doctor, but he don't even remember how the man was dressed. They have the inquest tomorrow, and I'd hate to see Tommy have to stay in jail for a month or two, waitin' for trial. Hartley, you've handled things like this before—"

Hashknife smiled slowly over his cigarette.

"Kelsey," he said, "I am not a detective. In fact, I'm just a wanderin' cowpoke. Maybe I've been lucky—findin' out things. Anybody could do the same thing, if they used their ears and eyes. The man who killed Ed Harmon wouldn't hesitate to keep on killin' to save his own hide. Maybe some folks think that I'm lookin' for El Pintado. Maybe El Pintado killed Ed Harmon. When all the peace officers in this country have failed to get El Pintado, how could I, a stranger, hope to do anythin'?"

"Yeah," added Sleepy, "and if all the lies that are told about me and Hashknife was laid end to end, you'd be surprised at how little truth you'd find in it."

After Lance Kelsey went away Aunt Em said, "I don't see why Lance don't hire a cook."

"He did have a good one," remarked Uncle Hoddy, "but he fired him about six months ago, and never got another one."

"Old Tecate Thomas was a darned good cook," agreed Brazos. "I've et his fodder, and it was great. Kelsey said he headed back for Texas, kinda honin' for the folks back home. Me and Tecate come from the same location. He used to know my folks."

"Well," sighed Hoddy, "I reckon Lance could afford a cook."

"He ort to do somethin', before his stum-mick is plumb ruined," declared Harp. "He only had four helpin's t'night."

THEY held the inquest at Arroya City next day and, because Ed Harmon had been a leading citizen, most folks in that country had an interest in seeing that justice was done. Tommy Pierce was not brought in. Joy Harmon testified to the fact that her father left her in front of the store, while he went to the Silk Hat to ask about the sheriff. She did not see the killer, nor did she have any idea why her father wanted to see the sheriff.

Doctor McBride testified as to the cause of death, and also added his experience

with the man Harmon brought to him. He did not know whether the man had a gun or not. He surmised not, because Harmon, if the man was dangerous, would have taken the gun. Slim Conover, the bartender, testified that Ed Harmon came earlier and asked for the sheriff or the deputy. He came back to ask the same question, and was shot. The six-man jury listened to the story of the trouble at the preacher's house, and asked that Tommy be held for the next term of superior court on a charge of murder, in spite of the fact that Rainy Knight testified that he was sure Tommy didn't have a gun. Lance Kelsey was indignant. He wanted to argue with the jury, but was stopped.

"How can a jury be so dumb?" he asked.

"It takes trainin' and opportunity," said Rainy. "It's a wonder they didn't vote unanimously to hang Doc McBride."

"I'm goin' t' choose me all six of 'em, one at a time," declared Brazos. "I'll learn 'em."

Harp shook his head in wonderment, as he looked at Brazos.

"There ain't a man on that jury, less'n six feet tall," he declared.

"That's what I hate about it," said Brazos. "Big and dumb."

"You'll have to use strategy, Brazos."

"I've got the brains and the brawn, Harp."

"Yeah—about fifty-fifty, I'd say."

Hashknife and Sleepy went with Uncle Hoddy and Aunt Em to the funeral of Ed Harmon.

In fact, everybody in the country was there, and the Reverend Clay Merriam took the occasion to preach the longest sermon on record. The temperature in the church was well over a hundred. Hashknife and Sleepy obliged to sit stiffly for that interminable length of time, were glad when it was over. Lance Kelsey, acting as one of the pall bearers, had a glint of amusement in his eyes, as he watched them suffer.

Joy Harmon asked Aunt Em if she couldn't come out to the ranch. She said things were too lonesome at the Half-Circle H. The big-hearted Aunt Em took the girl and headed for the buckboard, before Joy had any chance to change her mind. Uncle Hoddy grinned widely.

"Makes a funny deal," he said. "Tommy

in jail for killin' her pa, and her comin' out to our ranch."

"Yuh don't like it, huh?" queried Sleepy.

"Like it?" blurted Hoddy. "Hell, I love it, Sleepy! We've knowed Joy ever since her mothe died—and that was when Joy was born. Em has been just like a mother to her all these years. Joy and Tommy growed up together, went to the same school. Let's go home; my back's busted from that church seat. If it takes that preacher as long to marry 'em as it does to bury 'em, no wonder Ed Harmon got there ahead of the weddin'."

They found Rainy Knight, leaning sadly against the hitch-rack.

"You look like you've lost yore best friend, Rainy," said Uncle Hoddy.

"Worse'n that, Uncle Hoddy—I've lost that dad-blasted ring again. I'll never git my three dollars and six-bits back now. Allus somethin' t' take the joy out of my life."

"How did yuh like the funeral sermon, Rainy?" asked Sleepy.

"Well," drawled Rainy, "I thought it was all in favor of Ed Harmon, if that's what yuh mean. It was also the first time I ever heard Parson Merriam avoid speakin' about hell. Anyway, it was hot enough in there, without any allusions to somethin' hotter."

"I hope yuh find the ring," said Uncle Hoddy, backing the team away from the hitch-rack.

"Uncle Hoddy, if yuh want to rest yore back, why don'tcha ride my horse back to the ranch—and let me drive the team?" asked Sleepy.

Uncle Hoddy leaned forward and squinted at Sleepy.

"My back ain't botherin' me half as much, Sleepy—as pickin' up a pretty girl in the buckboard is botherin' you. No, I'll just keep you out of temptation, young man. See yuh at the ranch."

Over at the other hitch-rack Hashknife chuckled, "Uncle Hoddy is quite a character, Sleepy," he remarked.

"He's a darn, old hard-headed hindrance," declared Sleepy. "Joy is one of the prettiest girls I ever seen—and he takes her home."

Hoddy picked up the two women in front

of the hotel, and Hashknife and Sleepy rode behind them. Things were rather quiet that evening around the H Bar P. Out of respect for Joy's feelings, there was no discussion of their own troubles. Before going to bed that night, Joy said to Aunt Em:

"Did you notice Hashknife Hartley's eyes, Aunt Em?"

"His eyes? What was wrong with them, Honey?"

"Nothing wrong, Aunt Em—they're just different."

"You mean—they're different colors?"

Joy laughed and shook her head, "You don't understand what I mean."

"Yes, I do, Honey," assured Aunt Em. "I noticed them the moment I met him. They sort of make you feel that you have known him all your life."

"They tell you to not be afraid, Aunt Em."

"Well, yes, I suppose they do. My brother, Bob, swears that when the Lord made Hashknife—he broke the mould. Now, you go to sleep and you'll feel better tomorrow."

IT WAS just noon in Arroya City, and the thermometer in the shade of the hotel porch registered one hundred and twelve degrees. It was too hot for any activity on the street, which ran east and west, giving the sun a chance to sweep the length of the street at almost any time of day.

Frank Ross, the middle-aged cashier of the Arroya City Bank, was alone in the bank, working over some figures. Both the front and rear doors were open, trying to coax any possible breeze into the cross-ventilation. The street was deserted. Seemingly from nowhere, a man had entered the bank, and was standing only a few feet from Ross, as he looked up, his eyes centering on the muzzle of a .45. Behind the gaping muzzle of that six-shooter was the unmistakable figure of El Pirtado.

Slowly the masked man opened the gate between the counter and cage, his eyes boring into the eyes of the frightened cashier. He said huskily, "Take this sack and dump all the money in the safe into it—if you want to live. *Muy pronto!*"

Ross got up slowly and accepted the sack. There was nothing else for him to do, but

accept the inevitable. It was only a few feet to the open vault door. Possibly less than two thousand in currency had dropped into the sack, when the bandit yanked it away from the cashier. Footsteps had sounded along the sidewalk. Cat-like, the bandit stepped against the cage and against the gate. Ross edged a little closer to the counter, where a sawed-off shotgun lay in plain sight from that side.

The man just inside the doorway was Otto Myers, the big sheriff, unconscious of any danger. He had drawn a handkerchief and was about to mop his perspiring face, when El Pintado knocked the swinging gate open with his knee and stepped outside.

For a moment Otto Myers stared at him, and his right hand fairly streaked for his gun, but the draw was too one-sided, because El Pintado had his gun ready, before the sheriff started his draw. The bandit's gun flamed, and the sheriff's drawn gun clattered to the floor. The sheriff, his right arm dangling helplessly, staggered back, as Frank Ross dived for that shotgun. But El Pintado whirled, slashed Ross across the head with the barrel of his gun, and the cashier crashed forward against the counter.

The sheriff saw the bandit disappear, tried to pick up his gun with his left hand, but was unable to get it. Knowing that it would be useless to follow the man, he whirled and staggered for the front doorway. No one else had heard the shot; the street still deserted.

A man came out of the Silk Hat Saloon, and the sheriff called weakly to him, but loud enough to recognize that it was a warning, and came running, yelling for others, who responded slowly.

"El Pintado!" husked the injured sheriff. "Get the doctor—Ross is hurt."

By the time the doctor had things under control, Brazos Miller came galloping down the main street, yanking his horse up at the crowd around the bank. He yelled at Rainy Knight;

"I seen El Pintado! He's headin' into the hills toward the H Bar P, Rainy! What's he done now?"

Brazos got his information very quickly. Riders were scarce in town at that hour, but Rainy enlisted Brazos and Bliz Hale, from the Tumbling K, and they headed for the H Bar P, a three-man posse. As they raced for

the ranch Brazos pointed out where he had seen the pinto bandit, and the direction he was going.

The wind was blowing a dust cloud from their flying hoofs, but it was a hot wind, which fairly seared the skin. They found Hashknife and Sleepy at the ranch, talking with Uncle Hoddy. The two women were taking a siesta. Their tale was quickly told, and Rainy asked Hashknife and Sleepy to ride with them.

"Don't wait for us, Rainy—keep travelin'. We'll get goin' as soon as we can," said Hashknife.

"But you don't know this country, Hashknife."

"That gives us the best of it," said Hashknife. "You look where he'd go—we'll look where he wouldn't. Hit the grit."

Harp rode in, and quickly accepted their invitation to ride, and galloped with the other three men. Hashknife and Sleepy saddled and rode away into the hills, with no definite place in mind, because they were strangers to those hills. Hot wind whipped at them, and the sun was relentless. Sleepy said, "It's a wild-goose chase, if I ever seen one."

"True enough," agreed Hashknife, blinking at the heat-waves. "All this country for one man and a horse to hide in. That blasted wind blows yore eyes out in the heat. Anyway, we'll have a look at this bunch of upside-down hills—and we might see some-thin'."

An hour later, after having seen nothing alive, except an inquisitive white-tail deer, they came out on a bald spot and sat there, looking over the country. Below them was a deep, wide swale, and on the far side was the mouth of a brushy canyon, which angled back into the hills.

They were sitting on their horses in plain sight, enjoying a smoke, when they saw a horseman ride out from behind a clump of trees, and head directly into the brushy canyon. It was possibly five hundred yards from where they sat, motionless, silent, until the horse and rider disappeared. Then they looked at each other curiously. Sleepy said, "El Pintado!" Hashknife eased himself in his saddle and said, "That's right. And in no hurry. Sleepy, that man should have seen us up here."

"Yeah, but he didn't. If he had—yuh

don't suppose he'd have taken his time thataway, do yuh?"

"It don't look reasonable. C'mon."

They rode down the hill and across the swale to the mouth of the canyon. It was impossible to see any distance through the heavy brush, and there was an absence of any trail. However, that was where El Pintado had gone—and he was their quarry. With Hashknife leading the way, they went carefully into the canyon, watching closely ahead and to both sides. There was little chance of their progress being heard, because of the high wind.

A quarter of a mile into the canyon, it narrowed perceptibly, and the brush made it difficult for the horses.

Hashknife got off his mount and searched the floor of the narrow canyon, looking for evidence of horse-tracks or broken brush. Suddenly he lifted his head and sniffed at the wind. Sleepy, clinging to his hat with one hand, turned and looked back. There was the smell of burning brush on that wind, which came up that narrow canyon like the draft of a chimney.

Hashknife leaped back on his horse and spurred ahead, as a billow of smoke flared up behind them. They knew what it meant now.

A fire in that draughty canyon, fanned by that forty-mile-an-hour wind, would have the speed of a race-horse. Traveling as swiftly as possible, they scanned the side of the canyon for a way out, but there was none.

"Trapped like rats in a blind-canyon!" yelled Sleepy. "We've got to find a trail out!"

"Save yore breath—we'll need it!" panted Hashknife.

Behind them the flames were damnably visible now, licking high into the air, as the tinder-dry brush fairly exploded in the heat. They were traveling at a snail-like pace, trying to force their way through the tangle of rocks and brush, while the fire roared at top-speed. Already, the air was filled with flying embers, igniting the brush-tops around them.

Hashknife spurred his horse over against one of the walls, and Sleepy was close behind him. Here was an overhang, a right-angled break in the rocky wall, large enough for them and the horses. It was their last resort—their one long chance to live. Smoke

billowed around them, as they forced the frightened horses in against the rocky wall, and quickly tied their neckerchiefs over the eyes of the animals. Blinded, they would stay put.

Then he two men crouched in against the wall, watching and listening to the roar of the flames. Suddenly the flames shot out over their heads, twenty feet above them, like the blasts from big guns, and on the left-hand side of their slim refuge, a wall of flame, broken aside by the rocky wall, roared past. The heat was unbearable, and the smoke billowed in, forcing them to lie flat, their mouths close to the rocky floor.

Desert growth is mostly small stuff, which flames up like oil-drenched tinder, and quickly burns itself out. The roaring sheet of flame was quickly past, but there was plenty of fire remaining.

"We made it!" panted Sleepy, choking in the smoke. "Man, that was awful close!"

They could still see the wall of flame, tearing its way up the canyon and up the walls, where it seemed to fairly explode itself to pieces against the cliffs. Burning embers volleyed upward, as the full force of the fire struck the blind end of the canyon. Luckily the vegetation was scarce around the rim and the fire was checked.

It was still hot and smoky around their rock barrier, but the danger was past now. Grimy with smoke, a few holes burned in their clothes, they sat against the rock and rolled cigarettes. The horses had escaped with a few singed hairs, still waiting patiently to have their blindfolds removed.

Hashknife shook his head disgustedly as he said, "We should have known, Sleepy. El Pintado let us see him, feeling that we'd try to find him in this canyon. Then he doubled back in the brush and set the fire. With that wind—we didn't have a chance on earth to ever get out alive. This is the only spot where we could have survived."

Sleepy nodded grimly. "Our number wasn't up," he said simply.

"This," remarked Hashknife, "is one wild-goose chase, in which the goose almost got cooked."

AFTER another hour the ashes had cooled sufficiently for them to go back down through the mouth of the canyon, and out into a green world again. There was no sign

of El Pintado. He didn't need to wait and find out what happened—he knew.

They went back to the ranch, stabled their horses and met Hoddy on the front porch. He looked them over curiously, noting the burned holes in their shirts, their grimy hands and faces, scorched eyebrows. They both grinned slowly, as they sat down on the steps.

"We kinda caught hell, Hoddy," said Sleepy dryly.

"Yeah, yuh look it. I've heard that expression used before, but I never noticed burned holes in their shirts before. What happened to you was more than a figure of speech, I'd say."

"We found El Pintado," said Hashknife soberly, "We trailed him into a blind canyon, where he doubled back and set the place on fire."

"He did?" snorted the little cowman angrily. "Trapped yuh in the brush and—how did yuh get out?"

Hashknife explained what happened to them, and just how close they came to never coming back. Aunt Em and Joy came out in time to hear the story.

"You actually saw him!" exclaimed Aunt Em.

Hashknife nodded slowly. "Almost to our sorrow, Aunt Em," he replied. "He was too far away for us to see exactly what he looked like, but he rode a black-and-white pinto horse. We were foolish to not realize that he was decoyin' us into that canyon. Maybe he was trailin' us all the time, waitin' for a chance to take a shot at us, and when we trailed him into the canyon, he figured he'd kill us off in the fire."

"That would have been terrible!" exclaimed Joy.

"What do yuh reckon he was doin' back on my range?" asked Hoddy.

"Tryin' to cook our goose," grinned Sleepy.

He and Hashknife went around to the wash-stand at the rear, and cleared away most of the signs of conflagration. It was supptime, when the posse came back, weary, disgusted. Hashknife and Sleepy said nothing to them about the fire. After Rainy Knight and Bliz Hale rode on to town, they told Brazos and Harp what happened at the blind-canyon.

"We went over there!" exclaimed Brazos.

"We saw the smoke, but it was burned out, before we got there. So you two were in that canyon! Man, the Lord must have had both arms around both of you!"

"We sure must have had some outside help," agreed Sleepy.

They had finished supper, when three riders came to the ranch. Brazos said, "Bob Nolan, Slim Dunbar and Ed Haggarty." Hoddy was out in front of the house, talking with them.

"Tell them to come in and eat, Harp," called Aunt Em.

"Who is Bob Nolan?" asked Hashknife.

"He owns the Bar N," replied Brazos. "Twenty miles south of Arroya City. He don't get out there very often—the handsome brute."

THE three men came in, and Hoddy introduced them to Hashknife and Sleepy. Bob Nolan was a good-looking cowboy, about thirty-five years of age, slim, lithe, with good shoulders. Slim Dunbar was short and squatty, slightly gray, while Ed Haggarty was a gangling cowpoke, flat-faced, small-eyed and with a button-like nose. None of them shook hands with Hashknife and Sleepy. Aunt Em told them to come into the dining-room, and she would get their supper. Hoddy sat down with them, talking to Bob Nolan. Hashknife noticed that Joy was not in evidence.

Haggarty had evidently met with an accident. On the left side of his head, just above his ear, the hair had been cut away and replaced by a pad of dirty-white cloth, held in place with strips of court-plaster. Hashknife, Sleepy and Brazos, sitting in the main room, could see the four men around the table.

"Haggarty don't look very well—kinda scrawny. Must have been hit on the head," commented Brazos.

"Hit on the head," repeated Sleepy, in a half-whisper.

Hashknife had a good view of Haggarty's face in the lamplight, and he was studying the man's features carefully. Sleepy said quietly, "What became of Joy?"

Brazos chuckled, and whispered back, "She's done hid out. Yuh see, Bob Nolan tried to make love to her, but she don't like him."

"Yuh can't blame him for that, Brazos.

It's somethin' that any red-blooded man would do."

THE three men did not linger long after their supper. They thanked Uncle Hoddy and Aunt Em, got on their horses and pulled out. Joy came out of hiding, but no one mentioned her absence.

"They're lookin' for some missin' horses," Hoddy explained.

"How did Haggarty get hurt on the head?" asked Harp.

"He said a horse threw him against the corral fence," replied Uncle Hoddy. "Don't look like it was healin' up very good."

Joy sat down on the sofa with Hashknife, who had been thoughtfully quiet since the three men left.

"Are you working on a problem, Hashknife?" she asked.

He smiled slowly at her and replied, "Did you ever see somebody that yo're sure yuh knew once upon a time, but can't place 'em?"

"I suppose that happens to everybody," she replied quietly.

"Bob Nolan?" asked Hoddy.

"No, I never saw him before, Hoddy; it's the man with the flat face and a nose like a button."

"Yuh mean Ed Haggarty."

"The man who calls himself Ed Haggarty," corrected Hashknife.

"He's been with Bob Nolan for a year or so," offered Brazos.

"Wait a minute!" grunted Uncle Hoddy. "The man Ed Harmon took to Doc McBride's place that night had been hit on the head."

"This'n," said Harp dryly, "has been dumped against a corral fence."

"His head was givin' him some trouble, eh?" queried Brazos.

"He didn't complain about it," replied Hoddy, "but it didn't look awful good. Kinda blue around the edges of the bandage."

"I hate to say a thing like this," said Aunt Em, "but Haggarty isn't the cleanest person on earth."

"He needs a woman's care," chuckled Hoddy.

"They all do," declared Aunt Em. "I've never known a man who ever realized that he had ears or a back to his neck. Most of

'em don't even get clean as far back as their ears. Don't dispute me, Hoddy."

"Ma, I wouldn't think of it—it's too painful."

"Hashknife, are you still trying to place Mr. Haggarty?" asked Joy. Hashknife smiled slowly at the pretty girl beside him.

"Miss Joy," he said quietly, "with most folks it's just a case of bein' a little irritated, when they can't remember things like that, but it's a little different with me. They only get irritated, while I might get perforated."

"I never thought of that," she said quickly. "I—I hope you can remember."

"Yuh know," remarked Uncle Hoddy, "I just got to thinkin, that El Pintado is goin' to be annoyed, when he finds out that he failed to roast you two in that blind canyon, Hashknife."

"Yeah, I reckon he will, Uncle Hoddy. It looked like four aces to him. But if he's a good poker-player, he'll wait for the next deal, and try to hold better cards. He knows now that we know—so if he's real smart, he'll play his cards closer to his vest."

"There ain't no protection against a shotgun from ambush," said Brazos. "He knows who you are, and you don't know who he is, Hashknife; so he don't have to hurry the deal."

"That's right, Brazos. He holds all the aces and face-cards, but he is overlookin' one angle, and that is—no man dies until his number is up on that big board. No shotgun ever killed a man who is marked up to die in bed with his boots off."

"Do you believe that?" asked Joy.

HASHKNIFE nodded quickly. "I sure do, Miss Joy. Somewhere, there's a Big Book, and it has us all listed, and how we die. That finger of fate points to our name, an hour old, or eighty, and we can't avoid it. We think we are smart—sometimes. We avoid injury or death, and we give ourselves credit. That's fine—but we can't help doin' what we did."

"That is a queer theory," said Aunt Em. "I suppose you figure that people can't help being good or bad."

"They can't," smiled Hashknife. "It's all there in the book."

"I don't believe it," declared Aunt Em. "That isn't according to the Bible."

"The Bible doesn't teach it," admitted

Hashknife, "but somewhere in those pages you'll find a line that says, as near as I can remember it, 'The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him.' Don't ask me where yuh can find it, Aunt Em. I don't even know who wrote it."

"That is fatalism," declared Joy.

"Yeah, I believe it is," agreed Hashknife. "It's the reason why a man will break bad broncs for years and never get hurt, but will fall out of a rockin' chair and break his neck."

"That," declared Brazos, "is jist dumb carelessness. But I believe yuh, Hashknife. All m' life I've tried to be careful—and lotsa times it's ruined m' fun."

Aunt Em shook her head. "I don't hold with any such theory," she declared. "Why forgive sin, if sinners can't help being sinners?"

"Who does?" asked Hashknife.

"Ma," grinned Uncle Hoddy, "I believe he's got yuh there. You can pray for the forgiveness of sin—but yuh never get an answer."

"Don't look at it thataway," smiled Hashknife. "Keep prayin', Aunt Em. Maybe yuh don't get an answer, but yuh get satisfaction."

"I'm goin' t' bed," declared Brazos. "When yuh get to talkin' of things that nobody knows anythin' about, I get sleepy."

Hashknife was still thoughtful as they went to bed that night.

Sleepy said, "Stop tryin' to figure out that Haggarty. We've known a lot of flat-faced cowpokes, with button noses. I 'mber one up in Wyomin' a few years ago. What was his name? Bolen, Boden?"

"Bowman!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Ed Bowman! He was in that bunch they called the Gang from Gunsight!"

"That's right, he was! But this hombre—"

"Sleepy, that's him. Ed Haggarty is Ed Bowman."

"Well, imagine that! Uh-huh, uh-huh! Say, I believe yo're right! I wonder if he knowed us?"

"Uncle Hoddy introduced all of us," reminded Hashknife, "and if he don't remember us, he must be awful dumb. He was one of the two that got away."

"Uh-huh, that's right—he was. Well, now that makes—what does it make?"

"It makes us keep our eyes open, pardner."

"Yea-a-ah, it shore does. And he works for Bob Nolan."

"Don't say anythin'," advised Hashknife. "Maybe he's reformed."

"That's possible," agreed Sleepy. "Changed his name and turned over a new leaf. Prob'ly goes to Sunday School. Yuh know, I wonder if a horse did throw him against a corral fence. That busted scalp kinda fits in with the hombre who poked the doctor."

"I think we need sleep," smiled Hashknife. "After what happened today, me and you are lookin' for boogers behind every tree."

"After what happened today," said Sleepy dryly, "I believe we better."

AUNT EM and Joy wanted to go to Arroya City next morning; so Hashknife and Uncle Hoddy hitched up a team to the spring-wagon, and went with them. Brazos wanted to find two, half-broken sorrels, destined to be the buck-beard team; so Sleepy rode with him. The description covered two sorrels that Hashknife and Sleepy had seen near the blind-canyon, where El Pintado had made his big culinary effort. They rode back through the hills, watching all the draws, but drew a blank, as far as sorrels were concerned.

Sleepy wanted to show Brazos where they had made their stand in the canyon; so they rode up through the blackened area of burned stubs, and Sleepy showed him the place where they avoided the fire. As they squatted on the rocky shelf, enjoying a smoke, Sleepy noticed a spot about a hundred yards away, where the ashes had been disturbed over a small area.

They rode over to the spot, which a few days ago had been a dense clump of desert growth. Brazos said, "Coyote been diggin'."

Some bones were exposed in the dirt, and they did not look like the bones of an animal. Sleepy swung down and took a close look.

"He-e-ey!" he blurted. "This thing was once a man, Brazos!"

Brazos almost fell off his saddle, but was slow and deliberate in his approach of the scene. A grinning skull, partly covered, seemed to leer up at them. The bones were

not white, but a dirty, reddish-gray. Brazos shuddered and looked around.

"Bullet hole in the skull," remarked Sleepy. "If yuh look at it close, Brazos—"

"Not me!" came Brazos' whispered exclamation. "Things like that is somethin' I can git along right well without! Let's go find the sheriff, Sleepy; that's murder!"

Brazos didn't wait for Sleepy, but went right back into his saddle. Sleepy looked it over closely, got to his feet and came back to his horse.

"We'll get the sheriff and the coroner," he said. "Who's missin' around this part of the country, Brazos?"

"I dunno," replied Brazos soberly, "but if things don't quit happenin'—I will be."

Jim Harris, grizzled prosecuting attorney, was alone in the sheriff's office, when the light wagon from the H Bar P arrived. He said, "I promised Otto that I would be both sheriff and jailer, until he and Otto returned. I believe they have gone to the Bar N, Hoddy."

"Bar N, eh?" remarked Hoddy. "Quite a ride. Bob Nolan and his two men were at my place for supper."

Jim Harris nodded gravely. "They were here, too," he said. "Would you folks like to talk with Tommy? Go right in, that door is unlocked."

Hoddy let the two women in, but hung back, along with Hashknife, whom he introduced to the lawyer.

"Jim, just why did Otto and Rainy go to the Bar N?" asked Hoddy.

"Playing what you might call a hunch, Hoddy. Last night Bob Nolan and Slim Dunbar had a few drinks at the Silk Hat. Someone asked where Ed Haggarty was, but never got a direct answer. A bit later, it was discovered that Ed Haggarty was with them, but did not come to the saloon. It seems that Haggarty has been injured on the head. He went to the general store, where he finally purchased a bottle of liniment and some strong salve. He said that he was feeling sick and needed something to cure the cut on his head. Asked why he didn't see Doc McBride, he merely mumbled something. He bought a box of .45 cartridges, and went away."

Uncle Hoddy scratched his chin thoughtfully. The lawyer squinted at the sunlight through a front window, and added:

"You remember, Hoddy—Ed Harmon brought a man to Doc McBride—a man with a scalp wound, his face streaked with blood."

"Yeah, I remember that, Jim. And you think that Haggarty—?"

"We would like to know, Hoddy. They had been gone several hours, before Otto learned all this. We talked it over, and he decided to investigate."

"Good idea," said Hoddy. "Wouldn't go see Doc McBride, eh?"

"We don't know, Hoddy. After we found these things out, we went to Doc's place, but he wasn't home. A short time ago, Mrs. Harte, who acts as housekeeper for Doc, came up here and asked if we knew where Doc went. She says he didn't sleep in his bed last night."

"Didn't, huh?" granted Uncle Hoddy. "Well, he was prob'ly called away on a case, Jim."

"His horse and buggy are in the stable, Hoddy."

"Lovely Jerusalem!" gasped Hoddy. "He—he must be missin'!"

"That's the way it struck us," said the lawyer dryly.

"Well, I know, but—" Hoddy failed to find the right words.

Hashknife, leaning against the doorway, listening to the conversation, said, "How far is it to the Bar N spread?"

"It's about twenty miles south of here," replied Hoddy.

Lance Kelsey came down the street and stopped with them. He had heard that Doctor McBride was missing, but he hadn't heard that the officers had gone to the Bar N. Jim Harris explained their suspicions regarding Ed Haggarty. While they were talking at the office, Sleepy and Brazos galloped into town and pulled up at the office.

"Did yuh find the sorrels, Brazos?" asked Hoddy.

"Plumb forgot about 'em," admitted Brazos, piling off his saddle. "Where-at is Otto Myers?"

"What do yuh want the sheriff for?" asked Hoddy quickly.

"We've done found him a dead man, Hoddy. At least," qualified Brazos, "we've done got him a skillington."

"A skeleton," corrected Jim Harris.

"Skillington!" snorted Hoddy.

Brazos looked dejected. "Everybody knows more'n we do, Sleepy—and we found it."

"Where on earth did you find a skeleton?" asked Lance Kelsey.

"Over in that blind canyon that got burned out the other day. Coyotes been pawin' at it, too. And the skull's got a bullethole in it. We've got to take Otto and Doc over there."

"Otto has gone to the Bar N, and Doc's missin'," informed Hoddy.

"Missin'?" gasped Brazos. "Missin', yuh say? Well, love little children! What next?"

"You'll have to wait, Brazos," said the lawyer. "We can't do a thing until Otto gets back—and we find Doc."

Brazos sighed and scratched a shoulder against the porch-post. He said, "Sleepy, let's me and you go over to the Silk Hat and play a game of pool. You say yo're good at it—and I'm the best."

"I'll go along and watch it," grinned Lance Kelsey, and the three of them went up the street.

IT WAS about three o'clock in the afternoon, when Otto Myers, his arm in a sling, and Rainy Knight returned from the Bar N, tired, thirsty and disgusted. They had spent hours at the Bar N, but no one was there, nor did anyone show up. They listened to the information regarding Doctor McBride, but were too tired for comment. Brazos and Sleepy had long since settled the pool playing championship, and told the sheriff about their skeleton.

"That can't possibly be Doc McBride's re-mains," said Rainy.

"Even Doc couldn't disintegrate that fast," admitted Brazos. Otto Myers said, "We'll eat somethin'—and if Doc ain't back by that time, we'll go out there, anyway."

A half-hour later Doctor McBride came back to Arroya City. Rainy Knight saw him coming down the street and commented:

"My Gawd, look at him! He looks like a feller that's had a awful nightmare, and didn't sleep through it!"

The doctor was hatless, his mostly-bald head the color of a beet. His coat was ripped and torn, one pants-leg missing, his hands and face criss-crossed with scratches.

He was at a point of collapse, when they got to him, but seemed to resent any attention.

They led him into the shade of the hotel porch and let him sink into a chair. Everybody tried to question him at once, but the sheriff demanded silence. Someone gave him a small drink of water, which revived him a little. Hashknife noticed that there was a burned spot on the left breast of his coat, and the elderly practitioner seemed to flinch away from that side.

"Can yuh tell us what happened, Doc?" asked the sheriff gently.

Doctor McBride looked around at them. He seemed surprised. He whispered, "Why, I—I'm all right again."

"Yo're darn right yuh are, Doc!" exclaimed Hoddy.

"They said they'd kill me," he whispered. "I don't know—I—I don't think they did."

"We better get him home," suggested the lawyer. "Maybe we better use a blanket or a cot to move him."

"We've got a stretcher down in the jail," said Rainy. "I'll get it."

Down at the doctor's office they removed his clothes, while he protested against them going to all that trouble. Over his heart was a discolored swelling, and what looked like a bullet-scape along his ribs. Hashknife examined the torn coat and Doc's old vest. In the inside pocket of the vest, what there was left of it, contained the remains of an old metal spectacle case and the smashed-up remains of a pair of glasses. Through both the coat and vest was a bullet-hole, the edges and for an inch or two around the hole, had been powder-burned.

"Yuh can see what happened," he pointed out. "Somebody stuck a gun about an inch from his coat and pulled the trigger. The bullet hit that metal case and deflected around his ribs, but the force of that bullet knocked him cold, and they thought he was dead."

The other men nodded gravely.

"They had masks on, and they took me away," said Doc McBride.

"Take it easy, Doc," advised the lawyer.

"No, I'm all right now, Jim. They made me fix up a man's head. He was pretty bad. I—I remember that one of them said, 'He don't know a thing. We'll take him part-way home and turn him loose.' But

the other man said, 'I'm taking no chances; dead men don't talk.' And that is all I remember, until I awoke—a few years ago. I was all tangled up in the brush, and I—well, I don't know what happened after that. I believe I was hunting for water."

The men looked grimly at each other. They were all men who lived hard in a hard land, but this was too much. Otto said, "I hope we find them two men, boys—but they ain't entitled to trial."

After calling in Mrs. Harte to care for the doctor, they went back to the sheriff's office, where Brazos urged them to go out and look at the skeleton.

"Prob'ly some sheepherder," complained Otto. "But I reckon we better investigate. Rainy, you get a couple sacks."

THE sheriff had an extra horse and saddle, so Hashknife went with them, while Uncle Hoddy picked up Aunt Em and Joy down at the minister's house, and went back to the ranch.

Brazos led the way straight to the burned-out canyon and over to where they had found the skeleton. They circled the spot and stared at the slight depression. Fresh dirt was visible, but the bones were gone. Following some tracks in the ashes over near the rocky wall, Hashknife found most of the skeleton, where it had been thrown among the rocks.

They searched carefully, but were unable to find the skull.

"Brazos, are yuh sure there was a skull?" asked Rainy.

"I'll leave it to Sleepy," declared Brazos warmly. "Why, I'll see that grin in m' sleep tonight—won't you, Sleepy?"

"I've been seein' it all afternoon," replied Sleepy soberly, "so I don't know why I wouldn't see it in my dreams."

"I'd like to do a little sleepin'," said Otto painfully. "This arm is sure complainin' plenty."

"I wouldn't be surprised to see it fall off any time," said Rainy soberly. "I told yuh to let me make that trip alone to the Bar N. I could do anythin' that the two of us could do together—the fix yo're in, Otto."

"Everythin' except think, Rainy."

"Brains," said Rainy, "ain't never goin' to get El Pintado—it'll take bull-headed luck, of which I might have a handful."

Hashknife, Sleepy and Brazos went back to the ranch for supper.

JOY was still there; she didn't want to go home. She wasn't interested in the missing skull, nor in Ed Haggarty; she wanted Tommy Pierce out of jail, and she didn't see where any of these later developments would help him prove his innocence.

"Honey," said Aunt Em, "you've got to have patience. Remember, Job had patience."

"All he had was boils, Ma," reminded Uncle Hoddy.

"And a lot of 'em, Hoddy," she declared. "You had just one—and you—why, Hashknife, not one of us got any sleep for a week. Hoddy, suppose you had as many as Job had."

"I dunno where Job had his, Ma."

"We won't go into that, if you please."

After supper there was a general discussion about the kidnaping and attempted killing of Doctor McBride.

"If they catch Ed Haggarty, I'll bet they'll hang him," said Uncle Hoddy.

"What do you think, Hashknife?" asked Aunt Em.

"Folks are queer thataway, Aunt Em," he replied soberly. "They can't see beyond the end of their own noses."

"I can't quite foller yuh on that one," said Brazos.

"Don't let that irk yuh none," grinned Harp. "Brazos couldn't foller an elephant through a snow-drift."

"As a matter of fact," pointed out Hashknife, "Ed Haggarty was here. He said a horse threw him against a corral fence. Whether that was true or not, makes no difference. He went to Arroya City and bought medicine at the store. He didn't have to kidnap a doctor to fix up his head. See what I mean?"

"Yeah, yeah," agreed Hoddy quickly. "That's right—he didn't."

"Well, why didn't yuh tell Otto and Rainy?" queried Brazos. "It could have saved them that long trip to the Bar N."

"Prob'ly they never asked him," said Harp.

"I think Otto was foolish to ride around with that busted arm," remarked Hoddy. "He'd be a lot of help in case of trouble."

"Gettin' back to Doc McBride," sug-

gested Brazos. "What's yore theory, Hashknife?"

"My theory?" smiled the tall cowboy. "Confidentially, Brazos, I believe he was lucky to get out of it alive."

"That's mine, exactly!" exclaimed Brazos. "He shore was."

Joy and Sleepy, sitting together on the sofa, were going through an album of snapshots, most of them of local scenes and people. Sleepy said, "There's a funny lookin' hombre—the one with the big grin. He could shore suck in a lot of air."

"I'll bet that's Tecate Thomas," said Aunt Em, from across the room.

"The cook at the Tumblin' K?" asked Sleepy.

"He was the cook there, but he went back to Texas," said Hoddy. "Tecate looked funny, 'cause he had two front teeth out. Hunk of wood flew up one day and took 'em out as clean as yuh please."

"And no place to get 'em fixed," added Brazos. "He allus said he was goin' to get two gold ones, as soon as he found a dentist. Old Doc McBride could shore pull teeth, but he couldn't put new ones in."

After Hashknife and Sleepy went to bed that night, Sleepy said quietly:

"You heard about Tecate Thomas having two upper front teeth missin', pardner; and that skull had the same two missin'."

"Yea-a-ah?" queried Hashknife. "That's interestin'. Maybe Tecate didn't get as far as Texas."

After a while Sleepy said, "Does it mean anythin', except that he never had to spend the money to buy gold ones?"

"It means that I'd sure like to have a chance to study that old skull. Maybe we can find it tomorrow."

"Another thing," remarked Sleepy. "Rainy said maybe a coyote dragged them bones over by the rocks. No coyote done that, Hashknife."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Hashknife dryly. "All coyotes don't have just two legs."

ON SATURDAY everybody went to town. It was shopping day for the women, and a chance for the men to get together, talk over range matters and imbibe their capacity in hard liquor. Aunt Em had a pie and some cookies for Tommy, Joy

was receptive to a day in town, Brazos and Harp had thirsts, and Uncle Hoddy had to go along, because it was a habit. It was very hot. Hashknife and Sleepy wanted to make another search for the missing skull, but they decided to wait until it cooled off, if ever; so the rest of them headed for Arroya City.

Hashknife and Sleepy sat on the old, shaded porch, trying to get a breath of cool air, and rather pitying the folks who went to Arroya City. While they were taking their ease, Otto Myers, Rainy Knight and Lance Kelsey rode in out of the hills. Otto explained, after the usual greetings had been exchanged, that they had made an early trip into the hills, searching for the missing skull. Doctor McBride, unable to accompany them, said that the skull was the only possible means of identification.

"We don't know who we're lookin' for," complained Rainy. "We ain't lost nobody."

"Well, somebody has," declared Sleepy. "I seen it."

"You saw the skull, eh?" remarked Otto. "Did it just look like any old skull, Sleepy?"

"Well, I ain't no expert on skulls," replied Sleepy soberly. "It looked like a skull, that's all I know."

"Any gold teeth?" asked Kelsey.

"Gold teeth? No, I didn't see any, Kelsey. Do you know any missin' person who had gold teeth?"

"No, I don't, Stevens. Doc McBride mentioned the possibility of identifyin' a skull by the gold or silver in the teeth."

"Well, maybe he did have," said Sleepy, "but I didn't see any."

They rode on, after a drink of water, and Hashknife and Sleepy settled back in the shade again.

"You've got to give Otto a lot of credit," Sleepy said, "he didn't lay down on the job, just because he got a busted arm."

"Otto may not be too smart, but he's tough," said Hashknife.

About two o'clock a breeze came up, cooling the air a little; so they saddled their horses and rode away from the ranch, heading back again for the burned-over canyon. After an hour of intensive search, they decided that the skull had been carried away from there, and that a further search was useless.

"Do we go to town now?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife shook his head, looking back at the high country to their right. "Sleepy, we'll never find out anythin' in town—and it's a good bet we won't find anythin' up here, but I'd kinda like to see what's in them hills over there. We'll get back to town before dark."

ARROYA CITY was a busy place on Saturday. Aunt Em and Joy went straight to the jail for their visit with Tommy Pierce, Uncle Hoddy mixed with the ranchers, talking things over, while Brazos and Harp leaned against the Silk Hat bar and tried to slake their thirsts. There seemed to be a lot of dehydrated folks in Arroya City.

There was much conversation regarding Ed Haggarty and his whereabouts, the assault on Doc McBride, and the case of the missing skull. Arroya City had a lot of things to be discussed. One man, a grizzled cowpoke from the south range, said:

"They cain't treat Ol' Doc thataway, I'll tell yuh that. We've got to git Haggarty and make an example of him. No use both-erin' the law with a buzzard like him."

"What about Bob Nolan and Slim Dunbar?" asked another. "They're in on that deal."

"It jist means a couple more ropes, tha'sall."

Lance Kelsey said, "Whiskey talk. You've got to have proof."

Doc McBride was still in bed, running a little fever, but insisted that he would be all right. It had been a terrible experience for the elderly doctor. His face and bald head were a mass of blisters from sunburn. Otto Myers questioned him about the man he had treated for head injury, but the doctor wasn't even sure what color the man's hair was. He thought it was dark. The vague description covered Ed Haggarty.

Things drifted along as usual. Some fights started, but ended quickly. Otto was suffering from his injured arm and unable to do much, but Rainy Knight kept on the move, trying to keep peace among the men. Hoddy wondered why Hashknife and Sleepy never came to town. Aunt Em and Joy were visiting around, but came back to the street about four o'clock. They found Hoddy and told him they were ready to leave, but Hoddy didn't want to start.

"Ma, let's all stay in town for supper," he said. "No use goin' out there and building up a meal."

It was all right with Aunt Em. Rarely did she get an opportunity to eat in town. It was almost dark when they went to a little Chinese cafe for supper. Rainy Knight stood in the recessed entrance to the general store, looking across at the lights of the Silk Hat Saloon, where a crowd milled around in the eddying smoke, when a lone rider came down the main street, traveling at a moderate pace. Even in the dim light Rainy recognized Ed Haggarty. Favoring his bandaged head, the big cowpoke wore his sombrero rakishly. He pulled up at the hitch-rack near the store, and got off stiffly.

Rainy stepped into the store, where only the storekeeper was in evidence, and Haggarty came in behind him. He didn't see Rainy, as he stopped and looked into a dusty showcase. Rainy stepped in behind him, a gun shoved against Haggarty's ribs.

"Sorry, Haggarty," he said, "but yo're under arrest."

Normally, a man, with a gun against his back, does not move. Not so Ed Haggarty. He whirled like a cat, grabbed Rainy, and smashed him with a wild punch on the shoulder.

It threw the deputy off balance, but he swung wildly with his gun-hand, and the barrel of his forty-five bit into the head of Ed Haggarty.

The force of the swing took Rainy crashing into Haggarty, who collapsed, smashing the flimsy showcase into a mass of broken glass and splintered wood. Rainy got up, but Haggarty didn't. He was knocked cold, bleeding from a split scalp. The storekeeper came running, and stood there, owl-eyed, as Rainy, swearing quietly, hauled the unconscious Haggarty from the wreckage of the showcase.

"My God, Rainy, what is this all about?" he asked.

"Haggarty," explained Rainy, a little shaken. "I arrested him, and he jumped me. That gang over there." Rainy jerked his head toward the Silk Hat Saloon, "would lynch him on sight. You've got to help me—take him out the back way and around to the jail. He's too darn heavy for me—alone. Lock that door first. Two of us can drag him."

No one else had seen the incident. They dragged him out, leaving a fine thread of blood all the way down that floor. They took him through the back door of the jail, and placed him on a cot in the extra cell. Tommy Pierce leaned against the bars of his cell and watched them curiously. Rainy said, "We can't do a thing for him. Doc ain't able to get out of his bed. I hope he don't dreen off *all* his blood."

THE storekeeper hurried back to unlock his store and clean things up. Rainy leaned against the bars and looked at Haggarty, his face chalky in the lamplight. Tommy said:

"It's none of my business, Rainy—but who is he and why?"

"Ed Haggarty," replied Rainy grimly. "We think they kidnaped Doc McBride to fix up Ed's head—and if that gang in the Silk Hat find out he's in here—"

"Does Hashknife Hartley think Haggarty's guilty?" asked Tommy.

"What's Hashknife got to do with it?" asked Rainy testily.

Tommy laughed shortly. "I dunno," he replied lamely. "All I hear is Hartley this and Hartley that. I can't see where he's doin' anythin', Rainy."

"Just between me and you—he ain't," declared Rainy. "All him and Sleepy are doin' is settin' out at the H Bar P, eatin' Aunt Em's cookin'. They ain't done a blasted thing, Tommy—except eat."

Rainy sighed and looked at Haggarty again.

"Yuh must have hit him pretty hard, Rainy," remarked Tommy.

"I had to. I stuck a gun against his back and arrested him—but he whirled around, socked me once, and I kinda busted him over the head—kinda hard, too, I reckon. He weighs more'n a dead horse. Took two of us to drag him here. I'll have to go tell Otto."

"What'll I tell him, if he wakes up?" asked Tommy dryly.

"Tell him he's locked in," replied Rainy. "That blasted fool prob'ly won't even believe that much."

Sundown found Hashknife and Sleepy high in the hills above the valley, searching for a good place to get back to Arroya City. The brush was thick, and the broken

country made it rather difficult for them to select a direct way into the valley.

"It'll be dark pretty blamed quick," complained Sleepy. "How about that left-hand slope over there? It's kinda open along the top."

Hashknife reined his horse around and they started down the narrow hogback. On their right was a deep, brushy swale, to their left a sloping, heavily-brushed mesa. They had gone about a quarter-mile and had pulled up to look for a way around an outcropping of granite and tall brush, when they heard the nicker of a horse. It sounded as though it came from the swale. Again it came, but clearer this time.

Hashknife lifted in his stirrups and looked down. The nicker did not sound as though the horse was too far away.

"I don't see any reason for a loose horse to be down there. We better take a look," Hashknife announced.

"On foot," suggested Sleepy. "Safer and quieter."

Hashknife nodded, as he swung out of his saddle. It was slow and difficult work. Part of the time they were on their hands and knees, and suddenly they were up against the wall of a small shack, so closely brushed that only at close range could it be told from the brush itself. Slowly they worked their way around to the open doorway. Directly in front of the shack was a brush corral, where a white horse stood, looking at them, its ears lifted high. From the shack came the odor of medicine, but no sound.

Cautiously Hashknife peered into the shack. It was not over six by eight feet in size. In the dim light he could see a crude bunk, and there was a man on the bunk, his back to them. Hashknife got slowly to his feet, gun in hand, and stepped into the shack, while Sleepy leaned against the wall, watching from every angle. The man didn't move, but Hashknife could see the movement of the blanket, as he breathed. His head was heavily bandaged. This man, too, had black hair, a swarthy skin. Under the edge of the bunk was a small, black bag, which contained medicine, a cloth roll of surgical instruments.

Hashknife went back to the doorway and said to Sleepy, "Keep yore eye on this hombre—I want to scout a little."

Sleepy stepped inside and crouched near the doorway, watching the unconscious man on the bunk.

"Do yuh know him?" asked Sleepy.

"Never saw him before in my life, Sleepy."

Hashknife came back in a few minutes.

"There's a spring here," he said, "and I found some black stuff in a bag, along with dirty rags. That's El Pintado's horse out there, too."

"That ain't a black-and-white pinto, Hashknife."

"He is—when they paint him with that stuff. Plenty oats for feed, too."

"It's gettin' pretty dark," said Sleepy.

"Yeah, we better head for Arroya City—c'mon."

They weren't careful now, but crashed the brush loudly. Sleepy didn't know just what the idea was, until they stopped and Hashknife whispered:

"A dollar against a doughnut, the dyin' man pulls out."

"Yuh mean—why, he never moved in there. He's in bad—oh-oh!"

The supposedly dying man came past the corner of the shack and stopped. He was unsteady on his feet, but seemed determined. They watched him put a bridle on the white horse, take him from the brush corral and try to mount him bareback. It was a difficult job, but, after several tries, he made it. He rested for a few moments, after which he whirled the horse around and in a moment disappeared from sight.

"Now we've lost him!" complained Sleepy.

Hashknife chuckled. "We'll trail that jigger," he said. "C'mon, let's get the horses. It's a cinch there's a trail down there, which will take us into the valley."

"I shore thought that feller was too sick to travel," panted Sleepy, as they reached their horses. "In fact, I figured he was on his last legs. What made yuh think he was foolin'?"

"I watched close," grinned Hashknife, "and I saw him scratch his nose. Itches don't bother a dyin' man."

It was rapidly growing dark, as they sent their horses crashing down past the little shack, and struck a none-too-plain trail, which finally intersected a worn cattle-trail, heading into the valley.

"Did yuh notice the brand on that white horse?" called Sleepy.

"Yeah," replied Hashknife. "It's the Tumblin' K."

"Kelsey, eh?"

Hashknife had no comments.

Except for a lighted window they would have ridden past the ranchhouse. They swung off the trail and rode slowly, until they came in against a pole corral. They had no idea whose ranch it was, but they were not taking any chances. Leaving their horses, they slowly made their way around the corral, until they could see the dark bulk of the ranchhouse, and the dimly-lighted window. They could also see the white horse against the darker shadow of the house.

HASHKNIFE was about to cross the yard and try to see through that window, when they heard a galloping horse approaching. The lone rider was whistling, off-key, but with plenty vigor, until he saw the white horse. He jerked up sharply and headed for the front door, which opened in his face, and a man started to come out. A voice rasped:

"What the hell are you doin' here?"

The reply was too low-pitched for them to hear, but the newcomer's voice had plenty volume, as he said:

"Why, damn their hides, how did they find it? Where are they? Get back in there, you yaller-belly!"

He shoved the man back inside and closed the door behind them. Sleepy said quietly, "They act kinda upset."

"Somethin' botherin' 'em," agreed Hashknife. "You stay here and I'll tr —oh-oh!"

From inside the house came the muffled thud of a revolver shot. Only seconds later the front door opened and banged shut, as a man came out. He was cursing bitterly.

"Run out on us, would yuh? Take yore share and head for Mexico, would yuh? You'll stay put ~~now~~, until we plant yuh, you fool!"

He got swiftly on his horse and galloped away in the darkness.

"Who owns this place, I wonder?" said Sleepy.

"From their actions," replied Hashknife grimly, "I'd say that the Devil has a controllin' interest."

Six men stood around in the sheriff's office that evening. Otto Myers, the sheriff, Rainy Knight, Jim Harris, Lance Kelsey, Brazos Miller and Harp Harper. Ed Haggarty had not recovered yet, in spite of their clumsy efforts to revive him. Rainy was worried. Brazos had been out to the H Bar P ranchhouse, but Hashknife and Sleepy were not there.

"I wish we knew where they are and what they're doin'," said Otto Myers, resting his aching arm on his desk.

"They couldn't help us none," declared Rainy. "Our best bet is to go out to the Bar N and find Bob Nolan."

"Why did Haggarty take a chance and come back here?" queried Jim Harris.

"Hashknife says Haggarty ain't guilty," offered Brazos.

"What does he know about it?" asked Kelsey. "If he's such a ring-tailed wonder, why hasn't he done somethin'?"

"Maybe he has," suggested Harp mildly. "Wait and see."

Otto said, "Rainy, yuh better go over to the Silk Hat and see what's goin' on. That gang has been talkin' for hours."

"Whiskey talk," scoffed Kelsey.

"Mebbe. You go, anyway, Rainy."

Rainy Knight sighed, hitched his gun to a handy position, and went across the street. A man was getting off a horse at the long rack near the saloon, and he came swiftly down the sidewalk. Rainy said, "Hyah, Bliz," but Bliz Hale ignored him. Rainy said, "Big bum," to himself, and followed Bliz into the saloon.

The tobacco smoke was thick enough to cut with a knife, and the crowd was quickly quieted, as they saw the officer. Rainy smiled grimly. Bliz Hale stopped at the bar and looked around, as though trying to locate somebody. Slim Conover, the bartender, spoke to him, but Bliz Hale ignored him. He looked anxious over something, and jerked around, as two men walked in.

You could almost hear the crowd gasp, "Bob Nolan and Slim Dunbar!" A man outside the saloon recognized them, and went running down to the sheriff's office. The two men from the Bar N walked up to the bar, looking around at the silent crowd, probably wondering what had happened in there.

"Hold it, Bob—you and Slim!" drawled Rainy's voice.

The two men jerked around, looking into the muzzle of Rainy's six-shooter. Rainy said, "You fellers keep back—I'll take 'em, if yuh don't mind."

Bliz Hale slid aside as Bob Nolan said, "Rainy, what's the idea of this foolin'?"

"I ain't foolin', Bob," replied Rainy tensely. "Unbuckle yore belts and let 'em fall. The rest of yuh keep back—the law can handle this deal."

Men were running up the sidewalk, and into the doorway of the saloon—Otto Myers, Lance Kelsey, Jim Harris, Brazos and Harp. They halted just inside the doorway. Bob Nolan grinned wryly, and said to the sheriff:

"Otto, has Rainy gone plumb crazy?"

Uncle Hoddy Pierce came in, craning his neck to take in all the tableau. Myers, Harris and Kelsey came up closer.

"Bob, you and Slim better come along with us," said Otto.

"Why should we?" asked Dunbar belligerently. "We haven't done anythin', Sheriff."

"Wait a minute!" said a voice in the smoke-hazy crowd. "We'll hold trial right here. This is one crime that won't pay. Otto, you might as well put away yore gun and call it a day. We'll handle things from now on."

"I told yuh to unbuckle yore belts and let 'em fall!" said Rainy. "Don't pay no attention to them coyotes. *Muy pronto, Hom-bres!*"

BOTH men started to unbuckle their belts, when Brazos blurted:

"Here's Hashknife and Sleepy! Well, do you cats, where have you two been all day?"

The room was as quiet as a church, as Hashknife and Sleepy stopped just inside the doorway, looking curiously at the crowd.

Hashknife's gray eyes shifted swiftly over the gathering as he said, "What's goin' on, gents?"

Sleepy came on, moving part way across the room, where he leaned against a card table.

"Hashknife, we've got Haggarty in jail, and—and here are Nolan and Dunbar," said Rainy.

"What have they done?" asked Hashknife quietly.

"Well, somebody kidnaped Doc McBride and tried to murder him," said Otto.

"He had to mend a feller with a busted head, and—well, we've got to find out a few things."

Hashknife moved in a couple of steps, getting into a position where he could see everybody at the bar. When he spoke it was in a quiet conversational tone, with no emotion nor menace in his voice.

"Speakin' of busted heads, gents—" Hashknife smiled slowly, as he looked them over. "Will somebody tell me why they named Red Saunders 'Red'?"

For several moments no one spoke. Then Rainy said, "His right name is Redfield, Hashknife—his hair's black."

"I know it is, but that color kinda had me stumped. Yuh see, all I knew about him was his name. I was lookin' for a red-head."

"What's that got to do with this case?" asked a man in the crowd.

Hashknife didn't answer right away. His gaze centered on Bliz Hale, who seemed to be having trouble with his hands. Lance Kelsey put one hand on the bar, but his eyes were on Hashknife.

"What has it got to do with this case?" asked Hashknife slowly. "My friend, this is *the* case. Redfield Saunders is dead. Yuh see, Redfield was yellow. He didn't want to hang; so he tried to take his share of the loot and head for Mexico, but one of his bunkies gunned him down."

Otto Myers, slack-jawed, swung around and gazed at Kelsey, who was staring straight ahead, eyes slitted, his lips invisible. Otto said, "What do yuh mean, Hartley? You say Red is dead?"

"Yea-a-ah!" breathed Hashknife, but the whisper was audible any place in that room. "Red was sore—dyin'—so he talked."

"You bunglin' fool!" screamed Kelsey.

How Kelsey drew that gun was a mystery, but it flamed in his right hand, as he screamed, and the bullet almost knocked Bliz Hale off his feet. Kelsey whirled like a cat, snapping a shot at Hashknife, but the tall cowpoke was dropping to his knees, his gun bucking in his hand, and Kelsey's bullet only knocked his hat off his head.

Kelsey spun on his heels, went backwards, struck his right shoulder against the bar, and slid to the floor, his gun clanging loosely against the metal bar-rail. From Kelsey's scream to the echo of the final shot was only

a matter of split seconds. The shocked crowd reacted slowly. No one seemed to know what to do next. Bliz Hale was trying to lift his head and shoulders, and Hashknife quickly propped him against a card-table, and said:

"Hale, yo're finished. Let's see if you can tell the same story that Red Jackson told. He said that Lance Kelsey was El Pintado."

"Damn his soul—he was!" panted Bliz painfully. "He shot me."

"Yeah, we saw that. Red said that you shot Ed Harmon."

"Red lied!" gasped Bliz. "Red shot him. He caught Red paintin' the black spots on that white horse. Red jumped him, and they had a fight. Harmon shot Red in the head and took him to the doctor, but Red got away. He was bad hurt, but he found Harmon and killed him. He knew he had to do it. But Red got poisoned from that bullet and—Kelsey wanted to kill him—but I—I kinda liked Red; so we took Doc McBride out there and made him fix Red up."

Bliz slumped a little, but someone handed Hashknife a glass of whiskey, and Bliz gulped it noisily.

"Why did Kelsey take away the skull of Tecate Thomas?" asked Hashknife.

"He was scared," whispered Bliz. "Somebody said yuh can identify a skull—and Kelsey wasn't takin' chances. Yuh see, Tecate was pullin' out, after Kelsey started that El Pintado stuff. He was scared he might get himself into trouble. Tecate was yaller. Kelsey shot him, and told folks he went to Texas."

"You tried to talk Kelsey out of shootin' Doc McBride, eh?"

"Yeah, I—" Bliz grimaced from pain, "I liked the old coot. But Kelsey said if yo're dead yuh don't talk."

Hashknife got to his feet and looked at the crowd. Jim Harris said, "Hartley, we know everything now—thanks to you."

"But—but what about Ed Haggarty?" asked Rainy. "He had to get his head fixed, too. Why, we thought—"

"Wait a minute!" rasped Bob Nolan. "Haggarty got throwed against a corral fence. We couldn't find Doc McBride; so we all rode to San Miguel, had the doctor there fix him up, and we stayed all night. Rainy, you bla ted fool, did you think that we—"

"I reckon we're all sorry, Bob," said Otto. "Yeah see, when yuh don't know nothin'—"
 "That's it—in a nutshell," interrupted Rainy. "Ignorance!"

Uncle Hoddy suddenly went into a sort of spring-dance, grabbed Hashknife's hand and started pumping it up and down.

"Tommy's cleared!" he yelled. "Hashknife, don't yuh realize that Tommy is innocent? My God, it's true! I've got to find Aunt Em and tell her!"

The little cowman shot out through that doorway like a rabbit. Sleepy said, "After all, hadn't we better get these boys to a doctor? I don't believe either one of 'em have cashed in their chips yet."

"Doc's back on his feet," said Otto. "We may have to ride to San Miguel and get another doctor to help him."

There was plenty of volunteer help. Hashknife and Sleepy went down to the jail, where Aunt Em, Joy Harmon and Uncle Hoddy were telling Tommy about their good fortune. Ed Haggarty was sitting on a cot, smoking a cigarette, but looking very seedy.

The folks around Tommy's cell were too excited to notice Hashknife, who walked over to Haggarty's cell and looked at the occupant.

Haggarty knew him, and said, "All right, you long-legged blood-hound, you! I've been knocked down, dragged around and dumped in jail, but I still don't know why."

"It's all right, Haggarty," replied Hashknife. "You'll be out of there in a few minutes."

Haggarty's eyes lighted up quickly. "Yuh mean—they don't want me?" he asked anxiously. "I mean—yuh—well, what the hell do yuh mean, Hartley?"

"Haggarty," whispered Hashknife, "let's me and you forget. If you want to go straight—keep goin' straight. I don't even remember yuh. Good luck, feller."

Aunt Em grabbed Hashknife and kissed him three times. Joy missed once, but the second time was perfect. Tommy yelled, "Let him out and I'll kiss him myself!"

It seemed that everybody in town was trying to get into that room but Hashknife and Sleepy managed to get outside. Bob Nolan, who had been talking with Haggarty, shoved his way out behind them.

"Boys," he said, "I just want to say thank

yuh. It ain't much, but it's the best I can do. You sure saved us a lot of trouble—and I—well, I talked with Ed. Oh, I know he was with a bad bunch—once—and he knew you two. Ed's been with me ever since that time. He's goin' straight as a string."

"That's swell, Nolan," said Hashknife quietly. "I don't even remember him."

"That's what he said. If yuh ever need extra guns, feller—yell for the Bar N. Yuh see, his name ain't Haggarty—it's Nolan."

Rainy Knight shoved his way out to the sidewalk, exclaiming, "What a night! Haggarty says he excuses me for pettin' him over the head with m' six-gun. That's swell of him! Joy and Tommy are goin' to get married in a couple days, and if m' luck holds out, I'll get that three dollars and six bits back for that weddin' ring!"

"And you'll still be best-man, eh?" grinned Sleepy.

"That's what you think! Nope, I'm steppin' aside for a tall, lean, cold-jawed—he-e-ey! Where are you two goin'?"

But Hashknife and Sleepy didn't answer. They could beat the others to the ranch, take their war-sacks and fade out of the Arroya country. Hashknife was afraid of weddings—and the tall hills were calling them again. As they headed for the H Bar P, Sleepy said:

"Maybe I'm dumb, but how did you know that Kelsey took away that skull? After all, Red Jackson was as dead as a door-knob, when we got into that ranchhouse, and couldn't tell us anythin'?"

Hashknife chuckled. "Pardner, when yuh want a man to confess, get a few facts, but don't ask him questions—tell him yuh know. It was sort of a blind trail—with three men at the end of it. There had to be three—one with a sore knob, the other two kidnappin' the doctor. I wasn't sure, until that skull was gone. It had to be Kelsey—he heard us talk about it—went to watch you and Brazos play pool—but pulled out ten minutes later. I was kinda confused at that slack, when the man had black hair, but it worked out all right. Imagine a feller like that named Redfield!"

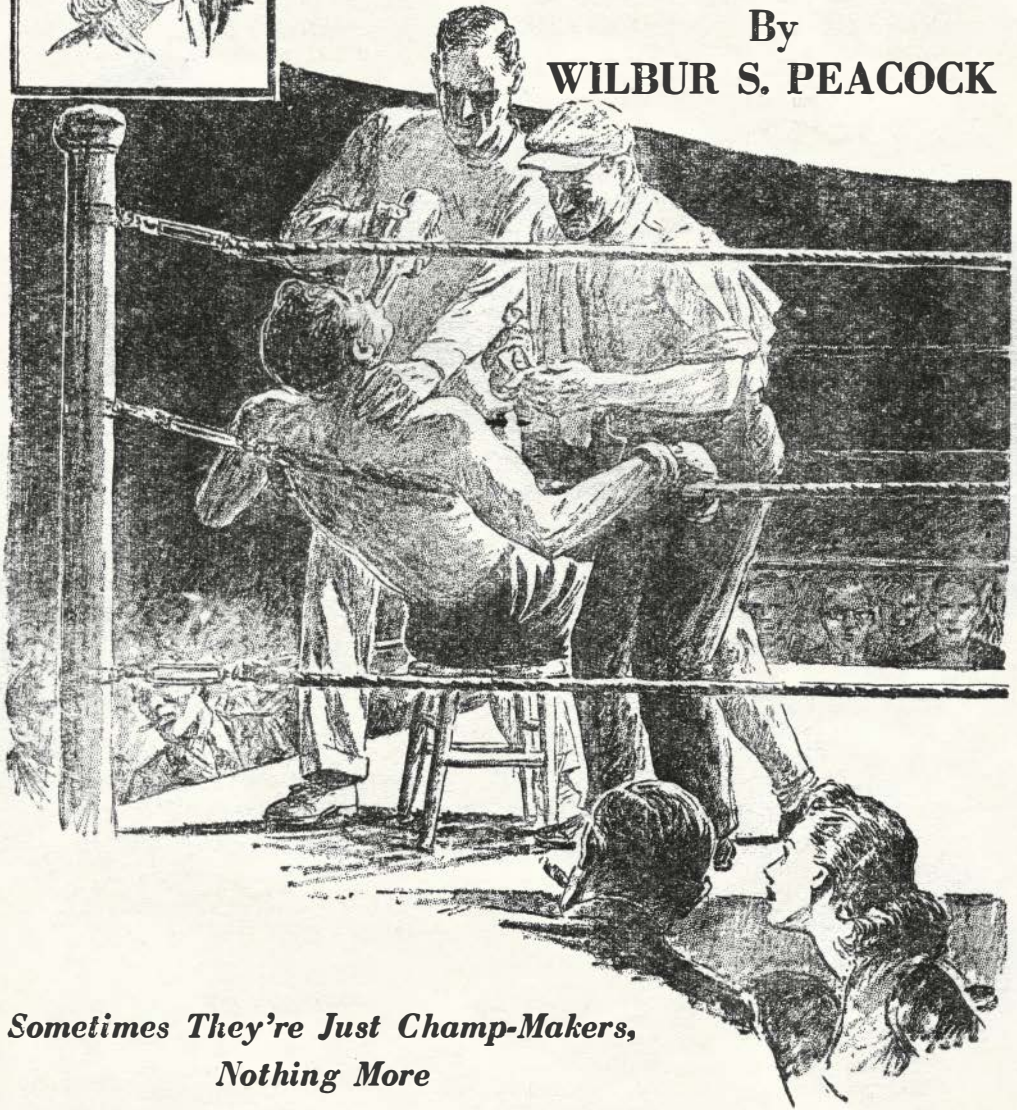
"Anythin' can happen in Arizona," said Sleepy.

"Except me bein' best-man at a weddin'," added Hashknife.



WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME

By
WILBUR S. PEACOCK



*Sometimes They're Just Champ-Makers,
Nothing More*

I COULD hear the piano as I came up the hall, and I tried to remember how many pianos I'd heard in the past. Thousands, maybe, and each one had a drunk beating the ivories, while other drunks harmonized so far off key they didn't even have the tune. It wasn't just the piano I hated, it was everything, the whole ousy racket.

Bingo said, "Straighten your tie, Champ." I fixed my tie, and my voice was ugly, despite myself. "I'm not the champ," I said. "I never will be. I'm the trial horse, the champ maker. I'm the last hurdle on the way up."

"Sure, Gene, sure!" Bingo said, and I was sorry I'd hurt his feelings. After all, it wasn't his fault.

He pounded on the door, then twisted the knob. Stale smoke and whiskey fumes and hard laughter washed into the hall, and I almost turned away. After all, I didn't have to appear. Lucky had told me to, but I wasn't taking orders from Lucky anymore, not since he'd sold my contract and latched onto Buddy Edson.

"Come on," Bingo said and went ahead, swallowed instantly by the crowd.

I followed, closing the door and edging along the wall. I didn't drink, so the bar wasn't of any use to me. I couldn't sing; a lucky punch had caught my throat years before and left me with a voice half-clear and half-growl. I was just there for the laughs, if there were any, and to make newspaper copy for any reporters free-loading.

I could see Buddy. His face was flushed, corn tassel hair a bit awry from its smooth cap. Big timers don't drink; but he was like a mule from the country he haled from, nothing could hurt him. He was a bit liquored up, as much from the adulation he was receiving as from the whiskey in his hand.

"Well, if it isn't the Champ!" a voice said at my side, and I recognized it without turning my head.

"Still riding the winners, Irene?" I asked.

"Only winners, darling," she said, and I turned for a good look.

She hadn't changed much. Her figure was still breath-taking, and her hair was so carelessly natural it was unnatural. Her lips smiled, and her skin was like smooth cream. But her eyes, once you understood her lashes were a shield to be pierced, were like panes of blue ice, cold and remote and calculating.

I felt the old tight feeling in my throat again. Once, she'd been mine, wearing a stone on her finger only rich people buy. I'd have sold my soul for her, and maybe I did.

She laughed, softly, like a big shot betting on a hard one and seeing it come through. She knew she could hurt me; she knew it and she did it, raking up old memories and holding them out to me like pennies to a beggar.

"Get away from me," I said, and turned and left the room.

I sat on the bed, getting my breathing back to normal. Cigarettes were on the night stand, and I lit one. Training wasn't

quite as important these days, not as much as it had been when I'd been twenty-two, with a championship a glove's length away.

The party was going stronger than ever, celebrating already a fight which wouldn't take place until the next night, celebrating a winning which might not take place at all if I got in a lucky punch. My stomach crawled a bit at the thought. I'd celebrated a winning, too, Irene at my side, and then Joe had dropped me for a long one in the fourteenth.

After that there'd been a uniform and a long trip away from the things I knew. And when I came back, there were others standing where I'd stood, good guys, plenty good, and I understood that my day lay in the past.

I KNOTTED my right fist, pounding it on my knee. I swore to myself thinking of what could have been, and the ugliness in me was almost frightening.

But after a time I quit. I saw the pucker almost vanish from the back of my hand, the pouting ridge left by a sniper's slug when I'd reached from cover. That, too, was one reason I'd never rise quite as high as once I could have done. That hand could take only so much, only so much and no more.

I blew smoke at the ceiling, watching it coil lazily. My mad was over, and somehow, not many things mattered any longer. I was broke, but then a lot of guys were broke. This fight would clear up the last of the debts.

I think I grinned then. It was kinda amusing to realize that after ten years in the racket, day after tomorrow, I'd just be about even with the world. After tomorrow, at twenty-eight, I could begin all over again. I could say to everybody, "*Who'll give a job to a washed-up punch jockey? Who'll take a guy who was almost champ and let him work for peanuts?*"

I heard her crying then.

I think I had heard the sound all along but had given it no heed. The bedroom was empty, which meant the sound came from the bath, and I listened for a long minute without moving, without caring. After all, it was none of my business; maybe some babe was on a crying jag.

But after a time my nerves couldn't take

it. I slammed the cigarette into the tray and came to my feet. The room was big, furniture scattered, coats and hats everywhere. I went across the rug, unconsciously walking softly, and opened the door to the bath, without knocking, without thinking.

"Nothing's that bad," I said.

"Go away!" She didn't even look around.

Her hair was gold, pale gold, and caught at the back with a wide barrette. She was slim, too, and young, and after a minute, when she turned about, I could see she was just a kid, twenty, maybe nineteen. Her eyes were red, and she had been using a washcloth for a handkerchief.

"Go away," she said again.

"All right," I said. "I was just trying to be nice."

I didn't move, just stood and watched. She was clean cut, this kid, strictly from the sticks. Not that that was anything against her, in fact it helped her. It was just that she somehow didn't belong here, along with the fight crowd in the other room.

"I'm sorry," she said at last. "I didn't mean to be rude."

"Who are you?" I asked. "What's the matter?"

She recognized me then; most people do after a time.

I've been around long enough, and the papers do like my pictures—the ones taken when I was champ material.

"You're Gene Boyle, aren't you?" she asked.

"That's me." I tried a grin. "The gallery's boy friend. But that still doesn't tell me why you're crying."

"You wouldn't understand," she said, and brushed by me.

By the time I turned, she was gone, the hall door slamming behind. In the other room, the noise was louder than before. I considered running for it, too. Then Bingo opened the door.

"Come on in here, Gene," he said. "They wanta take pitchers."

I went. After all, I didn't know the kid, she meant nothing to me, let her bawl all over the place.

PEOPLE were slapping me on the back and breathing whiskey fumes into my face. "Goodol' Gene," they were saying,

"Goodol' boy." I could have knocked their stupid faces off.

Sour grapes, that's what it was, of course. What the hell! Nobody could blame me. This should have been a party for me instead of Buddy. I'd licked better men than he'd ever be, and yet he was going to be the next heavyweight champion of the world. Sure, it was sour grapes.

"Hi, Mr. Boyle," Buddy Edson said, and shook hands. At least he still had a few manners.

"Hi!" I said, and that took care of that.

"Like buddies," a photog said, and the crowd thought that was funny.

We had our picture taken with arms about each other. Then we squared off like we meant it. Then they shunted me to one side and took pictures of Buddy and Irene. Oh, she was there, slick and hard and dangerous. Make sure she was in on it; and I could see she already had her brand on Edson. Hell, she hit his senses like a double scotch. His mind was spinning like a top. He was twenty-two and she was thirty, and he thought he was doing all the pushing and arranging.

"Let's get out of here," I said to Bingo.

"Aw, Champ!" Bingo said, then saw my face. "Okay, it's a stinking party, anyway."

We went out and had cheeseburgers and coffee. They weren't on my training diet, but who cared. Bingo had had one drink too many, but he was sobering up, and me, well, somehow, I was remembering the girl who cried.

"There was a blonde dish at the party," I said, "bawling her eyes out. Who was she?"

Bingo shrugged. Sometimes I think punches scrambled his brains as well as his features.

"How should I know?" he countered.

"Little, built right, hair like—like spun gold, and eyes so blue they're almost purple. Who is she?"

"Oh, you mean Miss Carol, Susan Carol. She was engaged to Buddy."

"Was?" I asked, and sucked at coffee in the heavy mug.

"Sure!" Bingo chewed at a strip of bacon.

"She and Buddy was goin' together, but they busted up tonight. Fellas was telling me." He winked. "But don't think he's goin' to bawl; he's got a dish in that Irene, and that ain't bad."

I finished the coffee; it tasted like dish-water. "'S'matter, he getting too big for his britches?'"

"Aw, fer cripe's sake, Champ," Bingo said, "what's wrong with one big timer teamin' up with another? She's an apple knocker; let her go back where she came from."

"I suppose," I said, but I still didn't see it.

A guy tapped me on the shoulder. Lucky Riordan, old "Cut your throat" Riordan, my old buddy.

"Beat it," I said, "you stink up the joint."

"The back booth, Gene," Lucky said, and I saw then he had a couple of friends standing back a way, ready for anything.

"Okay!" I said. "It doesn't cost anything to listen."

"Hey, what's goin' on?" Bingo said.

"Shut up, stupid," Lucky ordered, and his men flanked Bingo, pinning him in his place with neat precision.

WE SAT in the booth, and Lucky thumbed a nickel into the juke box a few feet away. Music came out, hot and swingy, setting my feet to itching. I always liked Dorsey.

"I missed you at the party, Gene," Lucky said, and I knew then why the juke box was rolling. Nobody could listen.

"That must of broke your heart," I said. "Anyway, you tailed me here; what's on your mind?"

"Ten grand."

"Ten grand!" I poured sugar into the ash tray, stirring it with my finger. "That's a lot of dough these days."

"Yeah, isn't it!" Lucky licked his lips. He was swart and greasy and smelled of barber-shop cologne.

"And for that I dive like a seal."

Lucky grinned, rolling a thin, gold-banded cigar in his fingers. I remembered when he'd mooched cigarettes, that was before he managed me.

"That's hardly the viewpoint, Gene," he said. "I've heard how tough things are. I know this fight will just about clear your debts. Ten grand would be plenty of nice folding green for your pocket."

I spilled pepper in with the sugar. "I hear a few things, too," I said, "like you mixing it up with Benton's gambling ring.

'S'matter, doesn't managing a future champ pay off enough?"

Lucky shrugged. "A dollar here, a dollar there," he said.

"Yeah!" I admitted.

I wasn't kidding myself; I was washed up; it was just a matter of time. This would be the last big show, then the skids, the tank towns, maybe a carnie. My hand could not take it, my body couldn't take it. Ten grand was mighty big, specially since I'd get my head beaten in anyway.

"What round?" I asked.

Lucky grinned and lit his cigar. "Who cares?" he said. "Eight, nine, it doesn't matter. You get paid when it's over."

"Now," I said, and laughed. I knew Lucky.

"You might get smart," he said. "You might tag him with a lucky one, trying to put something over. I pay on delivery."

"Half now," I said, "or maybe I will try to stop his clock even more than I intend to."

"Okay, Gene." He fished bills from a wallet, big bills. "Understand, this is for keeps. A lot of money will ride on this. No stalling, no grandstand plays; you just roll over and play dead at the right time."

"Yeah!" I said, putting the money away. "Now go back to your gutter."

He was smiling as he left, but there was not any humor in his eyes. He hated me as much as I hated him. I knew this was all I'd get; he'd welsh on the rest, but I didn't care, five grand was plenty.

BINGO slid into the booth, his face worried. "The Commissioner wouldn't like it, Champ," he said, "if he knew you was here talkin' to Lucky."

"That worries me," I said.

His mind fished for thoughts. "What'd he want?"

"Me to go into the tank for five grand, making a cinch a certainty."

"But you can't!" His eyes got big beneath the gristle ridges. "Hell, you ain't no tanker."

"Wasn't, Bingo," I said. "I'm through being the sucker; I'm getting what I can."

"But, Champ—"

"And I'm not Champ—I'm Gene Boyle, patsy and pushover. If you don't like it, get the hell out!"

"I don't like it; you can lick the bum."

I laughed. Somebody else was playing the juke box, and its music went round and round in my head. I felt even dirtier than before. I was a punk now, going down, but at least I'd always fought clean. Now I had five grand in my pocket, dirty money, diving money—good money.

"I couldn't whip him in a month of Sundays! But saying I did, then what?"

"Three or four fights and you'd be Champ."

I think I hated Bingo, too, then. When you let a guy down, a guy who believes in you in his nutty way, then you hate him because he makes you feel guilty for not living up to what he expects.

"I'm getting out," I said. "From now on, I'm a smart guy. I've taken enough pastings for glory. Hell, there's an attachment on my share of the purse already. I won't have a dime after this fight's over. All right, so I'll make it pay off my way."

"I don't like it."

"Then, like I said, get the hell out!"

I didn't expect him to. We'd known each other ten years. He was always in my corner; he was sort of my right hand. But now he stood up, and he made me feel lower than a snake's belly.

"So long, Gene," he said. "I ain't smart, but I am honest."

Then he was gone, and I was watching the door swing back and forth, whipping cold air into the diner. "Coffee," I said to the waitress, and sat back, wondering what the hell, what the hell.

I counted the money, running the bills through my fingers. I hadn't handled anything like this in a long time. After paying bills and cutting down old debts, I'd been left peanuts. This was like old times, like maybe just before I fought Joe.

I put the money away. I sugared the coffee, wondering what my brother would say if I came west and helped open a station. I'd been a good mechanic once, that is, before I found out I was a better fighter.

Then a shadow ran over the table, and I could smell the faint perfume I'd never forget.

"Hello, Champ," Irene said.

"You're in the wrong place, Irene," I said. "There's no caviar here."

She smiled, but her eyes were not amused.

She slid carefully into the booth, taking care of the platina, pulling it tightly about her slender shoulders.

"Bingo told me you were here," she said. "What happened, did you have a fight?"

"Look, Irene," I said carefully, "go away. Go back to Buddy."

"In a moment." She found a cigarette in a jewelled case and lit it with a monogrammed lighter. I recognized the case; it had cost plenty not too many years back.

"All right," I said, "what's on your mind?"

"Buddy."

I grinned past the coffee cup. "A lot of people are thinking of him. What makes your way so different?"

"We're going to be married."

I took that. It really didn't matter much any longer. I was out; I'd been out for a long time. Irene rode with the winners. I just listened, and I knew then that she, too, realized the years were sneaking by.

"So you really have cut out the apple knocker?" I said.

"She's out," Irene said, and her fingers stretched and retracted like a cat's claws. "Buddy's going to marry me the day after the fight."

"He know it yet?" I said nastily.

She flushed. I'd hit her squarely, and she didn't like it. But her voice didn't change. She crushed out the cigarette, then handed me an envelope from her purse.

"My old love letters?" I asked.

"Five thousand dollars," Irene said. "I want Buddy to be champ."

"My God," I said, "do you think I can whip him, too?"

She shook her head. "You can't whip him, even I know that. But you might hurt him. When he gets past you, he'll have time to get the final roughness polished off. He'll be champ then."

"And you'll be Mrs. Champ."

"I'll be Mrs. Champ."

Her eyes were almost green; she was adamant hard. I wondered how she could have twisted me around so in the old days.

"You figure it close," I said.

SHE fished for another cigarette, while I turned the envelope over and over in my fingers. This was velvet, like Lucky's money, all I had to do was nod my head.

But a doubt was growing in my mind. Maybe I wasn't quite as washed up as people thought, maybe I could still do the thing I'd started out to accomplish. Hell, other men had won titles in their late twenties or early thirties; maybe I'd repeat the story.

Irene read my thoughts. She blew smoke at me, and her lips curved in scorn. "Stop playing the hero, Champ," she said. "You're washed up and you know it. Buddy can take you, a lot of others can take you. Use your head."

I flapped the envelope. "Buddy know about this?"

"Of course not."

I was remembering Buddy Edson then, wide shoulders and tapering waist, a chin like granite, and a string of knockouts that stretched a long way back. I blew my breath.

"Okay!" I said. "I'll play. I won't try to hurt him."

I put the envelope with Lucky's money. Irene watched it disappear, then came from the booth, smoothing the soft fur of her coat.

"Goodbye, Champ," she said, and I knew then that this was the end of another trail.

She left the diner, a couple of men turning their heads to watch. I grinned; once I had thought that exciting. Then I flipped a dime on the table and left, too.

I walked back to the hotel. Traffic spun by, big lights chasing little lights, signals running red, amber and green and over again. Windows were bright, and people laughed on the sidewalk. I didn't like myself or anybody else. The only thing I liked was the feel of the dough in my pocket. Dough replaced a lot of things.

Bingo was in the room, waiting, his eyes shifting uneasily, not coming to center on me.

"Look, Champ—" he began, and I cut him off.

"Forget it," I said. "Forget it. Everybody makes mistakes."

"All right," Bingo said then. "I don't like it, but all right. I stick with you."

I lay a long time that night, thinking and sweating and wishing.

THIS was the eighth; I know it was the eighth because Bingo kept yelling the number in my ear. I could hear the crowd,

and it was going crazy. Smoke was rolling like fog, and the lights hammered at me with the force of a blow.

I tried to breathe, and my lungs were on fire. A rib ached where Buddy had smashed his right hand, and Mickey was doing something to my right eyebrow to stop the bleeding. I was taking a licking, a hell of a licking, and I didn't like it, I didn't like it at all.

I could see Buddy. He still looked fresh and big and tough, just as he was. But I'd marked him, marked him good. Even a guy like me, a trial horse, a champ-maker, a guy who's bound to lose, has to make it look good.

My brain was jumping and it hurt to breathe. The kid was good, damned good, and when he hit, he almost killed a man. "Keep your left up," Bingo was saying, and I was nodding, and Mickey was kneading the muscles of my belly.

The buzzer sounded, and by the time I was up, there was the bell. I went in, ducking and weaving, fighting my style, and Buddy came at me with both gloves moving.

He smashed my sore side, hit it again, and I felt like screaming. I tied him up, then roughed him, coming out of the clinch. He didn't like it. His left snaked out, tried to set me up, and I whipped a right into his chest.

He walked into me, and we slugged it out. I was pulling them, understand, not much, but a little, and I was being beaten to death because of that. There's a fine edge in boxing, drop it and you're lost, and I'd dropped it rounds before.

But it looked good; it looked damned good. I smashed his nose enough to start the blood, and he'd open the scar tissue over my eyes. We were big men, and when we hit, the blows sounded good. The crowd loved it, the blood-hungry mob sitting outside the ropes. They saw the damage and yelled for more. They were animals watching animals fight, and I was sick of them and everything else.

I took one on the face, feeling my neck turn. Ropes burned my back, then I was slipping away, holding him off, trying to clear my eyes. I caught his heart, then his shoulder and his heart again. He slowed more cautious now. My legs were lead, holding me down, immovable weights.

He caught me, he tagged me, and I never saw it coming. My buttocks slapped the canvas and I went sprawling backward. Stars exploded in bright colors, and somewhere I heard the referee counting. I was on my hands and knees, watching my corner, watching Bingo count. At nine, I came up, the referee cleaning my gloves. I went into a clinch, tying Buddy up, not giving him a chance to finish it. The bell caught us that way, and I went wobbly-legged back to my corner.

Mickey washed my face with a sponge. "You're doing fine, Champ he said. "But keep away; he's still fresh enough to run after you."

I spat into the bucket. My eyes were clearing now, some of the fog running from my head. I saw Lucky at ringside, and he waved his cigar in a friendly way. It would take a hell of a smart man to know he'd just signalled me to take the dive.

I saw Irene, too. She was at ringside, close to Buddy's corner, and I saw that she was laughing and calling up something to him as his handlers worked. My bullet-puckered hand was beginning to hurt.

THE buzzer sounded, then the bell. I closed my lips over the mouthpiece and went out, wondering just when the right second would be. It had to look good; it had to look damned good.

Buddy wasn't waiting for anything. He'd had his orders, and he was coming in for the kill. Maybe I looked like that once, before my nose had bent a bit to one side, before my ear curled and began to spread. He looked clean and tough. He'd make a good champion.

We mixed it up. I could smell sweat and the stink of blood, and the roar of the crowd was just a buzzing in my ears. I rocked back each time I was hit, taking it, waiting for the moment to open up and let him through with a good one. He slipped a bit, and I tagged him, accidentally, you understand, but I tagged him, and he went down.

He wasn't hurt, just surprised. I danced away; the rules said I had to, and I watched him coming up.

Then I saw her. I saw the blondeness of her hair at ringside, and I wondered what the hell she was doing there. She was on her feet, leaning forward, and I could see

her lips move. "Get up, Buddy," she was saying, "get up, Buddy."

I don't know why I did it. I just moved in. I didn't let him get set and I wasn't pulling punches any longer. I was slower, plenty slow, but when I hit him, he felt it. I caught him coming up and I drove him back, and I knew something then that even he didn't realize.

A fighter knows something when he gets in the ropes with another guy. He knows what's in the man, and he knows it fast. Buddy was big and fast and terrific. He was going places, rising high.

But when I drove him back, and felt him go back, I knew he'd never be champ. It wasn't in him. He could fight, he could box and mix, but he lacked that certain something that men like Sullivan and Kilrain and Dempsey and Louis had. He lacked an instinct.

He was like me, a champ-maker, nothing more.

I tried to kill him. I've really never been able to figure out why. I hit him with everything but the ringposts. Oh, he got to me, too, but I'm tough and I can take it, and I kept coming in.

At the bell, we were slugging and the crowd was crazy and I don't think either of us knew there were but two people in the world. The referee broke us, sent us back to our corners.

I was breathing hard, and there was an anger in me exploding then such as I had never felt before in my life. I could see Lucky.

He wasn't smoking; he was just watching, and I knew this had to be fast.

And I saw Irene, too, and I almost laughed.

"You got those envelopes, Bingo?" I asked.

"Yeah!"

"Then give one to Lucky and one to Irene," I said, and went out at the bell.

I saw Susan; I saw the blind terror on her face as I chopped at Buddy. He'd mauled me around for nine rounds, and now he was taking it. I roughed him, and I did him dirt, and I made him take it and come in for more. I opened him up, widening his defense, then slashed my hand square across his mouth.

His mouthpiece flew, skidding on the

dirty canvas, and in that second I smashed at Buddy's jaw.

I hit it a twisting blow, twisting my hand and opening his mouth. Then I smashed with both hands, never letting the daze disappear from his eyes. I broke his jaw with the second blow and smashed it with the third. I screamed on the fourth blow, but the sound went unheard in the bellow of noise from the crowd. I put Buddy to sleep with the fourth blow, and felt bones crumple like chalk in my hand.

Then Buddy was down, down for good, down for keeps, down forever. One leg was doubled under him, and his arms were outflung. His face was bloody and misshapen, and he was out, completely out.

I went along the ropes toward a neutral corner. I went along them and I leaned over to yell at Susan. I must have been a bit crazy then, but anyway I yelled.

"There's a present for you, apple knocker," I bellowed, and then went on to the corner.

I had seen the hate in her eyes. She could have killed me then for knocking Buddy out. I wondered if ever she'd understand.

Then the fight was over and my glove was lifted and I was fighting my way back to the dressing room. My hand was a chunk of crushed rock and blood was running down my face, but I walked straight and I didn't look back.

IT WAS late when we hit the station. It was late, and porters cleaned lazily, crowds thin and sparse. Bingo trotted at my side, his face still beaming.

"You're sure, Bingo?" I asked, looking at the tickets. "A gas station isn't Stillman's."

"Sure, Champ, sure!" Bingo said.

I saw the early editions on the stand. I knew what they'd say, that they'd be calling me a butcher. Buddy would never fight again, not with the jaw I'd left him. Any punk could smash it again. Now he'd go back where he came from, go back with a pile of dough he'd saved. And Susan would be there.

And Irene and Lucky? I grinned at the thought. Irene would have to start over again, and somehow I had the idea she'd find it pretty hard. And Lucky, well, maybe those gambling friends might not like his "double cross." Maybe they'd do something about it.

My hand was hurting, and I moved it in the sling. I was through, too, as far as that went. Twenty-eight, broke and through. I could wield a wrench, but I'd never wear a glove again, the sawbones had said so.

"Look, Champ," Bingo said, "I'm sorry I blew up last night. I guess maybe I was drunk, huh?"

I looked at him and I liked his face and the damned dumb hero worship in his eyes. I poked him with my good hand, and he grinned sheepishly.

I looked around at the station. It was part of the life I was leaving; it marked a portion of my life that had had its moments. I didn't hate it like I had, I just thought it was a nice station. I felt kinda rested inside.

"Right this way, gentlemen," the porter said and caught up the bags.

Then we were going through the gates, going toward the train which waited just ahead.

"Hurry up, Champ," Bingo said, and I grinned and lengthened my pace.

In the next *SHORT STORIES*

A novelette of justice as it was worked out
by the outlaws of Halfaday Creek

MINERS' MEETIN'

James B. Hendryx



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KUHLOFF

A New Design—Unsurpassed Strength
YOU know the two new Remington rifles, Models 721 (long action for long cartridges) and 722 (short action for shorter cartridges) have been cooking for a long time.

Let's take a look at the development of Remington bolt-action high-powered rifles.

After World War I the boys up at Bridgeport had quite a supply of actions, barrels and spare parts left, and with the sudden demand for a high-power sporting rifle with bolt action, a few (a mighty few) changes in the design of the U. S. Model 1917 (Enfield) rifle were made and the Remington Model 30 was born. This was one of the first successful high-power bolt-action rifles placed on the American sporting market.

With an improvement every now and then, this rifle was produced from shortly after World War I (1921) until World War II. It wasn't a bad rifle by any means.

Remember, during the War we heard rumors about the fine rifles of new design, we were going to have when the fighting was over? Also, if you were reading Shooter's Corner a few years ago, you may remember that I mentioned a new rifle that I had seen and was very enthusiastic about. Well, that rifle was not the new Remington but a short-action Winchester which evidently has been shelved until back orders for their regular models are filled. I just wanted to set you straight in case you remembered.

You no doubt are familiar with the design of bolt-action high-power rifles (most of them being variations of the German Mauser Model 98) and consequently have wondered why they were made with a portion of the cartridge case unsupported by steel. This to my way of thinking has always been a weak and occasionally danger point in an otherwise almost fool-proof design.

If you don't quite get the point, it's like

this: With the Mauser-type action (this includes the Mauser 98, Springfield M 1903, the Enfield M 1917 and so on) the weakest point is the space between the front of the bolt and the back wall of the chamber where a portion of the brass cartridge case is not supported by the steel of the rifle action. In other words, the strength of the brass case is at this point depended upon to support the gas pressure which may be 50,000 or more pounds to the square inch.

Now, in case of excessive pressure and, or, bad brass, this is generally where trouble starts.

If we have this condition in one of the old low-numbered Springfields, or other rifle having a weak or brittle receiver, the action may be wrecked with disastrous results for the shooter.

Here's what I consider good news! The Remington Model 721 and its companion the short-action 722 do not have this weak point. The face of the bolt is recessed so that the brass of the cartridge is completely supported by a fair amount of steel.

This new rifle while really being of modified Mauser 98 design has strength which surpasses that of all rifles of this type so far constructed.

Let me tell you about some pressure tests that the action of this rifle has withstood. The Remington boys wanted to test the strength of the new action and compare its performance under stress with that of various other actions, including the Springfield M 1903, the Enfield M 1917, and the German Mauser as used in World War II, all in .30-'06 caliber.

Cartridges with necks split down to the shoulder were fired in the four test rifles. No trouble to speak of!

Next, regular high-pressure-proof cartridge giving pressures of around 70,000 pounds per square inch were fired. Nothing happened!

The load was gradually increased until

the cartridge cases were full of fine grain powder. With these terrific high-pressure loads severe gas leaks caused bent extractors and splintered stocks in the Springfield, Enfield, and Mauser rifles (mighty dangerous to unprotected eyes) but nothing at all happened to the Remington 721.

The Remington kids were in a real "dead-end" mood, so "Let's bow 'em up," they sez. The overload charge was used with an extra 220-grain bullet lodged in the barrels just ahead of the chambers. It certainly sounds like four very dangerous rifles to me. In fact, it seems unbelievable that any rifle could take such punishment and stay in one piece! Believe it or not, the 721 was unharmed. The Springfield was locked shut, with the receiver bulged. It has never been opened. The Mauser and Enfield had plenty of gas squirt back, but held together to be used in the next test, in which two 220-grain bullets were lodged ahead of the super-proof charge. Nothing happened to the 721 (getting monotonous, isn't it?), but the Mauser couldn't be opened. The Enfield held together. (Incidentally, the government is selling Enfields, classed as unserviceable, to N. R. A., members for five bucks apiece.)

Next, three bullets were pushed ahead of the proof charge. The Enfield was bulged and couldn't be opened.

The test was continued with the 721. Four bullets and the proof cartridge fired O.K. but five of the heavy 220-grain bullets ahead of "dat ole debil" super-proof load strained the action to such an extent that the action could not be opened. The pressure figures in the last test were certainly astronomical.

Regardless of this show of excess strength, don't throw away your shooting glasses and go in for overloads when you buy one of these new rifles. The manufacturer decidedly frowns upon and definitely does not recommend overloads in any rifle!

Now let's see what's "different" in the design and production to this wonder child!

At first glance, something seems to be missing from the bolt of the rifle. There is no sign of an extractor or extractor collar as seen on the Mauser-type action.

The extractor on the 721 is of comparatively new design, being integral with the bolt face as is the ejector. You can't see either unless you look into the recess in the

bolt face. Extraction and ejection are certainly positive. The extractor consists of a crescent-shaped spring with a hook or lip on the inside curve, and it is so strong that once it has a grip on the rim of the cartridge it will hold as long as the rim stays intact.



The bolt as well as the receiver are so designed that they may be made of high-quality round-bar stock instead of from special forgings. This idea, with others, keeps the manufacturing cost of these new rifles down so the price tag doesn't scare one completely.

Other points of interest are: Speed lock (very short throw of the firing pin), match-type trigger with adjustable pull, bolt handle located so that a very low scope mounting may be had, the safety is side mounted for fast thumb operation, the bolt release is located inside of the trigger guard ahead of the trigger, the receiver is drilled and tapped for receiver sight or telescope mount.

The two rifles come with standard open sights which most shooters will replace.

The Model 721 which has the long action and will be chambered for .30-'06, .270 and .300 H. & H. Magnum sells for \$79.95. This rifle chambered for the .30-'06 cartridge is now available (I have seen a number of them on gun dealers' shelves), the gun in .270 caliber will be distributed in July and in .300 Magnum in September. The rifle weighs about 7¼ pounds, has a 24-inch barrel and 4-shot magazine for .30-'06 and .270 caliber. The .300 Magnum will have a 26-inch barrel, with a 3-shot magazine (one cartridge in the chamber making a total of 4-shots without reloading).

The Model 722 with short action will sell for \$74.95 and will be out in .300 Savage caliber in May, and for the .257 Roberts cartridge in July.

Take a look at these rifles soon as you can!



ISLAND FREIGHTER

By CHARLES YERKOW

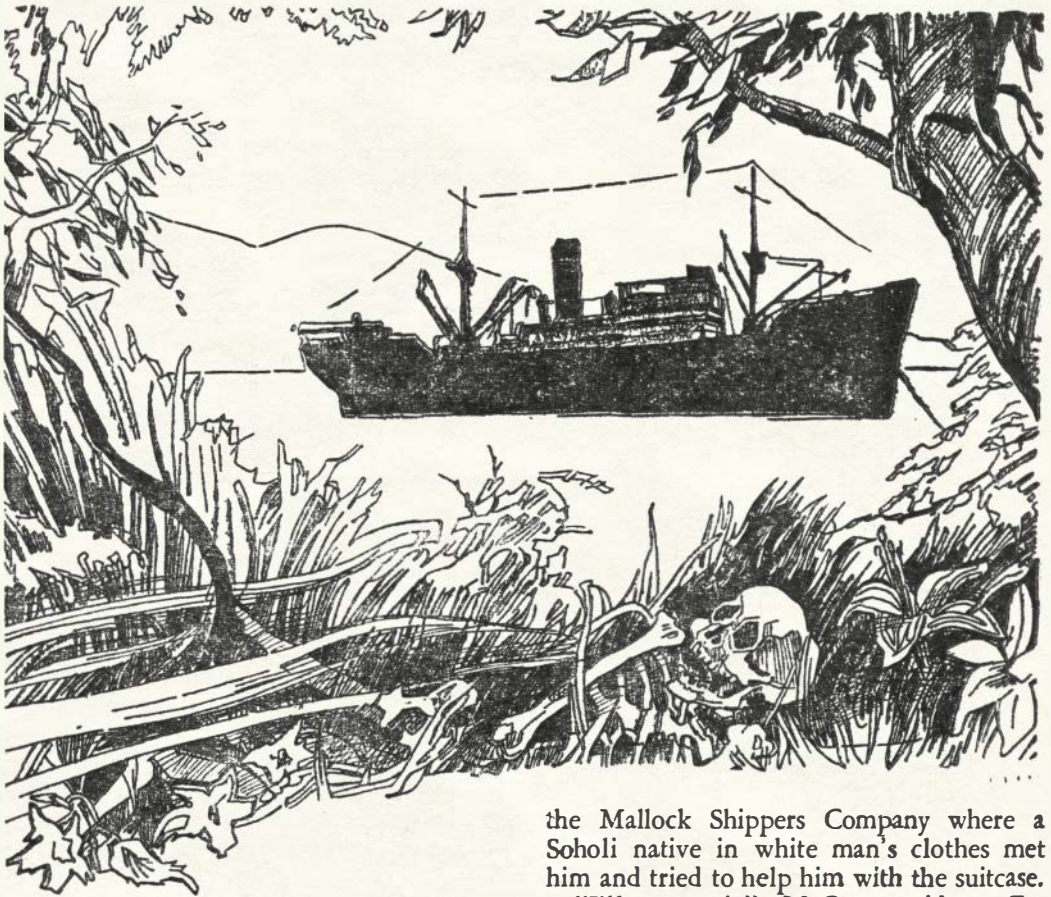
IN PASSING Kotir on the south coast of New Guinea, the steamer put off a motor launch to shore. McGrun sat on the sun-blistered white paint of the metal seat facing the bare-chested seaman at the helm, and he sat with a scowl on his face and his strong fingers twisting and untwisting the strap of his battered suitcase.

His whites were fairly clean but it was quite evident that their condition mattered little to him; his felt hat showed an oily band all around and the brim drooped,

beaten by the heat that burned into every crevice and nook of everything in sight. The seaman opposite him did not so much as comment on the birds wheeling overhead—and neither did McGrun want him to.

At the sea-washed landing bobbed several small boats and the District Officer's launch, and farther down two schooners and some long river boats. McGrun mounted the rotted ladder to the rotted quay, then slowly walked toward the rows of storehouses and buildings fronting the crooked streets. He purposely avoided going up toward the

**Gold May Be Gold—but a Ship's a Ship and Her Master's
Reputation Is His Greatest Asset**



Port Police building where he knew Hennick, the District Officer, spent his time.

Here and there a seaman turned to look, and upon recognizing the man, looked away. At the pub, Bendy—they all called him "the beachcomber"—emerged to squint thoughtfully after the man in white ducks with the battered suitcase and felt hat, then the beachcomber headed in the opposite direction. The pub owner Harry hurried to the dirt-streaked window, recognized McGrun, and smiled crookedly.

The news of the man's arrival in Kotir spread quickly, up and down the quay, aboard schooners, to Millie's Hotel, and the District Officer Hennick, who said, "I hope McGrun isn't thinking of settling any of his old troubles."

Walking up the street, McGrun turned in at the palm and casuarina lined walk to

the Mallock Shippers Company where a Soholi native in white man's clothes met him and tried to help him with the suitcase.

"I'll carry it," McGrun said gruffly. "Where's Mr. Koller, the manager?"

The Soholi backed away. "He inside." Pointing to the upper floor of the white-washed building, he added, "He upstairs in office."

Without a word, McGrun went into the cool shadowy house and up the creaking stairs. He flung the door open, the suddenness of it sending flies off wall and ceiling and desk, and slid the suitcase across the floor to the chair. Seating himself, he pushed back his hat and began a careful study of the puzzled man behind the desk.

The man was in his late thirties, with graying hair; his whites were immaculate, shirt collar open and tie loose, pipe stem and pen clip showing from the breast pocket; the hands were pudgy, the fingers weak and nervously touching the blotter edges; the man's shoulders were hunched

forward in the move he had made to stand up when his caller entered.

McGrun was sure he had never before seen Koller. In the same moment he was aware that the door to the right had eased open.

"Don't you think you should tell me who you are and what you want?" Koller said quietly.

McGrun shifted his eyes to the door, just in time to see a shadow move away.

"Who's in there?"

"That's an office," Koller replied. The manager took the time to lean back in his chair. "You really should tell me what you want here."

McGrun's eyes narrowed as he again faced the manager of Mallock Shippers. "Yeah, sure," he said slowly. "All in due time." He got up and went to the door, flung it open.

ONLY the flies on the two desks were disturbed.

A thin smile played on McGrun's mouth as he took his chair again. "I'm up here from Moresby," he said. "I'm Captain Benjamin McGrun. You hired me—" he pulled a letter from his pocket and tossed it on the desk before the manager—"to take over one of your ships, the *Halla*."

Koller's brow knotted. "Oh, that," he remarked as he glanced at the letter. "Of course. How are you, Captain McGrun?" He paused and pulled the pipe from his pocket. "I'll explain what we—"

"I'll explain first," McGrun cut in. "If you're afraid of hurting my feelings, forget it; but right now I want to know why you want me to command the *Halla*." Before Koller could say anything, the shipmaster went on. "Maybe you got the wrong man, I'm not sure. At any rate—" his eyes narrowed—"if I find I'm being played for a sucker, I'll not be easy to handle."

McGrun's stare wasn't nice to see, and his hard voice clearly was a warning.

The manager glanced quickly down at the blotter and the strewn papers, at the same time running his fingers caressingly along his clean-shaven chin.

"I assure you, Captain McGrun, that this is—"

Again McGrun cut him off. "I'm not finished, Mr. Koller." Leaning back

and folding his bulging arms across his massive chest, the shipmaster said, "A lot of people, back at Moresby and here in Kotir, are surprised that I got a berth. I don't like them being surprised. Do you happen to know, Mr. Koller, why they're surprised?"

The manager shrugged indifferently. "Why should I be concerned over trifles?"

McGrun's eyes flashed. "A man's reputation, Mr. Koller, is no trifle!"

The manager fidgeted with some papers and ran his tongue over his dry lips. "I didn't mean it that way, Captain. I realize what has happened to you, but I say let that be forgotten. I figure you got to get another chance, so I'm—"

"So you're giving me command of the *Halla*," McGrun finished sarcastically for him. He sighed, without taking his eyes off the man who was plainly uneasy. "You're sure, now, that that's all you're doing? You're holding nothing from me?"

Koller smiled, weakly. "Doesn't the fact that I give you a ship answer that?"

McGrun made a sound deep in his throat and slowly uncrossed his arms. "I was wondering about it. All the way from Moresby. In fact, I've been thinking about it ever since I got your letter two weeks ago. I kept saying to myself 'Now this guy Koller surely knows how Captain Benjamin McGrun tried to get those Jap big-wigs out of New Guinea when the war ended. McGrun, the collaborator, the quisling. The Japs could pay high for a special voyage, and McGrun took high pay. Hell, the money was found in his cabin. Yeah, he cleared himself some, but everything was there, plain to see.'"

The shipmaster leaned forward. "What do you say, Mr. Koller? Are you thinking along those lines?"

Koller swallowed, said, "Of course not! You were cleared."

McGrun laughed dryly. "Sure, sure. A little clearing went on, but nobody ever explained how the money got into my cabin. And don't bother asking; I can't explain the money." His jaw muscles tightened. "They branded me, but good. Someday, somehow, I'll find the man responsible, and when I do—"

The manager smiled easily for the first time and waved his arms across the desk.

"Why are we talking about that? I'm satisfied that you're all right and I think you're the man to command the *Halla*."

McGrun glanced at his battered suitcase, then shrugged. "I'm not going to figure it out, not now anyway. In all this time not one owner would give me a ship to command, not even a scow, not for Benjamin McGrun they wouldn't. And here you come and give me the *Halla*!" He paused and looked at the manager. "But remember what I said. If I find I'm being played for a sucker, I'll not be easy to handle."

"Nonsense, Captain McGrun," Koller said jovially. He was entirely relaxed now, pleased with the outcome. He proceeded to explain matters.

AND the matters were simple indeed. The *Halla*, an old island freighter, was up the coast at Bull Bay at the mouth of the river; she had been anchored there since some time before the war's end, the Japs having caught her in the area at the time. The crew, cargo and all was taken by the enemy. With the war's end the red tape had been slowly unwound, and she was free to be reclaimed by her original owners, the Mallock Shippers Company.

Koller picked up his pipe and rummaged through the desk's top drawer for his tobacco pouch.

"That's about all," he said. "The first thing is to bring the *Halla* down here to Kotir and check her thoroughly, then we plan to use her for inter-island freight." He was stuffing his pipe full, his close-set eyes all the while on the shipmaster. "You'll of course look the ship over, and let me have a signed report on her condition. Repairs, and all that, you know. Well, what do you say?"

McGrun got to his feet and went to the dirty paned window overlooking what tried to be a garden. He saw no one near the house, but down on the path, seated on the dry ground in the shade of a casuarina was a man with his head turned to the upper windows of the Mallock Shippers. McGrun failed to recognize the man; he backed away from the window, headed for the door to the side office.

"Is anything wrong?" Koller asked.

Without answering, McGrun went into the office and looked around on the desks.

Bills, orders, vouchers, cargo listings, a few checks—nothing that he thought was previous notice of his arrival here.

He came back to face the manager. "So now I'm in command of the *Halla*?"

Koller nodded.

"When do I bring her down?"

"I'm arranging for a crew. Until we get one, I have a room for you at Millie's Hotel. Your pay starts immediately."

McGrun sighed. Getting a crew up in Kotir meant a good wait, maybe weeks, maybe months. But it was no concern of his.

"Get a good engineer," he remarked, "and a good mate. Men who know their business in these ports." The shipmaster picked up his suitcase and pulled on the brim of his felt hat.

"How's Jon Edman for a mate? You know him, don't you?"

McGrun tensed. When he heard the name "Jon Edman," the shipmaster's mind flashed back to the *Dorsett* incident. The Jap big-wigs on board, the money in his own cabin, the army men boarding the ship to take the Japs off, and then the suspicion that he, Captain McGrun, had been playing the game with the enemy.

That incident was as clear in his mind as the coastal chart on the white-washed wall before him. He remembered the lieutenant searching one of the Jap generals, the side glances thrown his way by the crew, and he recalled one significant detail running through it all—the fact that his mate, Jon Edman, kept out of sight.

But things had happened fast after that; he had never had a chance to question Edman, except superficially.

McGrun turned slowly around. "Is Jon Edman here in Kotir? Is he here, now?"

The manager stood up and came around the desk, his arm extended for a handshake. "Don't worry, Captain. We'll handle everything."

The captain scowled in return, ignored the hand, and went out.

OUTSIDE, in the dry dusty heat, as he stepped over the gleaming flat stones of the garden enclosure and headed for the path, McGrun thought back to the *Dorsett* incident.

As master of the ship, the blame naturally had fallen on him, despite the fact that the

Jap big-wigs themselves denied paying him for his assistance. But that was as far as it went. The case then hit the usual complexities, and while U. S. and British Intelligence sought to uncover much in their questioning of the Japs, they completely forgot the ship incident and the original conclusions that he, Captain Benjamin McGrun, had attempted to run the enemy out of New Guinea. When the Japs were executed, the case ended—but the stigma remained. The peculiar thing of it was Edman's way of smoothly keeping his nose clean.

The only man who had believed in his innocence was the District Officer, Hennick. The D. O. had known him some six years, and the understanding of friendship differs with those who find a bundle of cash in your cabin and skulking Japs in the hold.

McGrun shook his thoughts free as he approached the seated man in the shade of the casuarina. The sandaled feet with bony ankles showed under frayed pants, and the man's chin rested on knees around which reached long thin arms, with long fingers clasped in front. A dirty pith helmet lay top down on the ground.

"You," said McGrun. "Get up and find your tongue."

The man's heavy-lidded eyes looked up and the unshaven hollow face twisted into something resembling a smile.

"I'm not on board your ship," the man said in a deep tone. "You can't order me to do anything."

McGrun put down the suitcase. "You'll get up and do some talking or I'll kick you down to the landing."

"Just a minute, Captain. Maybe you'd better listen to what I can do for you?" the man smiled broadly.

McGrun advanced, reaching out for his neck.

"They call me Bendy, the beachcomber," the other said quickly. "I can help you."

"Help me with what?" McGrun rasped angrily.

Bendy stood up to his full six feet, standing reed-like before the chunky shipmaster.

"I'm not sure yet," the beachcomber shrugged. "All I can say now is that we ought to team up. A partnership." He showed his yellowed teeth in a grin and lifted his shoulders in a cocksure move. "You get what I mean, don't you?"

McGrun couldn't restrain himself. This rat was telling him that he surely wasn't here in Kotir for the mere job of taking over a ship. Something else was on, something worth getting a cut off for yourself. That's what Bendy wanted—a partnership cut. At that, McGrun wasn't sure of the things he thought, but nevertheless he didn't like the approach and the offer.

Taking a step forward, McGrun put his hand on Bendy's shoulder. The beachcomber sensed what was coming, but he was too late with his defense. McGrun rocked him, then sent him sprawling over the pith helmet.

"Tell the guy that sent you," McGrun said, "I'd like to meet him sometime."

Grabbing the suitcase, he stamped down the path in the direction of Millie's Hotel.

THE streets were practically dead in the mid-day heat, and the hotel was dank, silent. Flies buzzed around, out the screened door when McGrun opened it. The place had been army officers' quarters at one time and left-over war trophies hung plentifully on the paneled walls. Two unlit kerosene lamps hung from the ceiling beams, evenly spaced, one above a frayed couch and the other above a high and narrow ornate bench facing the couch. To the right of the bench stood a partition, and the tinkling sound beyond indicated someone washing glasses. The bar. To the right of the couch a tightly narrow stairway led to the shabby upper floor.

McGrun let the suitcase crash to the hardwood floor.

From the bar a woman's voice called. "Bendy? That you?"

Keeping silent, and somewhat puzzled, McGrun leaned against the high bench and waited. A lively clicking of heels told him the woman was not slow and awkward, and when the slim-waisted figure appeared McGrun instinctively reached up and touched the brim of his hat.

Her dark hair was tied up into a yellow turban-like bandanna, showing off small golden earrings in small ears and a neat proportion of chin to cheek bones. In the faint light McGrun couldn't see the color of her eyes, but he was aware of their life, their passion for something that might be hope. She wore a simple dress, belted across the

slim waist, with a clean apron contrasting nicely.

At sight of him, the woman's brow knotted. "Oh," she said, and her voice dropped as if he were not welcome. "You're Captain McGrun." She approached the rear of the high bench, took out a gray register book and placed it for him to sign. "Mr. Koller reserved a room for you."

"That's fine," McGrun remarked. "I haven't got a pen."

She produced a cheap fountain pen. His eyes had been on her hands; he noticed clean, well-kept nails without the blood-red paint that he despised. He signed, looked at her.

"Then you know Bendy? Who is he?"

He flung the questions quickly and watched her eyes. They were blue eyes, rather pretty when you stood close to them like this, and the questions sparked them into defiance so that they looked even prettier.

"Bendy's all right," she answered. "Everybody calls him a beachcomber, but I know he isn't that." As an afterthought, she added, "And he's honest."

McGrun held his breath, not sure what to say. That defiant tone stopped him. She hadn't reacted hard enough, not the way he had expected her to react; if he was a good judge of women, and he admitted that he wasn't, then she wasn't too sure about saying Bendy was honest. What the devil did she mean by that? And of course there was no need to speculate on the self-evident—she certainly did not like her new boarder.

"Do I need a key?"

He got his key, Number 4, without a word from her.

He hesitated, then asked, "Do you run this hotel alone?"

"Yes, I do," came defiantly.

McGrun smiled. "Then your name's Millie."

She didn't bother answering.

He had plainly got off to a bad start here, though he couldn't see why. He didn't like it, not with a few weeks of waiting in sight to get up a crew for the *Halla*. Picking up his suitcase, he looked at her seriously.

"I'm sorry if I've said something wrong."

She came around the bench and started for the stairway. "I'll show you the room."

Behind them the screened door banged shut and a barefooted native boy came in on the run. "*Capt McGrun! Capt McGrun!*" he yelled.

"Yeah?" said the shipmaster.

The boy handed over a slip of paper, then ran out again, his bare feet slapping loudly.

McGrun held the paper up, read: "If you want to talk business about the *Halla*, come to Harry's Pub and ask for Harry."

"Well," he scoffed aloud, "all of Kotir has a business proposition for me."

Millie said nothing in answer but started up the stairs.

Watching her strong ankles as she mounted the steps, McGrun followed her up into the dark hall. A door opened, Number 1, and a small fat man emerged to block their way. He smiled at the woman as he pressed his back to the wall to let them pass.

"Hello, Millie."

"Mr. Williams," said Millie, "this is Captain McGrun."

They shook hands.

"Mr. Williams also has some business with the Mallock Shippers," Millie explained.

For a fat man, McGrun concluded, the fellow had a powerful grip. The introduction was made out of politeness, no other reason, and the shipmaster appreciated it. He watched the man go down the stairs, and noticed Bendy the beachcomber enter from the street and greet Williams.

"Over here, Captain," Millie called.

McGrun looked into a sunny room. "Very nice, Millie," he remarked. "You don't mind if I call you Millie?"

"It doesn't matter."

HE WATCHED her go, her quick steps silenced by the rug running the hall's length. Placing the suitcase into the room, he went to the end of the hallway and started back—listening at every door. There were eight rooms, and not one gave a sign of life.

His own room contained no more than an iron-frame bed, two chairs, a round table with a standing kerosene lamp, and on the one open window white curtains neatly tucked over the screen. He shook his head, smiling; he visualized Millie fussing with such nonsense here in Kotir.

Hooking his finger into the curtain, he pulled it aside to look down on the sun-parched street. To the right, just over the tin roof of a storehouse, he saw the tilting masts of the docked schooners, and farther up a hanging sign over a low building—Harry's Pub.

McGrun sighed, locked the door, put the suitcase between the bed and the window, then undressed partly and dropped on the neat bedspread. But he didn't sleep. His mind went around and around with the things that had happened from the time the motor launch had put him ashore; most of the time his thoughts knotted his brow and his hands clenched, but once, when he thought of Millie putting up curtains, he smiled.

He started to wonder what business Mr. Williams could have with Mallock Shippers, and it was then he heard the two quick knocks on his door.

McGrun instinctively glanced at the suitcase, then got up and pulled on his pants. He stood close to the door.

"Yeah?"

"This is Williams. I'd like to talk to you."

McGrun's eyes flashed. Another business proposition! Another partnership! He squinted suspiciously at the fat man as he let him in. Locking the door, he faced Williams, curiously waiting to see what the mysterious game would be, for he was sure nothing less than that would bring the man here.

"I don't know how to begin, Captain," Williams said hesitatingly. "It's an unpleasant situation."

The urge to laugh swelling in him, McGrun took a deep breath. "I'm listening," he said. "What kind of proposition have you got, Williams?"

The other looked up quizzically. "Proposition?" Then he shook his head, went to the window to peer down at the street. "Everything's so peaceful this time of day," he remarked and stepped around the suitcase to seat himself on the bed. "Am I supposed to have a business proposition for you, Captain McGrun?"

The shipmaster met his gaze. "Everyone else seems to. If you haven't, what then."

Williams shrugged, smiled. "I don't know how to start this."

McGrun swung a chair around and eased himself down into it; at the same time he saw, under the bulging coat of the fat man, the butt end of an automatic in an armpit holster. He tensed when Williams reached for his inside pocket, but it was a leather folder that the other produced.

"My identification."

McGrun looked the folder over. Stephen Williams. Claims Adjuster. The Leader-Phipps Insurance Company; Offices in Darwin, Sydney, Singapore.

"In the back is a letter from your District Officer, Hennick."

McGrun looked at the letter of authorization; Hennick's signature looked all right. Handing the folder back, he asked, "What about that gun?"

Williams glanced at the protruding butt as if he'd just become aware of it. "I have to carry it," he said, Company regulations. I might as well tell you I'm here on a gem claim."

"Meaning what?"

Williams crossed his short fat legs, put away the folder. "Well, during the war one of our clients was trying to leave New Guinea, but too late, so that the Japanese representatives knew they were safe in detaining him just as the main Japanese army force landed in the area. He was taken prisoner, of course; fortunately came through alive. He's free now and has asked us to locate his gem collection. Do you follow me?"

McGrun nodded. "Yeah. But where the devil can you locate his gems?"

Williams smiled. "Our client was leaving by boat and he had placed the collection in the ship's safe. When the Japanese took him off, they left the gems on board."

"Now you have to locate the ship?"

"No, not exactly. The ship is the *Halla*, and I know you're in command."

McGrun remained silent, waited for the rest. He couldn't help jumping to conclusions now. Was the claims adjuster suggesting anything? Being in command of the *Halla*, he could easily take the gems and report that the ship's safe was found empty, and then split the value with Williams. Was this the game on the fat man's mind? But on that basis, why hadn't the Japs taken the gems off the ship?

Williams said, "I see you're on guard,

and I don't blame you. My company is not expected to adjust these claims; insurance does not cover war losses. But this case is so simple we thought we'd take a try at it. Good will, you know. You're probably thinking that the Japanese should've taken the gem collection when they took over the ship, but I can explain that."

"I'm listening."

"I like your caution, Captain. Here's how it stands. The *Halla* has one safe in the captain's cabin. The gems were not placed in there. Another safe, built behind the freezing unit in the cook's galley, contained the very important items—and our gem collection."

McGrun smiled thinly and stood up. "And what, Mr. Williams, do you want me to do?"

For a moment the other was silent, then he answered. "I'd like you to come with me to the District Officer, and the three of us can take his launch up to Bull Bay where the *Halla* is anchored."

"And then?"

"Then you can check on the ship, and I can take my gem claim off her."

McGrun turned around. "You're making a riddle out of a simple matter. Why don't you get Koller of Mallock Shippers to go with you? Why come to me?"

Williams stood up. "Look, Captain. I've heard stories about you, and I checked them with Hennick, the D. O. He says you're all right. The catch is this. Mr. Koller, your manager, refuses to co-operate with me; he doesn't refuse flatly of course, but insists he hasn't the time to spare to take me to the *Halla*. I don't believe him. In other words, Captain McGrun, I'm trying to say I suspect that something is decidedly wrong with Mr. Koller and with the *Halla*." He pursed his lips, added, "Now you can tell me what you think."

"You make it sound as if Koller is keeping you off the ship in order to get the gems for himself."

Williams shook his head. "Not at all. But for some reason he doesn't want me to set foot on that ship." He smiled. "By the way, when are *you* going on board?"

McGrun frowned. It would take weeks to get up a crew, and it was true that he had made no arrangements with Koller to go on board the ship. If anyone would go, it

would be the mate—Jon Edman—and the engineer. Why would Koller want to keep certain persons off the ship?

"I'll ask you two questions," McGrun said. "Does Koller know where the gems are? I mean, does he know about that galley safe? And more important—do you know Jon Edman?"

"No one knows about the safe. My company had an agreement with the main Mallock office. As for Edman, he was in Koller's office two days ago, and when I suggested he take me on board he remarked that the ship is not safe for visitors."

McGrun rubbed his chin. "What else?"

WILLIAMS lifted his round shoulders. "Nothing. Except that Koller was quite angry when I arrived. I don't understand why my arrival should upset him. He doesn't know of the special safe in the galley, and he didn't know anything about the gem collection until I told him. Yet, he refuses to let me go on board. As I said, Captain, there's something wrong."

"How much is that gem collection worth?" McGrun asked casually and began pacing the small room.

"About sixty thousand. If you're thinking Koller has plans to search for them and recut them for sale, no. Even if he could find them, they're worth sixty thousand in their setting. Broken up they wouldn't bring half that. No, a wise man wouldn't break up the sets, and neither could he sell them as they are since they're registered and every dealer would know them on sight."

McGrun reached for his shirt, began pulling it on. "That means Koller isn't interested in the gems."

"That's why I came to you. I thought you'd know what the angle with the *Halla* might be."

McGrun tied his tie carelessly, put on his coat. "I'd sure like to see the *Halla*," he said coldly. "Looks like somebody's trying to play me for a sucker again."

He didn't expect the fat man to understand what he meant, and neither did he take time to explain his remark. He lifted the suitcase, laid it on the bed, and began unbuckling the strap.

Williams suddenly stepped to the door and listened, then quickly pulled back the latch and looked around the hall.

"Thought I heard someone."

McGrun lifted the suitcase lid, said, "That rug makes it easy to come and go." He slid his hand under the top tan shirt, and when his hand appeared he held an ugly .45 automatic. He stuck the gun into his hip pocket, reached for his hat.

"What's the idea?"

"No idea," McGrun answered evenly. "I've got some questions for Koller. You can go down to Hennick's office and wait for me. I won't be long. You might tell him the whole story the way you told it to me."

Williams slapped his palms together. "This is more like it. Action! You're all right, Captain."

McGrun had decided the claims adjuster was on the square, no tricks, no propositions. Maybe together, with the D. O.'s assistance, they might discover what the game on board the *Halla* was.

AT THE foot of the stairs McGrun glanced scornfully at Bendy leaning against the high bench. Millie wasn't in sight. Walking past, he expected the beachcomber to make some remark, but strangely the man remained silent.

The street was still uncomfortably hot in the late afternoon, only the barest breeze coming from the sea to whirl up dust eddies in the path edges. Williams turned in toward the Port Police building where the D.O.'s place was, while McGrun went on to the garden grounds of the Mallock Shippers.

As he walked up the street he glanced back once to make sure no one was following him; he cautioned himself mentally—he was clearly involved in something, and he wondered what purpose Koller might have in taking him on to command the *Halla*. What could be on board the freighter that was worth more than sixty thousand dollars? He couldn't guess at it, but he intended to force an explanation from the manager—and do it in front of the D. O. This time McGrun knew his own position would be clear; he was through being a sucker.

Turning in at the palm and casuarina lined walk leading to the house, he glanced up at the second floor office windows of the building. When he reached the veranda

with its overhanging roof directly beneath the windows, he sensed he was about to enter an empty house. Only the Sohli boy met him in the big room and, on recognizing him, instantly backed away.

"Where boss man?" McGrun asked sharply.

The native shook his head. He didn't dare follow the shipmaster up the stairs.

McGrun took his time in searching through every desk and file cabinet, but could find nothing unusual regarding the freighter *Halla*. Just a ship, reclaimed by the Mallock Shippers through natural channels, anchored at present in Bull Bay, and the last report of Koller's to the main office simply stating that Captain Benjamin McGrun was in command and would bring her down to Kotir.

There was one letter asking why Koller had not placed the *Halla* into service, and the best that McGrun could deduct was Koller's reluctance to use the ship. But why? Why would the manager want the old freighter tied up? Why would he keep the insurance claims adjuster off the ship?

At the moment when the shipmaster headed for the door, a sound like the crack of a bull whip echoed in through the window opening out on the garden. He stopped abruptly, waiting for another shot to sound. It didn't. One shot, from the direction of the quay.

McGrun returned to the window but stood to the side. His guess was right this time. Instead of using the path from the street, the figure came up along the mound marking the garden's edge, crossed the garden, and headed for the left of the house where the company storehouses were hidden from view. Even though he strained his eyes, McGrun failed to recognize the man; anyone around the quay might wear a tan short-sleeved shirt and soiled white ducks, but not everyone would wear a ship officer's visored cap. McGrun watched the man hurry under the low-hanging branches and disappear.

Running down the stairs, McGrun halted at the rear door of the house; he stood for a moment, telling himself that the man who had fired the shot could have easily discarded the rifle or revolver and so, if need be, deny any connection with the shooting. The idea gnawed at him—that one, single

shot. It was too clean, too menacing, too final—as if someone knew exactly what that one shot would accomplish.

He knew better than to approach the open doorway to the storehouse, but when the same man with the officer's cap emerged, McGrun stepped out. He instantly recognized his mate from the *Dorsett*. Jon Edman.

"Hi, Skipper," Edman greeted. "What're you doing here?"

TO McGrun it was clear the question did not refer to his being in Kotir but was asking about his presence here at the Mallock storehouses. There was no answer for that, and McGrun didn't attempt one; he looked Edman over and noticed that nothing had changed in the tough mate. He appeared taller and broader than when he'd last seen him at the military inquiry regarding those Jap big-wigs, and his eyes squinted the same merciless way as ever.

McGrun sensed this was one of those times when the pattern fell into place of its own accord. He didn't have to voice his suspicions to Edman; it was as obvious as the beginning night sounds from the jungle beyond that Edman and Koller were in something together, that both men were trying to prevent *anyone* from boarding the *Halla*.

"I'm looking for Koller," McGrun said.

"You won't find him here, Skipper."

Edman's tone was taunting, almost a warning; it would have been more to the point had he said, "You better keep out of our way." But then, why would Koller take him on to command the ship if they wanted no one boarding her?

McGrun experienced an irritation with the entire set-up, but he controlled his temper. He had no intention of being a sucker, yet the puzzle facing him weighed too much.

"If you see Koller," McGrun said casually and hoped his attitude would seem genuinely indifferent to Edman, "tell him to rush that crew for the *Halla*."

The mate grinned broadly, started for the door. "Why the rush, Skipper?"

McGrun checked himself. His patience was running short as it was, and here an arrogant mate was sounding off, telling him damned near to mind his own business.

"Watch yourself, Edman," McGrun

warned. "I don't like Kotir, and I don't like the riddles around here. Is that enough reason for you?"

Edman shrugged, and McGrun knew it took an effort for the mate to do just that. The big man was tense, coiled like a steel spring, ready to fight anyone. This was no time to ask either about the *Halla* or the *Dorsett*.

"I'll tell Koller about it," Edman said and went into the house.

McGrun followed him through to the front veranda, and down the walk. The realization came slowly to the shipmaster—the letter from the main Mallock office asking why the *Halla* was tied up, and Koller's taking on a skipper. Was it, then, that Koller took him on because he was trying to keep the main office from investigating matters here in Kotir? Was that why he had remarked about him, McGrun, signing a report on the ship's condition? Just a ruse to keep the ship tied up longer?

And there was the shot from the direction of the quay. Was it significant? Was Edman connected with it?

He watched the mate head toward Harry's Pub.

Alone, McGrun started for the Port Police building.

The sea breeze was now strong, refreshing; he became aware of hunger touching his insides—his last meal had been on board the coastal steamer that morning, and here it was near evening and he'd had nothing to eat. He thought of Millie at the hotel; as soon as he finished with the D. O. he'd return there and see what could be had in the way of a Kotir supper.

The nearer he came to the street the more people he met, until finally he was forced to elbow his way through the crowd to find Hennick and two Port Police men doing their best to disperse the milling men. The D. O. looked unusually grave.

"Captain! I want to see you."

McGrun pushed his way through the crowd, entered the building and went into Hennick's small cubby-hole of an office. Presently the D. O. came in.

"Where were you all this time?" he asked irritably.

McGrun was silent to the question, still trying to piece together things in his mind. He was thinking of the fat man, Williams,

the claims adjuster, who was supposed to meet him here.

"I was up at Mallock Shippers," McGrun said. "Let's not play games. I heard a shot. Who got it?"

"A decent guy got it, that's who!" the D. O. snapped. "They tell me you left Millie's Hotel with Williams. How about it?"

"Sure. He was going to come down here and tell you something interesting. I went to the Mallock offices in the hope of beating some sense into that manager. Didn't find him. I heard the shot." The shipmaster clamped his mouth shut; he wanted to keep the Edman exchange to himself—for the time being.

Hennick looked long at the captain, then stood up and fussed with a match to light the big kerosene lamp. Adjusting the wick to a bright flame, he turned around. "Then you didn't walk down here with Williams?"

The question was put slowly and McGrun sensed a tone of accusation. He did not answer, but pulled from his hip pocket the automatic and handed it across the table. "Can you tell when it was last fired?"

Taking the gun, the D. O. laid it down without examining it. "All right, Captain. Let me put it another way. Do you know who did it? Did you see anyone do it?"

McGrun knew he was not going to tell the D. O. about Jon Edman. That was something personal and had to be settled in a personal way. The way it stood—somebody killed Williams. That was all. Someone who knew the streets, knew the storehouses, knew his way around.

McGrun shook his head. "Wish I could help, Hennick."

The time element bothered him. If anyone trailed Williams, why wasn't the shot fired right then? It took but minutes to reach the quay from the hotel, and yet the shot wasn't fired until some time later. In other words, whoever shot Williams had first engaged him in a conversation, had bargained with him over something, and, when Williams refused the deal—whatever it was—he was shot dead. At least that was the best McGrun could figure out.

If Edman did the shooting, it would be an easy matter to find the gun in the Mallock storehouse. But what was the game? Where did Bendy the beachcomber fit in? Why was Millie, the hotel owner, angered

by his, McGrun's arrival? She was clearly Bendy's girl. Why were Koller and Edman angered by the arrival of Williams, the claims adjuster? If the gem collection on board the *Halla* was a trifle, why was Williams killed?

McGrun tried to piece the puzzle together, tried to simplify it, but the parts failed to fit. He could tell Hennick only so much, and leave the rest to guess work. When he finished, the D. O. handed the automatic back to him.

"You never carried a gun. Why the change, McGrun?"

"Damn it," the shipmaster rasped. "What do you expect me to carry? I'll tell you, Hennick; the gun was to settle the old *Dorsett* score, but now—" He paused, looked at the automatic in his hand, then slipped it into his pocket. "Maybe I'll settle two scores at once."

"Look here, McGrun. Koller is within his rights in everything so far, so don't go making a mess. There is nothing I can do with the *Halla*, unless the ship was down here, in which case I could send the Port Police on board. But up there at Bull Bay, with no proof for me to work with, Koller doesn't have to permit anyone on board, if he so chooses. He hasn't tried stopping you, has he?"

"The devil! No! I haven't made a move to go on board."

The D. O. lifted his arms, sighed. "I can't figure out what the game is, but that shouldn't stop you from finding out things. If you ever get on that ship."

The captain laughed dryly. "What about Bendy, and Williams?"

"My investigation into Williams' death will be routine. I've no clues, no motive, nothing. As for Bendy, my guess is that he thinks you're in on some big deal, and he's trying to cut himself a slice of it."

"Big deal, huh?" McGrun paced the small office.

"Got a plan?"

"I'm not sure."

"Let me give you some advice. The Mallock Shippers had another captain here for the *Halla*. That was about two months ago. You knew the man. Captain Chris Wyatt."

"Yeah, I knew him. What happened?"

"One morning my boys found him up in the shallow creek, drowned. I looked over

the place, and I know for a fact that Captain Wyatt was murdered. The day before he had remarked at the pub that he would go on board the *Halla*. You get what I'm driving at?"

The shipmaster nodded. "What did you do?"

Hennick shrugged. "What could I do? No proof. I sent my report to the Resident Magistrate. I'm telling you about it so that you'll know where you stand."

Realizing his helplessness at the moment, McGrun's eyes flashed with anger. A ship anchored up shore, and two men killed because they tried boarding her! And Koller hired him to command that ship!

What would happen, then, if he let it be known that he was taking the launch up shore to board the *Halla*? He grinned, his fingers rubbing his rough unshaven chin.

"Looks like I've got to handle this mess in a legal way," he remarked, looking at the D. O. "What about the ship—can't some wise skipper claim her for salvage?"

"Not in this case. I don't think Koller has anyone on board her, but all the owners agreed on the salvage question. There had been too much red tape reclaiming the ships, and most of them are anchored in odd corners. No, McGrun; the *Halla* is safe up there. True, Koller and Edman have made periodic trips up to Bull Bay to check, but outside of that—" He waved his arms.

McGrun scowled. "But if anybody else tries to board her, he gets killed. The devil! I'll board her!"

"Why don't you first have a talk with Koller?"

"Maybe I will. I'll talk it over with him, but in my own way." McGrun started for the door.

"Keep in touch with me."

McGrun didn't answer. He stepped out into the night and headed for the Mallock place.

He barely walked ten yards when he heard soft foot pads behind. Edging toward the shadows of the storehouses, he went on, listening all the while to the padding feet coming closer.

Wheeling around, McGrun leveled the automatic.

"Who sent you?"

It was only a Sohli native, a little frightened, standing before him.

"Come to Millie Hotel, Capn. Come now."

Holding the automatic half-leveled, the shipmaster followed the native up the dark street. He was lead by some rear route to the back of the hotel, where the native came to a halt and waited for him to go ahead into the lighted rear room. McGrun couldn't help wondering if this was to be another business proposition, the big deal stuff.

He could see Millie doing something in the room, but all the while he was uncertain about his next step. When she faced the doorway, he stepped in; not to frighten her, he stuck the gun back into his hip pocket.

Millie hesitated for an instant when she saw him. In the diffused light her eyes seemed worried. She was looking at him, questioningly, and her voice was low and strained when she asked, "What's happened to Bendy? Where's he?"

Puzzled, the shipmaster said nothing. The smell of fried meat twisted his stomach into a loud growl; he frowned—no time for food when the damned riddle was again falling apart.

"Am I supposed to know where Bendy is?" he asked.

The woman trembled visibly and retreated from him.

Maybe Bendy had answers to some parts of the riddle, McGrun thought, and maybe Millie knew a few answers herself.

"Is that why you wanted to see me?" he asked casually. At the same time he thought a trick question might get him the right answer, or the clue to the riddle, or something. He said, "Don't worry; Bendy can handle his part of the deal."

He watched her, waited to see her reaction. She was plainly in love with Bendy, and just as plain was the fact that she'd do anything for her man.

"Why can't you leave Bendy alone?" Her voice trailed into a near-sob. "We'd be all right here, but you had to come. What have you got up your sleeve this time? What kind of a game are you playing? Who's paying you this time?"

Keeping his wits, McGrun flung back, "My name's black in every New Guinea port and to every ship owner. If I've a big deal on, so what?" He pulled his belt tight. "Hasn't Bendy told you anything about it?"

"Big deals," she said scornfully. "It's no use— He's always planning something big, something that's never right." Lifting her head, she looked long at the silent shipmaster. "Where's your sense of decency? I'm begging you to stop Bendy. I don't want him mixed up with you and your deals!" Stepping closer to him, she asked, "Did—did Bendy have anything to do with the shooting of Mr. Williams?"

"I don't think so."

Her eyes were still questioning his.

He grinned, shaking his head. "If you think I had anything to do with the shooting, you're wrong. Go ask the D. O."

Millie covered her eyes with her two hands. "I don't know what to think. So many things have happened lately, I don't know what to think. I don't know what to believe."

From inside a voice called her name.

McGRUN was glad that the break came at that point, for he had been ready to tell Millie certain things he did not want to mention. He wasn't too sure of her own position in the riddle of the *Halla*. All of this might be an act, something in which Bendy had coached her.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said and went into the big room.

McGrun glanced around. The place was a kitchen, and on the iron stove lay a frying pan with a piece of cold meat frozen in the fat. He picked up a knife and cut off a slice of bread, then slid the blade under the meat and lifted it onto the bread. He ate hungrily, not in the least disturbed by Millie's wry grin when she returned.

"Look here, Millie; I can't tell you much, but I can tell you that you got me wrong. I know you're thinking about the stories you heard about me, and I know I can't convince you otherwise. I'll tell you this much. Bendy wanted to get in on something. So did Harry, the pub owner. They all think I've got a big deal on, and the devil of it is that I don't know what they're talking about."

He could see she doubted him. "What about Mr. Williams? I know he was in your room, talking to you about the *Halla*."

"He was on to something, Millie. The only thing I can say is that somebody doesn't want anyone to set foot on board that ship."

"That doesn't tell me what you and Bendy are planning."

McGrun became impatient. "I've some business at the Mallock office. If I find Bendy there, I'll send him home to you!" He strode off.

In the distance the lighted windows of Koller's office served him for a guide. Reaching the garden grounds, McGrun went on cautiously, crossed the last patch of moonlit pathway and entered the house. He remembered the creaking habit of the stairs and hugged the wall when he tried his weight on the third step. Half-way up, the stairs creaked. He waited. Koller's voice drifted to him from the office, then Edman spoke in a monotone.

Stepping high, to take in three steps, McGrun tensed as the stairs creaked again.

If Edman or Koller came out of the office—

McGrun went up the rest of the way. He paused at the closed door, decided to listen in on the conversation from the other office. Finding the door open and the place in darkness, he slipped in and silently edged toward the door separating the two rooms. He felt safe now; he was at last going to hear what the *Halla* game was.

IN THE private office of the manager a sudden silence hung heavy and menacing, and in a flash McGrun realized the mistake he had made. Neither Koller nor Edman had been fools to just sit in there talking. No, this was planned—for him. A trap. From this darkened office they had been watching him approach the house, and now—

Reaching for his automatic, he heard the lights in Koller's office click off.

McGrun acted instinctively.

Picking up a chair, he went to the window and crashed it through the screen, letting it fall to the roof of the veranda below. As he expected, from Koller's office window two streaks of revolver fire blazed after the falling chair.

McGrun raced out the door.

A figure in white ducks stood in Koller's doorway. A gun roared, sending a hot whip licking past before his eyes. McGrun stepped back, and from there gauged the banister. He could jump over it to safety.

Clutching the automatic, he sprang over,

but even as he jumped another figure emerged from the doorway at the rear of the house and started shooting. McGrun recognized Bendy's pith helmet.

The figure in Koller's doorway fired. Something hot crossed his back, and after that the shipmaster knew nothing.

McGrun opened his eyes to see the bright moon above him. His dulled brain tried to arrest and sort out the hushed jungle sounds. He listened. Nearby the careful movements of a man were coming closer. He felt the ground with his hands—touching damp leaves and the dust of a path. Above him the high trees of the rain forest reached up toward the bright night sky; somewhere an owl hooted complacently over the restless and fierce cries of a jungle animal.

Hearing footsteps approaching him, McGrun strained his eyes to make out the shape before him. He frowned in surprise at the pith helmet. Bendy, the beachcomber.

"Can you get up?" Bendy asked.

McGrun felt the sharp pain where the bullet had streaked across his back; he got up into a crouching position and reached for his automatic, only to find his hip pocket empty.

"Here's your gun," Bendy said, handing the weapon to him.

Standing up, and still puzzled by the set-up and the beachcomber's actions, the shipmaster took the gun and examined the magazine. "What's the game, Bendy?" Satisfied that the weapon was loaded, he stuck the gun into his belt and faced the beachcomber. The happenings at Koller's office flashed through his mind; he could figure the obvious—when Koller and Edman blocked his escape, it was Bendy who had got him out of there.

The beachcomber was matter-of-fact about it. "When you parted with Williams, I followed him down to the D. O.'s place. I saw Edman talking to him for a long time, they seemed to be arguing. Williams got angry suddenly and turned to walk away, and that's when Edman shot him. Then I followed Edman up to the Mallock storehouses where I saw him talking to you. Then I just stuck around there to see what would happen. What went wrong, Skipper—they try to get you out of the way?"

McGrun hesitated to answer. In the dark-

ness he couldn't see the man's expression. Was Bendy jeering him? Was the rescue part of some game? The devil! He didn't even know his whereabouts at the moment! It might be best, he told himself, to begin playing a game of his own—one of Millie's remarks supplied a ready-made angle on which to start.

"Koller refused to agree to my deal," the shipmaster flung sarcastically. "He's a fool, and so's Edman."

There was a pause. McGrun couldn't tell what effect his remark had on Bendy. McGrun pretended the need of pacing around to stretch his legs. "Where are we?" he asked.

"This trail leads up shore to Bull Bay."

Not sure what Bendy's intentions were at the moment, McGrun had to let it go at that. "What're we waiting for?"

"I guess you'll be all right," Bendy remarked. "I looked over that nick in your shoulder, stopped the bleeding."

BENDY was sure of himself, the captain concluded irritably. The man was going about this whole business in an absolute and methodical way. He wanted to get on board the *Halla* at all costs—the big deal, whatever it was!

"Any idea where Koller and Edman are?" McGrun asked.

"They didn't wait around after the shooting, I can tell you that much. Koller headed for the D. O.'s place—I figure he'll blame the shooting on a night thief."

"What about Edman?"

"He made it on the run to Harry's Pub."

"Probably to round up some men to help him get the *Halla* out of here." McGrun stepped close to the beachcomber. "What about you, Bendy? Where do you and I stand?"

In the moonlight the shipmaster saw the other shrug, but the move was not one of indifference.

"I helped you at Koller's," said Bendy. "I'm not kidding myself that I can swing the *Halla* stuff alone, so how about that partnership I mentioned?"

McGrun tried to play the game. "How much do you know? How much are you worth to me?" He smiled to himself at this veiled condition; here he was talking about something on which he had no information

—bargaining over a freighter which cost two men their lives.

Bendy's answer was careful. "I know the *Halla*, Skipper. Let's put it this way. Any time I want to, I can stop Koller and you from getting the ship."

"Why don't you?" McGrun shot back.

"No profit in that. I can't work it alone. I can't trust anyone in Kotir, except you."

"Not even Millie," chuckled the shipmaster.

"Leave her out of it!" Bendy snapped.

McGrun sighed. "Tell me, Bendy; are you after those gems that Williams was trying to reclaim?"

"Stop joking, Skipper."

"I see you know the real thing, but I don't see why you teamed up with me."

"I figured you and Koller wouldn't get along." The beachcomber paused, then said, "A friend of mine, a Lahi native from the next hill village, told me what he saw up at the creek some months ago. Did you know Captain Wyatt? Koller brought him here to command the *Halla*." Bendy's voice dropped to a hollow croaking sound. "If we work together, we'll be doing good. The *Halla* can take care of both of us, you know that."

In an attempt to drag out the time and learn more, McGrun said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that." He had to think fast, yet he didn't know where to head. "What about Williams? You're sure it wasn't you who killed him?"

"I don't go for killing," Bendy retorted dryly. "We better get started."

HE LED the way down the path and the shipmaster followed him. All around them the jungle moved in its many forms, the slithering of a night-prowling lizard, the soft thump as a tree kangaroo moved away, the *slap-slap* and shrill cry of a bat, and all the hushed and daring sounds beyond in the endless blackness.

The moonlight filtered onto the path which soon emerged out into the *moika*, the flat grassland, where the going became easy. The best McGrun could recall of the coast charts made him conclude they'd reach Bull Bay near daybreak. He walked silently behind the beachcomber, and in his mind turned over the possibilities of the *Halla* mystery. What the devil might be worth

more than sixty thousand dollars in a gem collection? He had tried to pry the information out of Bendy, only to learn nothing.

As they walked on, McGrun began talking casually to the man, and every now and then used a key word with which to draw out important bits of information.

Once, when he mentioned the word cargo, Bendy took to it, saying the two of them could use the ship's launch to get the cargo ashore.

Sensing he was on the right track here, McGrun continued to pry bit by bit out of Bendy, until at last he started to understand the importance of the *Halla*, and the mystery of that old island freighter. The sudden realization what her cargo was!

Walking behind the beachcomber, McGrun knew his shock had not been witnessed by the other.

He tried to reconstruct what might have happened here at Bull Bay during the war—

WHEN the Japs took over, they were cocksure of themselves and saw no need for special precautions in a special plan. The captured *Halla* was perfect for their plan—to load all the gold of the area into the freighter and get it to Japan. It took months of planning and doing, but then the Allies struck just at this same area, they struck with such force that not a single one of the enemy remained alive to tell of the ship's cargo.

The Allies on the other hand rushed everything in their way, listened to nothing that might turn out to be a ruse to prolong matters, and, with the quick executions, no one was left to inform the authorities, no one to know of the gold stored below the blistered and grimy decks of the freighter.

The gold board! The *Halla* lay at anchor, apparently worthless, and below her decks concealed a fortune which the Japs never had time to run out of New Guinea.

Gold! Gold worth probably millions, near enough to take, and the authorities knowing nothing of its existence!

"You know, Bendy," McGrun said, now more composed after his discovery, "it must have been tough keeping your mouth shut about the *Halla*. Keeping it from Millie, for instance."

"You'll never know. But leave it to a

woman to know that you're up to something."

McGrun smiled. "You and I," he asked "we split fifty-fifty?"

"Fair enough?" Bendy retorted without looking back.

"Sure," McGrun said lightly.

He needed time to think this out. For one thing, his guess had been right. Of that he was certain. In the hold of the *Halla* was stored a gold hoard worth many fortunes. Edman must have somehow got into the fact, and then he and Koller formed a partnership. Since the ship needed a skipper, they got Captain Wyatt, but when he became suspicious, they killed him. Then Williams, the insurance claims adjuster, arrived and began showing suspicion, and so he had been removed. Not one of them had been able to get the news to Hennick, the D. O.

That left himself, Bendy, and Koller and Edman must have somehow got onto the gold. McGrun doubted that Harry, the pub owner was in on it; he was probably just a dupe for Edman, or at best might have been trying to get into a deal he thought was worthwhile—maybe the gem collection. McGrun also left Millie out of it. She was clearly opposed to these schemes of Bendy's and therefore she couldn't know of the real nature of the big deal.

On reasoning further, the shipmaster wondered how Koller and Edman planned to work their end of it.

They had taken Captain Wyatt on, perhaps with the thought of running the *Halla* to some remote shore and there unloading and caching away the gold. It was plausible. They could dispose of the gold later by saying they were operating a mine—gold prospectors were going into the hills all the time.

Had Koller then taken him on with the same idea? Use him to move the ship—his papers would get them past official port interference—and then see to it that he met with an accident?

McGrun's jaw set grimly as he walked behind Bendy. What was the beachcomber thinking? Use him, play him for a sucker, and then show the natives how they could get a white man's head?

The fact that he had fitted this many happenings into one side of a crooked picture pleased McGrun, but he warned him-

self to thread carefully on the next step. He couldn't be sure of Bendy's plans; besides, he didn't know what Koller and Edman were doing. Were they on board the *Halla* at this moment?

And Bendy's game was simple, unless the beachcomber had other plans in his mind. Bendy wanted to get that gold off the ship and hide it somewhere on shore, and then thumb his nose at Koller and Edman.

Scowling at the fig-like paleness in the distance, McGrun slammed his fist into the leathery palm of his hand. Daylight was breaking, they were nearing the bay, and he was still as helpless as when he first set foot on the rotted quay.

Bendy glanced back over his shoulder to look at the shipmaster, said, "You're kinda impatient, Skipper. No need to be. Look down there. You can see the ship from here."

The small squat freighter rode at anchor not far off shore. Gold! The highest stake in the world, right here in this forsaken corner of New Guinea, ready for the taking!

McGrun realized he was wasting time. He was letting Bendy entrench himself in the idea that he was playing along with him, that he would help him take over the gold.

The awakening chatter of birds was starting up through the jungle behind them and the dank smell of the *moika* lifted into the still air. The paleness began to clear up on the sea.

McGrun fell back, his thumb hooked into the automatic in his belt.

Bendy turned to call to him. "Come on, Skipper. The snakes in this grass aren't tame." He stopped to look closely at the captain. "What's worrying you?" he asked suspiciously.

The shipmaster said nothing in reply. He squinted up at the brightening sky. If he waited too long—

The command of the *Halla* was on his mind. He grinned at the beachcomber. The devil! Gold or no gold, I'll command that ship, he told himself.

He saw Bendy make a move for his belt and level a revolver at him. His free hand pushed the pith helmet off his brow.

"What's funny, Skipper?"

McGrun stopped several paces away from the beachcomber and scowled at the gun in

the other's hand. "A man's reputation is the funniest thing in the world. That's what I'm laughing at."

Bendy's eyes narrowed as he studied the shipmaster. "Are you pulling a trick on me?"

"Like what?"

"Like figuring on getting rid of me."

McGrun shook his head. "That'd be too easy. I'll go better. I'll give you a chance to keep the reputation you have." He laughed hoarsely. "That'll be tough on you, Bendy." He looked out to the sea where the *Halla* was now clearly visible; he felt reckless about the thing he was going to do.

The revolver in Bendy's hand jabbed against McGrun's side. "What're you driving at? You've something on your mind, and I don't like it. We agreed on a deal! We're sticking to it! I've waited a long time for a chance like this and I won't let you or anyone else stop me!"

The jabbing revolver infuriated the captain. There was no sense in giving Bendy too much headway—it was time to show him who was in control of the situation.

An abrupt turn and chopping down against Bendy's gun hand threw the beachcomber momentarily off his balance, then McGrun cracked his hard fist across a thin bony jaw. With the impact of the punch the pith helmet snapped over Bendy's face, and he fell over backward. He lay on the path, panting, the gun still clutched in his hand, but he was too dazed to use it.

McGrun bent down and wrenched the weapon away, tossed it into the grass.

The beachcomber sat up angrily and pulled his knees under him; he felt his jaw, all the while glaring revenge at the captain. The screeching of the birds was increasing around them but both men were silent for a time.

"I'll kill you for this," Bendy said defiantly.

McGrun frowned. "Maybe so." He couldn't shake off a strange feeling. The devil! He was thinking of Millie—he was seeing her side of it. He was feeling sorry for *her*, not for Bendy! In that short span of a few seconds he understood and yet was baffled by the strange patterns of life—that Millie would want to see her man give up scheming for quick fortune, and that Bendy could not understand her desires.

Thinking about it, he felt awkward, not sure what to do. The urge in him was to pound the beachcomber to a pulp, and yet the mental picture of Millie putting up curtains in that shack of a hotel and smiling at Bendy caused him to check himself.

"Get up," he ordered.

The beachcomber got to his feet. "Go ahead and shoot," he snarled. "I'm not afraid of you."

"That's good," McGrun flung back. "I don't have to tell you this because you know part of the story, but you know the wrong part. You know me as Captain Benjamin McGrun, the collaborator who was caught running some Jap big-wigs out of New Guinea! Big money stuff! The thing you never knew was the back side story when the captain tried to prove to shipowners that he had nothing to do with the Japs." He went on talking, tersely, scornfully, and the beachcomber stood listening; McGrun toyed with the butt of the automatic but did not bother threatening the man with it. "So when this same Captain McGrun showed up in Kotir this time, you were one of the many who thought, 'Ah, a big deal must be on' and you tried teaming up with me. You said to yourself, 'That's the same McGrun who made himself a rich haul in that Jap deal.'"

McGrun clenched his powerful hands and took a step toward Bendy. "You'd never think I came back to try and reinstate myself, would you? You'd never think honor could go above gold? No, you wouldn't. You're no damned good. Too bad Millie is wasting her time on a rat like you, Bendy."

The beachcomber retreated and, for the first time before any man, he trembled.

"Leave Millie out of it!" he shouted. "You're a fool! They didn't give you a chance, no decent break. Why worry about anyone but yourself? Think it over, Skipper!"

McGrun sneered. "Maybe I'm a fool," he said quietly. "Maybe I'll get caught with this ship, with the gold, and they'll blame me for Koller's and Edman's doing. All I know is that I'm going to settle an old score with Edman, and maybe settle the *Halla* deal too. Because I want to stand on a bridge again, but stand head up and proud, you call me a fool!" He reached out and grabbed Bendy's soiled collar. "Look

at you! You're shaking because a fortune in gold is slipping through your fingers and there's nothing you can do about it!" In disgust he pushed the beachcomber away. "Go on back to Kotir and tell Millie you met a fool who values his reputation above a shipful of gold!" With that he turned and strode down the path.

Bendy stood alone, undecided, cursing; he neither retreated back into the jungle, nor did he search for his revolver, nor did he follow McGrun. He was a man who still had gold on his mind but didn't know what to do about it.

UPON reaching the beach, McGrun hurried up shore where the *Halla* was anchored. He ran part of the way, knowing he must reach the ship ahead of Edman and Koller, for he was sure they too were on their way here.

Reaching a place in line with the freighter, McGrun waded into the tepid water, then swam with easy strokes, unmindful of the bite where salt water lapped into his shoulder wound. He wasted no time at the rope ladder, climbed up to the deck and sought a good vantage point from where to scan the sea.

The motor launch appeared off the point and made unmistakably for the *Halla*.

Edman and Koller had a simple plan, the shipmaster concluded as he watched the motor launch approaching. They were bringing up some men to help get the ship somewhere where there'd be no interference in unloading the gold. If there was one good man in that crew, McGrun was sure he could win the men over and stage his showdown with Edman.

Keeping out of sight, he waited for the men to clamber up to the deck; Edman and Koller were last to come up, and as the shipmaster waited for them he gauged the crew one by one. One sour-looking thin man with a wrinkled brick-red face caught his attention—there was something oily about the man to suggest him as an engineer and something in his manner to tell McGrun the man could be trusted.

McGrun stepped out into the open and shouted: "You men! Stand still, all of you!"

A few heads turned to look at him, but not one of the eight men made a wrong

move; the surprise of it was too great—even Edman and Koller forgot to reach for their exposed revolver holsters, and McGrun wasted no time in circling around the crew and lifting the revolvers out of the holsters.

Koller's reaction was fear. Edman glowered belligerently, his eyes darting to the crew only to find he had picked a group of hard workers who wanted no part of any shooting.

McGrun kept Edman in his view as he backed away to stand close to the thin man with the brick-red face.

"Know me?" he asked.

"Yeah," the engineer drawled. "You're Captain McGrun, but I don't know what this is all about and I guess the men don't either."

"Take these guns," McGrun said, "and I'll explain a bit of it."

Edman shouted, "What's your game, McGrun?"

"Shut up, bucko! You'll have a chance to settle things with me right here and now." He turned to the engineer. "Edman wants you and the crew to get this ship out of here, but he didn't tell you why, and he didn't tell you he planned to kill all of you to prevent you from talking about it. No, I'm not telling you a story. It's true, and you'll believe me when you see the D. O. back in Kotir."

"What do you want us to do?"

"Just get the ship back to Kotir." McGrun watched the men to see what their reaction would be. None of them seemed to object—what difference whether they touched Kotir before heading elsewhere? And surely the D. O. could put them straight on this business about Edman wanting to kill them.

And then, Koller was too frightened to deny McGrun's accusations, and Edman was too furious about the sudden obstacle.

"If it's as you say, Captain," drawled the engineer, "let's get back and talk this over with Mr. Hennick."

Several of the men started for the ladder.

The shipmaster stopped them. "We've got to get the ship back to Kotir, men. Forget the launch." Having their attention, he went on. "But before we start, I have an old score to settle with the mate." Noticing several grins turn his way, McGrun knew he was winning the men over on the prom-

ise of a fight. What seaman would refuse to see a good fight—and this one between skipper and mate? McGrun handed his automatic to the engineer, who in turn distributed the two revolvers to his men.

"Whatever you do," McGrun warned the men, "don't let Edman and Koller off this ship."

The crew nodded.

If straight murder were possible, McGrun was sure Edman would have resorted to it, but even so there was no mistaking the truth that the big mate would fight now with the cunning and ferocity of a tiger shark in a death trap.

In the early light of day the crew formed a circle, with Koller cringing in the grip of one husky stoker. The men had seen shipboard fights, but from the instant the mate rushed at the shipmaster on that rusted deck they sensed the importance and the significance of the outcome. This was no ordinary fight. This was life and death for Edman, even though the man could not guess the reason of it.

Both fighters were big, both knew their strength and their ability to handle not one but four men of average size. In fact, the mate might have been thought to have a slight edge over the skipper, for skippers don't as a rule come to grips with men whereas mates too often do.

The fight was silent, fierce!

Blood smeared over Edman's face but his eyes remained frozen in a sneering mask, still defiant, still arrogant.

And McGrun, grinning crookedly, drove his hammer blows against the man's body and head; the pain of his shoulder wound only spurred him on, so that two of the crew watching turned away from the sight before them.

Koller winced before the fury of McGrun's attack, so that the stoker had all he could do to hold the man in place and watch the fight at the same time.

Edman tried tricks against McGrun, tricks which a mate was liable to learn in waterfront pubs and on board some mean ship, but the tricks fell flat under the shipmaster's violent and determined assault. Once, when the mate managed to toss the skipper to the deck, he got hold of a loose end of chain and tried to smash it across McGrun's eyes. One of the crew shouted

but kept out of it. McGrun grabbed the chain in time, ignoring the blow over his head, rolled over to carry Edman under him. He let the mate get to his feet after that, much to the crew's disgust, only to half-kill him with fist blows to the head and ribs.

Panting for breath, Edman staggered around.

"You're a wreck," McGrun taunted, "and I haven't started the rough stuff."

The mate didn't last long after that. He was beaten, helpless, his head rolling from side to side and his jaw smearing more blood onto his blood-caked chest.

Whatever the man was, McGrun had to admit Edman was a stubborn man; he just refused to stop coming in for more punishment.

"You're broken, Edman," the Captain growled as he slapped the mate's face. "We're square on that *Dorsett* deal. Hear me?"

Edman fell face down on the deck.

McGrun turned to the crew. "Keep him and Koller under guard. I want them in Kotir alive."

Eager hands reached for the mate and the cowering manager.

McGrun wiped blood off his own face now.

"Sure was a good fight, Captain," the engineer said as he handed the automatic over. He spoke with a different tone, something like awe or respect. "We'll have steam up, and we'll be waiting for orders."

The shipmaster's eyes narrowed, then he warmed to the man. "I'm sure glad you and the men let me handle this my own way. I'm not forgetting it."

Somebody from behind them yelled "We're with you, Captain!"

McGrun grinned at the group of men hustling the two prisoners off.

WHILE the engineer and the men busied themselves in getting steam up, McGrun started a hurried search of the few cabins and the main holds. He found the special safe behind the cook's freezing unit, but the combination baffled him and he left it alone. Still unable to find any trace of the gold hoard, he began thinking of the unlikeliest place where a— A grin twisted his bruised face.

He went to the bridge.

The winch whined as the anchor came up.

The shipmaster closed his bleeding knuckles around the engine-room telegraph handle. He knew this was the beginning of the old—a full and respected command of a ship. His eyes gleamed as he swung the lever.

It was hot afternoon when the *Halla* steamed down the coast and anchored outside Kotir. The D. O. and three men of the Port Police came out in a launch and boarded.

McGrun's report was brief, and Hennick listened attentively.

"I've got them both locked up, but you can pack them into your jail any time you want." Then McGrun explained about the gold hoard and smiled at the D. O.'s frowns of disbelief.

"This isn't a joke, is it, McGrun?" the D. O. asked sharply. "Is the gold really here, on board?"

"I'll take you to it," the Captain chuckled.

McGrun led the way down—down to the last stinking deck space where they had to crouch to get through, and there, piled high, row upon row of foot-long bars. *Gold! Millions in gold!*

Even McGrun exclaimed at the sight. "The devil!"

"Blimey!" the D. O. said. "This *is* something!" He was speechless then for a long time, finally coming out of it to say, "I'll have to post a guard on this old tub until my superior informs me what to do next. Blimey! What a stack!"

"I thought they'd have the gold hidden in filthy bilge water," McGrun remarked, shaking his head. "Just look at that haul!" He reached for one of the bars, weighed it casually in his hand, then put it down. "Well," he sighed, "better get in touch with whoever you're supposed to get in touch with."

The D. O. scratched behind his ear. "You know, McGrun, this is going to become an awfully involved affair. I'd say off hand this gold here runs into millions! And it's here in Kotir, on a Mallock Shippers freighter, with their manager and first officer charged with murder and the attempt to steal this gold. Good God, man! Where'll I begin?"

"You can cinch the murder business,"

McGrun said, "if you check Edman's revolver against the bullet that killed Williams." He started back, crouching low to clear the overhead beams. "Let's get some fresh air, Hennick."

LATER, in the D. O.'s office, the shipmaster inquired about Bendy, the beachcomber.

"Strangest thing," Hennick remarked, pursing his lips. "Can't figure him out. He came in here about noon and wanted me to arrest him."

"Arrest him? For what?"

"Something about withholding information from a government man, meaning myself."

"He was talking about the *Halla*. What did you do?"

"Told him to be off until I got the full story. What do you make of it?"

McGrun was thoughtful. He had given Bendy a jolt up on the trail, but didn't know just how hard. The beachcomber couldn't fathom a man refusing to take the gold so near at hand. Still, for Bendy to come on his own and ask to be arrested, well—McGrun shrugged. "What he needs is a—"

"Another thing," cut in Hennick. "Millie came to see me, just before you brought the *Halla* into the harbor, and asked to see you." The D. O. smiled. "Said you did her some kind of favor and she wants to thank you. As I said, McGrun, it's all very confusing to me."

"My suitcase is at the hotel," said McGrun. "I'll have to see her."

"There's still another thing. Harry, the pub owner, was around too. You can appreciate the procession, can't you? He wanted me to assure him of protection." The D. O.'s brow furrowed. "When that freighter showed up here in Kotir, it seems everybody knew which way to run."

McGrun refrained from asking why Harry wanted to be protected.

The D. O. chuckled. "You're a hard man to figure, McGrun. Seems Harry is worried about you beating him up."

Recalling the note the pub owner had sent him, McGrun laughed. "I don't even know Harry. Well, guess I'm holding you back from important matters, Hennick; I better be off."

"You mean you're going to beat up Harry?"

"Nonsense. I've a ship, and I've got a good crew on board. If I ever saw a ship that needs fixing, it's the *Halla*."

Hennick held out his hand. "I'm glad everything turned out well. My own report is going to Mallock Shippers, so you just sit tight. You'll have no more trouble, McGrun."

"I'll see nothing happens to that gold in the meantime."

GOING out into the hot street and heading down to the quay, McGrun saw men already putting their heads together and talking about him. Several hands went up in a friendly salute as he passed by. Rumor and news spread fast in Kotir.

Far up the street at Millie's Hotel two figures stood watching the shipmaster walking toward them. On reaching the hotel steps the captain noticed the woman smiling warmly at him, and he heard Bendy say, "Hi, Skipper."

Without answering, McGrun went to his room where he put his battered suitcase on the bed, lifted the lid, and stuck his unfired automatic under the tan shirt. He made a mental note to get the gun cleaned first thing.

Outside in the street he paused to give Bendy a searching glance. "My talk do you some good, huh?" he drawled.

The beachcomber nodded, sheepishly. "I had things figured wrong, Skipper."

"Some of us do, sometimes. The trick is to know when to figure them right."

Millie's hand reached out and held onto Bendy's coat. "I'm glad this is over," she said, looking seriously at the shipmaster. "I guess I can never thank you enough."

"What you need, Bendy," McGrun said quickly, "is a certain kind of work, something that'll keep you on the go."

"Like working on your ship maybe?"

"No, not that. You're no sailor. I was thinking if you took Koller's job, as manager of Mallock Shippers here in Kotir."

The beachcomber looked somberly down at the dust of the roadway. "They'd never see that."

"I'll talk to them," McGrun promised. "Maybe Hennick will, too." He picked up his suitcase and headed toward the landing. He sighed—a good many things were turning out all right at that."

Mentally, he started a list of things that needed fixing on the *Halla*. She needed a paint job, she needed everything. He'd get a wire off to the insurance company and ask them to send down someone for that gem collection. He thought absently of the excitement that would hit Kotir when they started removing the gold to some government ship or seaplane, with the military guards taking over, with Edman and Koller trying to explain away damning evidence.

At the landing a launch from the *Halla* was waiting for him with a jovial seaman at the helm. When they were under way the seaman saw fit to remark, "That was the best fight I ever saw, Captain."

Captain McGrun looked up, smiled. "Would you know how to clean a .45 Colt automatic after it's been in sea water?"

"Aye, Captain," was the ready reply. "We've some kerosene on board that'll do it fine. I used to have one when I was with the—"

McGrun listened to the man talking, but his eyes strayed to the rusted bows of the anchored freighter ahead. There was his ship, there was his command. His mind skipped to the gold hoard below her decks, the bars stacked in high rows, row after row.

"Did I say something funny, Captain?" the seaman asked.

McGrun shook his head. "No, no. I was just thinking about something."

The seaman said "Oh" and resumed telling him how best to clean the automatic.



Curiosities By Weill

PHORORHACOS, THE HUGE PREHISTORIC BIRD COULD NOT FLY BECAUSE OF THE 'SIZE OF HIS WINGS! HIS HEAD WAS BIGGER THAN A RACEHORSE AND HE STOOD **8 FEET HIGH!**

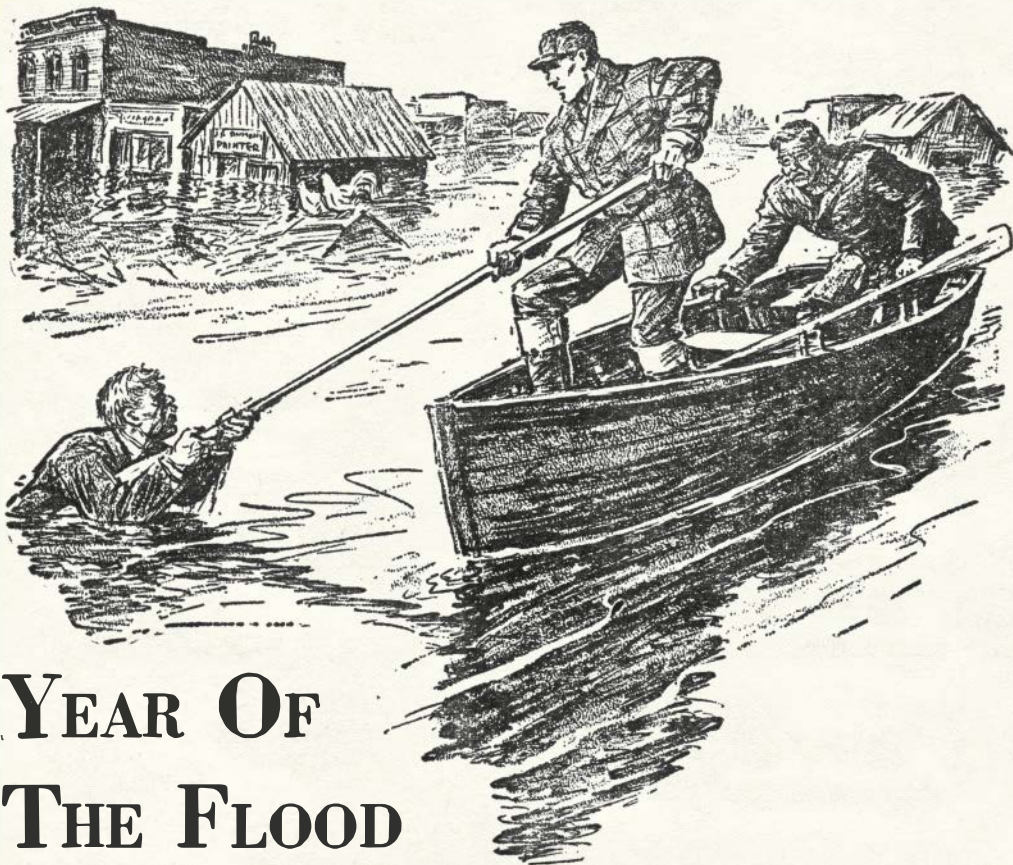


KING HENRY VIII WAS AN ENTHUSIASTIC TENNIS PLAYER, AND THE FIRST TENNIS COURT IN ENGLAND WAS CONSTRUCTED FOR HIM IN 1539!



THE NORWHAL HAS ONLY **TWO TEETH** - BOTH IN THE UPPER JAW! IN THE MALE THE RIGHT TOOTH REMAINS CONCEALED WHILE THE LEFT TOOTH GROWS SPIRALLY TO THE ENORMOUS LENGTH OF **ALMOST 10 FEET!**

Paw Was a Little Set in His Ways, but on the Whole He Was Better Company Than a Bengal Tiger



YEAR OF THE FLOOD

By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

THE WATER on North Main Street was yellowy and viscous, like cold bean soup. It was rising slowly, seeping into stores and creeping up the courthouse steps. A brand new Great Western stood in front of the Lyric Theater immersed to its brass headlights—a symbol of utter impracticability. To all appearances the town was desolate, deserted and about to enter into solution with the Wabash River.

Jim Clinton poled his raft down the street, his Mackinaw collar turned up to his hat brim. As he neared the high school he noticed that the basement was completely under, but the water had not yet reached the first floor.

"Oh, mister! Mister—mister!"

It was a plaintive voice, almost like a whisper. He glanced toward the school again and saw a girl standing at the window of Miss Porter's room. She looked as if she might be nineteen or twenty years old and she had a little blue shawl wrapped around her head.

"Hi," called Jim. "Didn't know school was keeping today."

"Please, mister—get me out of here!"

"You're safe enough right there," Jim replied. "Don't worry. I'll see that a rescue party picks you up before dark."

"Take me with you now. Please!" She climbed onto the window sill and beckoned to him frantically. "There's a tiger in here!"

"A what?"

"A t-tiger."

Jim frowned; then he shoved the coat collar back, revealing a broad crinkly grin. "See here, miss," he said. "I went to that school for four years, and I never once ran into a tiger."

"But I'm telling the truth," she insisted. "He's right outside this room, in the hall!"

Jim shoved the raft over to the front steps and tied it to a railing. He took a long-legged leap to the nearest step and slapped his gloved hands together to restore circulation. "I'll pick you up," he said. "But if I see a tiger, I'll eat that shawl of yours—tassels and all."

He went inside. The long hall was gloomy and smelled of mildew. Jim's rubber boots made a squishing sound as he strode up to Miss Porter's room and opened the door. "Now do you believe me?" he said. "No tigers."

The girl grabbed the lapel of his coat with one hand and pointed into the hallway with the other. "Wha—what's that?" she stammered.

Jim saw a large, stripped animal lying in the principal's office. It was stretched out on its side, with its tail protruding through the doorway. The beast was sopping wet, and seemed to be quite dead. Jim had no intention of investigating.

He took the girl's hand in his and edged sideways along the hall. As soon as they were outside, he lifted her in his arms, sloshed down the steps to the raft and placed her aboard.

"Looks like I'm going to have boiled shawl for supper," he told her.

The girl still looked scared. "I'd of died if you hadn't come along. I saw him swimming through the water about an hour ago. And when he came right up into the school—I nearly fainted. Where do you suppose he came from?"

"Only one place he could come from," said Jim. "The circus has their winter headquarters across the river. My father does a lot of blacksmithing for them. I heard they lost a lot of animals, but I didn't figure any of 'em could swim across. I'll bet Mr. Tiger was as scared as you were."

"I don't think that's possible."

"I'm Jim Clinton," he said, shoving the raft along slowly. "I was on my way to get a ledger from Paw's shop. That's why I didn't want to stop for you."

"You don't have to turn back on account of me."

"The water's currenty below here. Don't like to risk it with a passenger. Whereabouts do you live?"

"Up at Webleyville," she said. "My name is Anna Peterson."

He regarded her curiously. A few strands of blonde hair wisped from beneath the shawl. Her eyes were large and blue, and she had freckles on each side of her nose. She was undoubtedly one of the "immigrants" his father was always complaining about. A lot of new farmers, mostly of Scandanavian descent, had settled around Webleyville while Jim was away at college. Paw Clinton regarded them with chronic disfavor.

"I reckon you better spend the night at my place," he said. "It's on high ground, and the folks have plenty of room. We'll go by the courthouse and leave word where you are."

"I don't like to bother you."

"No bother. Maw likes company, and Paw—well, Paw's a little set in his ways but he's better company than a wet Bengal tiger."

PAW CLINTON paced the floor, pausing now and then to tug at his scraggly gray mustache and scowl in Jim's direction. "I'll be doggoned!" he said angrily. "I send you out after my ledger-book and you come trompin' in with a towsy-headed immigrant girl from Webleyville—"

"What was the boy supposed to do?" Maw Clinton looked up from her knitting. "Leave her to be et by a wild animal?"

"Anna's a nice kid," said Jim, wiggling his feet in front of the oil stove. "Not a bad looker either."

"She's a doggotted foreigner," fumed Paw. "A Swedish Lutheran too, I'll bet."

"Land sakes, Paw, that ain't nothin' to hold agin a body," declared Maw Clinton. "My cousin Amos was a Lutheran."

"Look what happened to him," sniffed Paw. "Ended up a saloon keeper in Buffalo."

"Everybody can't be Baptists," said Jim.

"An' what's wrong with bein' a Baptist?" roared Paw. "I spent good money sendin' you to Philadelphey to be educated an' you come back a heathen!"

"Jim ain't a heathen," said Maw. "Do you

think it's Christian-like to begrudge a pore, homeless child a roof over her head?"

"Homeless child," spluttered Paw. "I know her old man, Tor Peterson—fixed a wagon for him onc't. He's a doggoned Democrat!"

Jim picked an apple out of a basket and crunched into it. "Maybe you're right, Paw," he said. "When Anna comes downstairs, ask her who her father voted for last November. If she says Wilson or Roosevelt, throw her out."

"I'll have none o' your sass—"

"Shush," said Maw, "She's comin' now."

The stairs creaked. Jim put on his slippers. Paw sat down, unfolded last Tuesday's newspaper and pretended to read it.

Anna had removed her coat and shawl. She was wearing a white dress with blue dots, and the ruffles at the bottom were still damp. As she came into the room she made a small curtsy. "It was so nice of you to take me in," she said. "I thank you all."

Paw grunted. Maw put her knitting down and grasped the girl by the hands. "You're welcome, child," she said. "I'll have supper ready in two shakes."

"Can't I help?"

"Nothin' to do but dish it up. Set down here, on the davenport."

PAW CLINTON lowered his paper and stared at her through his gold rimmed spectacles. "How'd you happen to be away from your folks?" he asked.

"I came to town yesterday for my elocution lesson," she said. "I take from Mrs. Purdie on Fourth Street. I was going to read Enoch Arden at the church sociable—"

"What church?" Paw interrupted.

"Webleyville Lutheran," she replied.

Paw frowned and made a harsh sound down in his throat.

"Go on," said Jim quickly.

"Well, I'd only been there fifteen minutes when a neighbor came in to tell us the Wabash was rising. I thought I could get a ride back to Webleyville with Nils Hagen; the water was only up to the curb. Then it started to get deeper, and I ducked into the high school. I spent the night there. It wasn't bad at all—until I saw the tiger."

"Tiger," snorted Paw. "Bet it was old Sultan. He ain't got a tooth in his head."

"He was bigger than Sultan," said Jim.

"Your dern tiger cost me five hundred dollars," said Paw. "I was countin' on Jim to fetch my ledger-book from the shop. There's over five hundred in accounts due an' payable listed in that book. I can't bill the customers if I don't have the doggoned records."

"I'll get the book tomorrow," Jim promised.

"Supper's ready." Maw Clinton bustled in, wiping her hands on an apron. "Hope you like stewed chicken."

They went into the long, rectangular dining room. Paw walked to the far end, pulled up a trap door that led to the cellar and lit a match.

"The water's still risin'," he announced, peering into the hole. "It's up to the cranberries now."

He let the trap door slam; then sat down at the head of the table and mumbled a few words of grace. As he was tucking a napkin under his stiff collar an urgent, jangling sound emanated from the front of the house. Someone was twisting the doorbell knob. "Now who on earth could that be?" he frowned.

"You'll never find out settin' there," said Maw.

Paw arose, took the oil lamp out of the sitting room and pushed aside the beaded curtains which hung in the front hall. He placed the lamp on a taboret and opened the door.

A tall, gaunt man with high cheekbones and cavernous eyes stood before him. He wore a pair of drenched overalls and a skimpy coat that was threadbare at the elbows.

Behind him stood a woman, short and dumpy, wearing a cap with earlaps.

"I am looking for my daughter, Anna," said the man. "At the courthouse they told me she was here."

"She's here," nodded Paw. "I'll tell her you come for her—"

"Papa! Mama!" The girl ran down the hall and flung herself upon them. "I was afraid you'd drowned!"

They broke into a torrent of Swedish. Paw glowered. He disapproved of anything he couldn't understand. Jim and Maw edged into the hallway.

"Paw! You're not lettin' those folks stand outside in the cold?" Maw Clinton leveled a

fierce glance at him. "Ask 'em to come in an' have a bite to eat."

"No. No," said Tor Peterson. "We go now—now that we have found our Anna."

"Where can you go to?" asked Jim.

"We find a place," Peterson replied. "We got a boat." He pointed to a rowboat which was tied to one of the maple trees in the front yard.

"You're comin' right in here," said Maw. "We're still high and dry, an' there's plenty of vittles for all. Paw—git out o' the way."

JIM slept in the attic room that night. He awakened soon after sunup and was scrubbing his face in a china basin when Paw came in.

"Where's the water this morning?" he asked.

"Almost up to the spiced peaches," said Paw. "Git your duds on. We're goin' to fetch my ledgerbook afore it's too late. Tom Ochletree came by ten minutes ago an' said that the blacksmith shop is liable to go down the river any minute."

"You goin' with me? It'll be awful risky on that raft."

"Reckon I better see that you git it this time—without bringin' any more immigrants back with you."

"They're fine people, Paw," Jim insisted. "After all, we were all immigrants at one time or another."

"I declare," sighed Paw. "You ain't the same boy since you come back from dental college."

"No," admitted Jim. "I've changed my ideas some."

"I seen you toadyin' to that girl last night," said Paw shrewdly. "You didn't take her into the front parlor just to look at the history of Miami County."

"You were young once yourself, I guess."

"But I didn't take up with any foreign trash. That girl reminds me of a picked jaybird—" Paw hesitated, and his voice softened. "Son, you can't forgit that you're a Clinton. The Clintons are one o' the first families in this town. I'd hate to see you—"

"I'm ready." Jim pulled on his boots, then looked in the mirror and gave his brown, tously hair a few swipes with a comb.

They went downstairs and found Tor Petersen standing in the hall. "You take my boat," Petersen said. "A raft is no good in deep water."

"We can make it in the raft," said Paw.

"Mr. Petersen's right," said Jim. "We'd better take the boat."

Paw grumbled under his breath, twisted a muffler around his neck and stomped out the front door. The water was about two feet below the porch. Jim waded over to the maple tree, untied the boat and pulled it up to the steps. Paw climbed in and Tor Petersen got in beside him.

"You goin' too?" Paw raised one shaggy brow.

Tor Petersen nodded.

They rowed down Main Street within a block of the blacksmith shop, Jim and Tor Petersen pulling on the oars. As they left the calm backwater the current became stronger and logs and splintered bits of timber hurtled past. Jim's shoulders began to ache.

"'Spect we better go back." Paw sat in the stern, regarding the water apprehensively. "If we was to git swept down that river, we'd go clean to Terre Haute."

Tor Petersen had a Viking look. "We make it," he said. "Only a little ways more."

It took half an hour to cover two hundred yards. The floor of the blacksmith shop was covered by ten feet of water, and the big doors at each end had both been ripped off their hinges and washed away. Constructed like a barn, the shop had a single room upstairs which served as Paw Clinton's office.

THEY approached the shop from the rear, and the current pinned them against the back wall. Jim pinched the boat under the upper window and broke the pane with an oar. He tried to reach for the sill, but his fingers missed it by inches.

"I can reach it." Tor Petersen stood up, grasped the sill easily and pulled himself upward.

"The ledger's in the desk," Paw called. "Just bust the top of the desk open!"

Tor Petersen nodded and disappeared. Jim sat down and grasped a loose board on the wall to keep the boat from drifting. Through the fifteen-foot doorway he could

see a red circus wagon, almost completely submerged. Gold gold letters at the top of the wagon announced: "Blood Sweating Hippopotamus."

The wooden structure seemed to quiver and shake as the water roared through the two doorways. Jim heard a splintering noise inside. That would be Tor Petersen breaking the desk top. The noise occurred again. This time it was louder, like a giant breaking trees with his fist.

"Mr. Petersen!" Jim shouted. "Get out of there! The building's going—"

Tor Petersen appeared at the window, triumphantly clutching a leather-bound ledger. He threw the ledger into the boat and clambered over the sill.

Jim saw the whole back end of the building tilt away from the boat. Tor Petersen let go of the window sill, slid along the wall and disappeared under the water. He came up an instant later, about three feet from the prow.

Jim held an oar out to him, and his big red hands grasped the blade. Paw lurched forward; grabbed the oar also, and the two of them managed to drag Petersen to the gunwale. The boat tipped and twirled crazily as Petersen swung his leg over the side and clambered aboard.

Paw and Jim immediately sat down to the oars. Paw's spectacles were dripping, his mustache dragged over his lip like burnt hay and he had lost his hat. They were far below the blacksmith shop now. Only the bright red top of the hippopotamus wagon marked the spot where it had stood.

AT SUPPER Paw Clinton deviated from his usual recital of grace. Besides thanking the Lord for the food, he expressed gratitude for their deliverance from the flood and he put in a special word of recommendation for Tor Petersen.

If Tor Petersen appreciated this unprecedented tribute he gave no sign of it, for his face remained as frozen as ever. Maw Clinton's eyes opened, however, and she gave a little smile.

"What are them things?" inquired Paw, pointing to a mountain of edibles on the main dish.

"Mrs. Petersen made 'em," said Maw. "They're some kind of Swedish meat ball."

Paw said one gingerly. "Ain't bad,"

he said. "'Course I reckon they take a little gittin' used to."

He ate five of them nevertheless, and when supper was over he went into his den and procured a box covered with red plush. "Cigar, Mr. Petersen?" he asked, snapping the lid back.

Tor Petersen shook his head and took a corn cob pipe from his pocket.

"Play checkers?"

"Ya." A gleam came into the cavernous eyes.

Paw placed the checker board on the sitting room table. "I'm the champeen of my lodge," he declared. "Thought it only fair to tell you."

"Ya," said Tor Petersen, lighting his pipe.

It was a big, comfortable house, and Jim thought it seemed more comfortable than usual that evening. Maw and Mrs. Petersen were busy washing dishes, the checker game was in full swing and he and Anna were sitting in the front parlor.

"Our folks seem to be getting along fine," Anna remarked.

"Paw usually takes a little knowing," Jim said. "If he can get a cigar and a checker game, he's happy. He feels pretty bad about losing his shop though."

She walked across the room and examined some abalone shells which were on the what-not. "I suppose Papa's farm is ruined too. He worked so hard on it, but he never liked being a farmer—"

"Don't move," said Jim. "Stand there, just like that."

"Why?"

"You remind me of a picture that was in one of my books in high school. A picture of a goddess with bright hair and pale skin and blue eyes, with a spear in her hand."

"Did she have freckles?"

"On each side of her nose." He stood up and gazed at her admiringly. "Let's see—this'll do for a spear." He took a cane out of the umbrella stand and placed it in her hand.

"You're so silly."

Jim shook his head. "When I first saw that picture I swore to myself that if I ever met a girl who looked like that, I'd kiss her."

"Jim!" She tried to draw back, but he held her tightly. Their lips touched for an

instant, then again. The cane dropped on the carpet, and her hand crept to his cheek. Finally she pushed him away. "I shouldn't have let you do that, Jim. I shouldn't have."

"It was a mean trick on my part," he admitted. "But I had to kiss you."

"I was hoping you wouldn't try."

"A man usually kisses the girl he's in love with."

"You're not in love with me, Jim. You know you're not. You just—" She turned abruptly and ran into the other room.

PAW CLINTON looked up from the checker board and glowered at her. He was about to make a momentous move and the slightest sound annoyed him. Slowly, he picked up a piece and placed it on another square.

Tor Petersen retaliated with a brisk, hopping movement, wiping all his opponent's pieces from the board.

"You lose," he said.

Paw turned purplish. "Doggone it!" he exploded. "If that dad-blamed girl hadn't busted in here and got me flustered—"

The mechanical doorbell jangled. Jim answered it. The visitor was about Jim's age, but shorter and heavier. His face was round, and he had big square teeth like a chipmunk. He wore hip boots and an oil-skin coat that was ripped at the sleeve.

"How'd do," said the stranger. "My name's Knut Holm. I'm lookin' for Anna Petersen."

"Come on in." Jim led him up the hall to the sitting room.

"It's Knut!" Anna stared at the man inquiringly. "I was wondering what had happened to you."

"Figured you was," Knut replied. "I been up in a tree for two days."

"A tree?"

"Ellum tree," he nodded. "Rescue boat finally came by this morning and got me down."

"Why, you pore boy." Maw Clinton overheard him from the dining room. "I'll bet you ain't had a speck o' food. You say you was in a tree for two whole days?"

"Yes'm. Didn't trouble me none—'cept I caught cold in my jaw."

"You set right down in here, an' I'll fix you somethin' to eat," she said. "After that you can take a good long sleep."

Paw's chin jutted wrathfully. "We're beddin' six people now, Maw. I don't see how we can put up another—"

"Jim's got an extry cot in his room," Maw reminded him. "You related to the Petersens, son?"

"Not yet," said Knut with a self-conscious grin. "Anna an' me are engaged to be married next month."

Jim's throat seemed to tighten up, and he had an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. He looked at Anna, but she suddenly became interested in the pattern of the carpet.

Paw swung around and glared at the checker board. "Set 'em up again," he said to Tor Petersen. "Doggone it. It's this infernal ruckus around here that's throwed me off. I ain't been beat in a checker game for five years!"

IT WAS late the next afternoon before Jim had a chance to talk with Anna—and then only because he grabbed her by the wrist and thrust her into the front parlor when no one was looking.

"Why didn't you tell me you were engaged?" he demanded.

"I didn't see any reason to. After all, we've only known each other since—"

"Are you in love with that—that tree climber?"

"I don't really know. Knut and I have been friends for years. I never thought much about marrying anybody else."

"You can start thinking about it now."

"Jim—are you sure—"

"Sure I'm sure. And don't worry about Knut. I'll put him on the right track."

"No. Knut's jealous, and he's strong as an ox. He nearly broke a boy's arm last year, just because he winked at me."

"I'm jealous too," said Jim. "I'd as soon hit him as look at him."

"I won't let you cause any trouble. Not after your folks have been so good to us all. I promised to marry Knut, and I'm not going to break my promise!"

"Anna, darling—"

"Leave me alone!" She hurried up the hall stairs.

Jim shoved his hands into his pockets and kicked at an ottoman which stood in a corner. He went into the sitting room and found Paw sitting alone by the stove, his

head cradled in his hands. The old man's mustache appeared more droopy than ever and his eyes were pale pools of despair.

"I'm worried," Paw said. "Son, I reckon I'm gettin' old."

"Don't feel that way, Paw." Jim patted him on the back. "You can build the blacksmith shop up again. I'll help you after I get started in my practice."

"I'm worried about that cussed Swede," Paw replied heatedly. He set there last night an' beat me three games in a row. It's downright humiliatin'. If I wasn't beholden to him for savin' my ledger book—"

"You used to say that it's harder to be a good loser than a good winner."

"Hm-m." Paw chewed on the butt of a dead cigar. "Pears like you lost out, yourself. Kind o' took the wind out o' your sails when you found out who that buck-toothed feller was, didn't it?"

Jim nodded.

"Lucky for you she was engaged. Never thought much of her anyway. I don't want no Lutherans or Democrats in this family."

THE beaded curtains parted, and Knut Holm walked in. He stared at Jim the way a bull stares while making up its mind to get mad.

"I seen Anna upstairs," he said. "She was cryin'. She wouldn't tell me why, but I figured maybe you had somethin' to do with it."

"Maybe I did," said Jim.

"I recollect that I told you we was gettin' married next month," said Knut. "A body don't like to see the girl he's engaged to cryin' because of another man."

"What if I was to tell you she isn't in love with you?"

Knut's heavy eyelids drooped. "If you was to say such a thing I'd thrash you within an inch o' your life," he replied. "But just so we won't have any such unpleasantness I'm seein' that she leaves here right away."

He turned and walked back down the hall.

A bluish vein appeared on Jim's forehead. He clenched and unclenched his fists nervously.

Paw revolved the cigar back and forth in his mouth, then tugged at his mustache. "Huh!" he blurted. "You goin' to stand there gawkin' an' let him take your girl

away from you? I'd show him whose board ate the cabbage!"

JIM was stunned for a second. He grinned at his father understandingly and headed for the hall. Knut Holm was starting up the stairs when he caught up with him.

"I think we'd better step out on the porch and settle this right now," Jim said.

Knut seemed anxious to oblige. "Suit yourself," he said.

They went outside, squared away and sparred around for a few seconds. Jim suddenly launched a hard punch that caught Knut on the cheek. He could tell that it hurt, for Knut stepped back, his face contorted with pain. Stretching out his thick arms, Knut shoved Jim against the wall of the house and hit him squarely on the jaw.

Jim sagged to the floor and lay there quietly. Knut walked away massaging his cheek.

The screen door slammed, and Paw Clinton came out, with Tor Petersen behind him. He turned Jim over on his back; rubbed his temples.

Tor Petersen walked over to the porch railing and spat into the water. "I think he'll be all right in a minute," he said, and his deep-set eyes held the suggestion of a twinkle. "Your boy don't fight so good, does he?"

Jim spent the rest of the afternoon in the barn loft. There was some hay up there, left over from the days when Paw Clinton kept a horse, and Jim stretched out in it, nursing his jaw and his pride. It was his pride that hurt most of all. He hated to go back into the house and face Anna and Knut—and Paw.

"Jim! Supper's ready."

He thought for a moment, then answered, "All right, Maw."

No use being a coward. He might as well go back in and act as if nothing had happened. He climbed down from the loft and poled over to the house on the raft.

They were all sitting at the table when he got there—all except Knut. Nobody said anything. Paw was quiet and serious. Anna scarcely glanced at him.

"Where's Knut?" Jim inquired.

"Upstairs," said Maw. "His jaw's all swole up. He can't eat."

"What's wrong with his jaw?"

"Dunno," said Paw, digging into a pork chop. "He claims he hit it on somethin'." "I better take a look."

HE WENT upstairs and found Knut in bed with a wet towel wrapped around his face. His cheek was swollen ponderously. "Hi," said Jim. "What's ailing you?" "Jaw's sore," mumbled Knut. "It pained me some before, but it got worse after you punched me."

"Open your mouth."

"What for?"

"I want to see something, that's all."

Knut complied reluctantly. He was still suspicious.

Jim probed the massive orifice with his finger, then took a dental mirror from the bureau drawer and looked inside. "I'll tell you what's wrong with you," he said. "You've got an abscessed tooth"

"What can I do for it?"

"Nothing. It'll have to come out." Jim reached into the bureau and obtained a pair of forceps.

Knut's eyes seemed the size of barrel heads. "Are you—fixin' to take my tooth out?"

"I'm a dentist," said Jim. "I don't have any gas, so it may hurt some."

"You ever took a tooth out before?"

"Lots of times. I'll give you some medicine to treat your mouth with afterwards."

Sweat poured down Knut's broad face. "What if I don't want you to take it out?"

"Then you can just lie there and suffer. Maybe you'll get blood poisoning and die."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"No," said Jim. "You licked me in a fair fight. I don't hold it against you. Now lie back and keep your mouth open."

It was a well-rooted tooth, but Jim had it out in no time. When the gulping and rinsing was over, he handed Knut the offending molar. "Look at it," he said. "No wonder you had a toothache."

"Jehosephat—what a whopper!" Knut examined it wonderingly. "Mind if I keep it?"

"It's your tooth."

"Might look good on a watch chain."

"How's your jaw feel?"

"Don't hurt at all—hardly."

"Rinse it with this medicine three times a day. Keep the hole good and clean."

"Say—" Knut kept rolling the tooth between his fingers. "—I'm sorry I was so hard on you today. Guess you couldn't help yourself, falling in love with Anna."

"No," said Jim. "I couldn't. That's a fact."

"You're a right smart feller too," said Knut. "Bet you'll be a big success. Dentists make good money, don't they?"

"The good ones do."

"You sure took out that tooth in a jiffy. Much obliged. I reckon we got mad at each other too soon."

Jim grinned and extended his hand. "Let's blame it on the flood."

WHEN Jim came downstairs next morning, he found that Knut had gone.

"He lit out early," Paw said. "Went a'slushin' up the street in his lip boots. He said for me to tell you an' Anna that he'd had a change o' heart. Said he was headin' for South Bend."

"Does—she know?" Jim asked

He nodded. "Maw told her. Maw's tongue wags at both ends."

"I'm going to marry her, Paw"

"You're old enough." Paw shrugged.

"The only thing that bothers me is that big Swede father of her'n. His farm's wiped out, so he's tryin' to buy into my blacksmithin' business. Claims he'll give me two thousand dollars for half interest."

"But you don't have a shop any more," Jim reminded him.

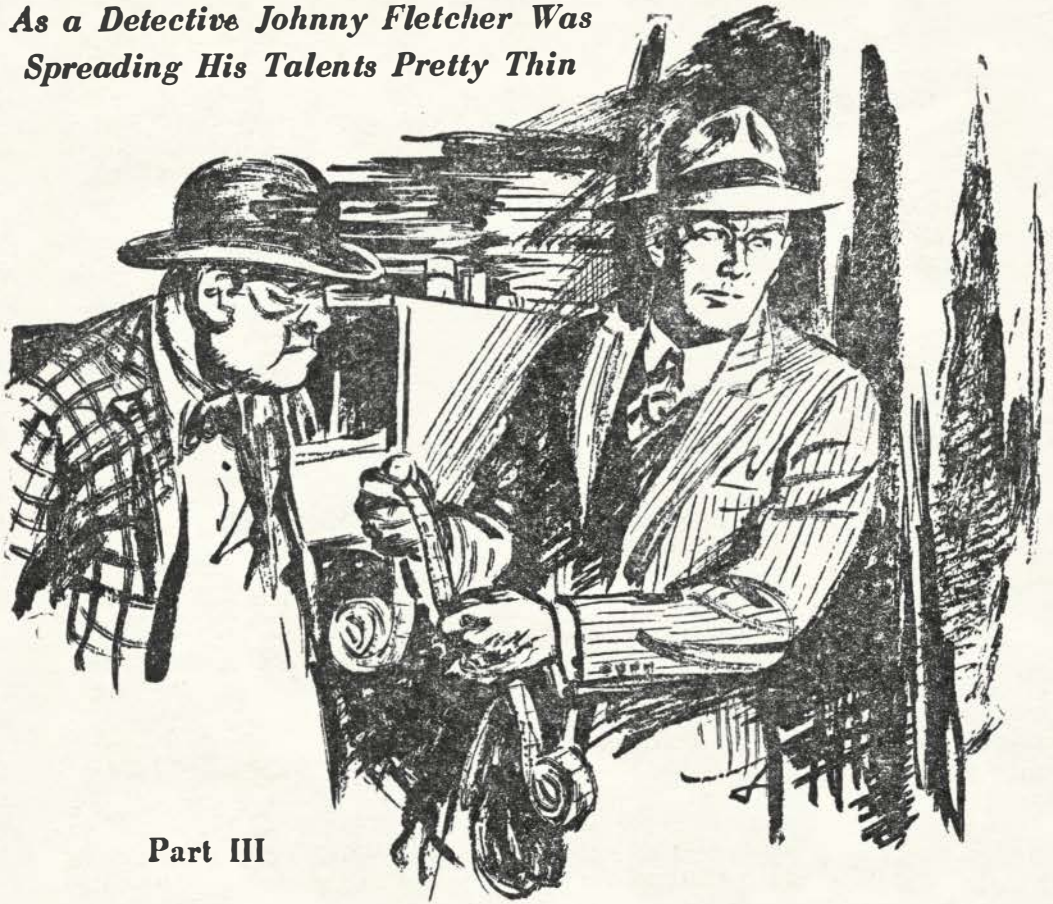
"I would have—if I had the two thousand dollars," Paw chuckled. "What's more, I'm goin' to beat him at checkers if it takes the rest of my natural life."

The kitchen door opened, and Anna appeared, bearing a load of freshly baked biscuits. Her blue eyes were shining, and the freckles on each side of her nose seemed more enticing than ever. Jim took the biscuits away from her and kissed her. This time she didn't push away.

Paw coughed, lifted up the trap door at the end of the dining room and peered into the cellar.

"I'll be doggoned," he said. "The water's goin' down. It's way below the cranberries."

As a Detective Johnny Fletcher Was Spreading His Talents Pretty Thin



Part III

THE STORY SO FAR

THOSE two chasers of illusive fortune, JOHNNY FLETCHER and SAM CRAGG, are once more broke. This time in Chicago. When the story opens they have just fished out of the icy waters of Lake Michigan

LOIS TANCREDE, who tried to commit suicide. They cash in on their rescue act to the extent of a new suit for Johnny from Lois's father,

DOUGLAS TANCREDE, and are interested in a note they find in the glove compartment of Lois's car. It reads, "Come tomorrow," and enclosed in it is a dark red feather. Johnny proceeds from that feather to a poultry show, and there goes into his book-selling pitch and raises enough money to keep Sam and him for a few days. Only while they are in the poultry show building a murder is discovered—that of

WALTER PENNEY, a breeder of game birds. Johnny suspects this game bird

breeding is a mask for illegal cock-fighting and looks up several men in the business. One of these is the wealthy

CHARLES LANYARD and another, a belligerent out-of-town barber

BENDER, who is staying at the same hotel where Johnny and Sam are. To make his investigation, Johnny has to skip out of the poultry show taking Sam with him. This is against police orders, since a murder is being investigated. They meet Lois Tancred at the show before they go, and later look up

HOWARD CORCORAN, editor of a game bird breeding journal called *Pit and Main*. They later go with Lanyard, Lois and Bender to a gambling establishment which is raided. Oddly enough the only patrons the police question are the people who were at the poultry show where Penney was murdered, but they are all released. Johnny has let it be surmised that he and Sam are detectives and Lois hires him to get back some letters which Walter Penney had and had

THE JUNGLE SHAWL



By **FRANK
GRUBER**

been holding over her. She pays him a retainer fee with a five-hundred-dollar bill, and the very display of it eases many troubles for Johnny and Sam. Then Bender asks Johnny to try to arrange a fight between his cock and one of Lanyard's, and for half of the proceeds Johnny agrees. Meanwhile, he and Sam start for Baker Hill where the late Walter Penney had had a country home where Lois avers he kept most of his papers.

XIII

BAKER HILL was forty-two miles from Chicago and was a combination of a country village and a suburban town. It had a Main Street about four blocks long and three or four cross streets of not more than a block or two each. The population was less than 2,000.

Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg got off the train and approached an ancient flivver which had a sticker on the windshield on which was the single word:

TAXI.

"Can you drive us out to Charles Whitney Lanyard's place?" Johnny asked.

"I could," replied the cab driver, "but it wouldn't do any good, if it's Mr. Lanyard you want to see. He took the train into the city an hour ago."

"That's fine," Johnny said. "If he isn't home, it'll give us a better chance to ransack his house."

"Huh?"

"We're burglars and we work better when the boss isn't home."

The cab driver grinned uncertainly. "Comic, ain't you?"

Johnny shrugged. "Lanyard has somebody at his place, doesn't he?"

"He's got ten-twelve people out there. Rich man, Mr. Lanyard."

"That's fine. Now what about a little taxi service?"

"You want to go out to Lanyard's place?"

"No," said Johnny, **gritting his teeth.** "We just want to make smart cracks with the natives."

"Just for that," retorted the taxi driver, "you can walk."

A five-dollar bill finally appeased the cabby and Johnny and Sam got in and were whisked down Main Street and out upon a macadamized road that made a specialty of chuck holes, nice big ones.

After a mile or so, the taxi turned down a side road that was a little narrower than the first, but also of macadam and much smoother.

The cab driver pointed off to the right. "There's Walt Penney's place," he said, "who got murdered down in the city yesterday."

Sam started to crane his neck to look out, but Johnny nudged him in the ribs with his elbow. "That so?" he said casually.

"Big mystery about it," the cab driver went on, "all over the city papers. Talk around here that him and Lanyard weren't such good friends."

Johnny yawned and the taxi man, shrugging, drove on. But after a half mile he began braking his car. "Here we are—best farm in the state, if anyone should happen to ask you."

It looked to be all of that. There was a huge sprawling farmhouse of white-painted brick; it must have contained close to twenty rooms and nearby was another farmhouse of white frame. The superintendent's "cottage." Behind the house were great barns, sheds and long poultry buildings, all with gleaming metal ventilators and all painted white. Money had been spent freely on this "farm."

Johnny and Sam got out of the taxi.

"Want me to wait for you?" the cab driver asked hopefully.

"No," Johnny said, "our business may take awhile."

"I don't mind waiting a little while," the man said. "I could drive you back—for five dollars."

"Thanks," said Johnny, showing his teeth. "But if we don't get the job, we'll walk back. In fact, we'll have to walk."

"You're lookin' for jobs?"

Johnny held out his hands, palms up. "Best milker in the county and my friend here is that way about chickens."

"Especially when they're Southern fried," said Sam.

The taxi driver looked at them uncertain-

ly, then suddenly shifted into gear and backing his flivver into the driveway, turned around and headed back for Baker Hill.

Johnny waited until the taxi had a good start, then nodded to Sam. "All right, let's walk now."

"Back to Penney's place?"

"Yes. I didn't want that busybody to know where we were going."

THEY plodded back up the highway until they came in sight of the Walter Penney place. By contrast to Lanyard's showplace Penney's farm looked like a sharecropper's establishment; yet there was a rather neat six or seven-room farmhouse and a big red barn and two long red poultry houses. Not to mention a windmill and a tractor that stood out in the barnyard.

The house stood back from the road a hundred feet or so and was reached by a graveled drive. Johnny and Sam trudged up the drive. They were starting past the house when the front door suddenly opened and a figure stepped out on the porch. He was a short, squat man of about forty, and wore levi's and a woolen Army shirt.

"Oh, hello," Johnny said.

"Lookin' for somebody?" the man asked.

"This is Walter Penney's place, isn't it?"

The man nodded. "Yeah, but Penney ain't here."

Johnny sized up the man. "You're a relative of Penney's?"

The man shook his head.

"Friend?"

"I work here."

"Ah, yes," said Johnny. "Then you're just the man I want to see." He coughed gently. "We're from the county."

"Yeah?"

"You know that Mr. Penney is dead, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Well, it's our job to look after his, ah, personal effects."

"You mean you want to go through his things?"

"That's right."

"Guess again."

Johnny put one foot on the lowest step leading to the porch. "Just what is your status here?"

"I work here, that's all."

"Doing what?"

"Whatever's done, I do."

"Correction," said Johnny. "You *did*. Mr. Penney's dead and your services terminated with his death."

"Nobody's paid me off and I stay here until I get paid."

Johnny drew a deep breath. "How much is due you?"

"A half-month's wages—fifty dollars."

"Well," said Johnny, "I guess the county can give you that."

He took out his roll of bills and peeled off two twenties and a ten and extended them to the man on the porch. "Here you are. Now, if you don't mind—"

"I got some things to pack."

"Go right ahead. In the meantime, we'll just look around."

The man shrugged and stepped to the door. Johnny and Sam followed and entered the house. There was a carelessly furnished living-room in front, an office or den along one side and directly opposite a small dining room and beyond a large kitchen.

A staircase led to the bedrooms upstairs. The man to whom Johnny had given the fifty dollars, headed for the stairs. "Help yourself," he said over his shoulder.

"Thanks."

Johnny stepped into the office room, followed by a frowning Sam Cragg. Inside the room, Sam whispered, "I don't like the looks of that fellow, Johnny."

"He's all right," Johnny assured Sam. "That fifty bucks convinced him." He stepped to an old-fashioned roll-top desk, tried to raise the roll-top and found that it was locked. He nodded to Sam. The latter gripped the slide roll with his fingers and lifted the entire desk from the floor, but the lock held.

He swung sideways, seated himself on the edge of the desk to hold it down and tried again. The lock snapped and the roll-top went up with a crash, revealing a nice clean blotter and some empty pigeon-holes.

Johnny exclaimed in disappointment and tried the drawers. There were plenty of things in them; bills from the local feed stores, pedigree records, a few poultry-raisers' catalogues and a bunch of pictures of game fowl. But no personal letters of any kind.

Those would be in the steel filing cabinet,

on the other side of the room. Johnny went across to them and tried the top drawer, expecting it to be locked. It wasn't, to his surprise, and slid out easily. Indexed manila folders contained a few letters, only a very few. Johnny ran through them quickly. They seemed to pertain mostly to Walter Penney's chicken business; inquiries from game fowl raisers, in reply to some advertising Penney had apparently done in *Pit and Main*. Nothing incriminating and nothing personal.

Behind the manila folders were forty or fifty round aluminum containers, neat little affairs about an inch in diameter and not quite twice that in length; they were film containers and Johnny, opening one at random, took out a roll of developed .35-mm film. He unrolled it part way and holding it up to the light, could make out barnyard scenes, individual and flock snaps. He let the roll curl back to its natural shape and tried another. It was very similar to the first.

Behind the containers of film was an Argus camera. From what Johnny had learned of Walter Penney he found it hard to believe that the man was a camera enthusiast, but such apparently had been the case.

JOHNNY opened a third container of film and then the telephone in the room rang. Johnny winced and looked at the instrument in annoyance. Sam started for the phone but Johnny signalled him back. The phone rang and rang, and then feet pounded on the stairs and Penney's former hired man came into the room.

"Whyn't you answer it?" he asked.

"Can't be for me."

The man grunted and took the receiver off the hook. "Hello," he said. "Yeah, it's me. It's a good thing you called. There are a couple of birds here, claim they're from the county. They're nosing through things." He listened for a moment, looking at Johnny over the phone. A scowl grew on his face.

"I don't like their looks. Okay, Sim." He hung up and gestured to Johnny. "Find what you're looking for?"

"No," said Johnny.

"Tell me what it is and I might help you."

"You might at that—if we were looking

for something special. Only we aren't."

"You mean you're not lookin' for any special—letters?"

Johnny sized up the man narrowly. "Are there some around?"

The man walked to Johnny's side and stooped to pull out the lower drawer of the steel file. "There certainly are. Here—" He thrust his hand into the back of the drawer and still stooped, moved quickly away from Johnny.

The biggest automatic that they make—a .45—was pointed at Johnny. "This what you want?"

"I ought to have my head examined," Johnny said bitterly.

"You sure ought," agreed the man with the gun. "You didn't expect to get away from here with anything, did you?"

"I guess not."

"Because if you did, you never had a chance. I was letting you look around, figuring maybe you had a tip on where to look for—for something."

"You mean you don't know yourself?"

"I've searched the place inside and out, and I ain't found it."

"Maybe he didn't keep his money here."

"Who said anything about money?"

"Isn't that what you've been looking for?"

The squat man regarded Johnny sourly. "Penney didn't keep any money here." He looked suspiciously at Johnny. "What're you trying to hand me?"

"What do you think *we* were looking for?"

"Some letters or something."

"What kind of letters—or something?"

The man made an angry gesture with the .45. "Don't try any of that stuff on me."

Sam said, "Put down the roscoe and we'll talk this over."

The man with the gun sized up Sam Cragg's brawn. A contemptuous smirk twisted his lips. "You're big, all right, but I only quit the ring a year or two ago. I'd chop you to pieces."

"Tell you what," Sam offered, "I'll let you hit me once before I hit back."

"I may take you up on that—later," was the reply. "After we settle this little business." He nodded to Johnny. "You want to talk now, or do you want to wait until Sim comes. He'll be here any minute and

I don't mind telling you that Sim's got a mean streak in him."

"So have I," retorted Johnny.

THE wheezing of an automobile came to Johnny's ears. The noise became louder and after a moment, a horn honked outside the house. The man with the .45 stepped to the door and risked a quick look outside.

"Okay, Sim!" he called.

Feet sounded on the steps and then the door was pushed open and Sim came in. He was a big man, a little over six feet in height and weighing in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds. He had the cruellest-looking face Johnny had ever seen on a human; its appearance was enhanced by a jagged scar that ran clear across his chin.

"Hello, Horace," he said. He sized up Johnny and Sam, then stepped up to Johnny.

"Who sent you out here?" he demanded.

"I don't remember," Johnny said.

Sim smacked Johnny's face with the palm of his hand, a hard, savage blow. Johnny, as much surprised as hurt, reeled back. Sam Cragg cried out hoarsely and lunged for Sim.

Horace sprang forward at the same time. Sam got hold of big Sim by one arm, whirled him around and was drawing back his fist to hit the man in the face, when Horace jammed the muzzle of his automatic into Sam's back.

"Hold it!" he cried.

Sam held his fist cocked and even then for a moment he was tempted to smash Sim regardless of the consequences, but Johnny, seeing his friend's plight, exclaimed, "Don't, Sam!"

Sam let go of Sim and Horace promptly stepped clear with his gun, but he kept it trained on Sam.

Sim's face was twisted in rage. "Tough guy, huh! Well, you won't be when I get through with you." He whirled on Johnny. "I asked you a question and I want an answer. Who sent you here?"

Johnny remained silent. Sim tried again, "What are you looking for?"

Johnny shook his head. "Nothing special."

Sim raised his hand to hit Johnny again

and a growl came from Sam Cragg's throat. Sim stopped. "Can't you keep this gorilla quiet, Horace?"

"Yeah, sure," said Horace, "but look, Sim, this is too close to the road. Somebody's liable to be passing and hear 'em squawk; might even somebody come in here. Let's take 'em back to the barn."

"A very good idea," conceded Sim. "Come on, suckers." He nodded to the door, but Johnny Fletcher remained where he was until Horace, stepping around Sam, prodded him with the automatic. Then he stepped quickly to the door.

Sim crowded out on his heels, then Sam came, herded by Horace. Outside the quartet walked toward the big red barn which was a hundred yards or so from the house.

XIV

ENTERING the barn, Sim headed for the big space that led to the haymow, but Horace called to him. "Here's a better spot, Sim."

He indicated the cow section apparently unoccupied for some time. It contained a manger about ten feet long and stalls for four cows. To the manger, in each stall, was fastened a cow chain. On the end of each chain was a broad, three-inch belt which was intended to go around the cow's neck.

Horace picked up one of the straps and chuckled. "Just right."

Sim took the strap from Horace's hand and nodded. Horace stepped back, holding his gun on Sam. Sim went behind the big man's back, reached under his armpits and brought the ends of the belt behind his back, pinioning Sam's arms to his sides.

He put the end of the strap through the buckle, then using his knee in Sam's back for leverage, buckled the belt so tightly that Sam could scarcely breathe. When he finished he slapped Sam's face. "Now get tough."

He repeated the process with another belt on Johnny. When he finished he struck Johnny in the face, but this time he used his fists. Warm blood trickled down Johnny's chin.

Reeling, he said, "I'm no hero. We were looking for a piece of film."

"Film," exclaimed Sim. "What the hell do you want with film?"

"Penney photographed some letters," Johnny said. "The—the person who sent us out here bought the letters from Penney, then discovered that he had photographed them."

Horace said to Sim, "There's a lot of little cans of film in the house. He was pawing over them when I threw down on him."

Sim cracked Johnny's face with the back of his hand. "Who's paying you for this job?"

Johnny licked blood with his tongue. "Douglas Tancred."

"You'd better not be lying," Sim said threateningly, "because if you are, what you've had is only going to be a sample of what you'll get." He nodded to Horace. "Where's this film?"

"I'll show you."

"No, you stay here and watch them."

"What for? It'd take them two hours to get out of those straps."

"Just the same, we can't take any chances. Where'd Penney keep this film?"

"In the steel file behind the letters; there's a whole bunch of these cans, forty-five. You'll have to look at all of them."

"All right. You keep an eye on them."

SIM left the barn and Johnny and Sam exchanged glances. Horace found a milking stool and setting it up near the door, seated himself on it.

Johnny called to Horace, "Can't you loosen these straps a little? Mine's cutting into my skin."

"Too bad," replied Horace without sympathy.

Johnny looked again at Sam. "I wish we were back selling books."

A gleam came into Sam's eyes. "Yeah, you pattin' on a spiel and me—"

Johnny nodded. "Can you?"

Sam sent a cautious glance in the direction of the door, where Horace was seated on his stool. The squat man didn't seem much interested in them; he had faith in the straps. Too much faith, for he had never seen a sales pitch of Johnny's and Sam's.

Sam took as deep a breath as he could, crouched low and let all the air out of his lungs. Johnny whispered, "Now!"

Sam came up and as he rose slowly he drew in air. His chest expanded an inch

and a half—two inches. The strap cut through Sam's clothing, into his skin. Sam's chest expanded another inch, a fourth—and then with a pop the broad cow-strap broke!

And Sam, crouched low, was hurtling toward Horace by the door. He had covered half of the distance before Horace was aware of his approach. The hoodlum was so astonished then that he sprang to his feet, before he remembered his gun. And then it was too late to use it. Sam Cragg's shoulders hit Horace's stomach and the crook went over backwards. His head hit the wall, knocking him groggy. Then Sam scrambled to his feet, reached down and gathered up the man's coat and shirt with his left fist. He hit him once with his right; just once, but Horace was due for an hour's sleep.

Sam ran back to Johnny and in a moment had unbuckled the belt. Johnny drew air into his tortured lungs, exhaled heavily. "Now let's have a bit of a talk with Old Sim."

On the way to the barn door Johnny scooped up the sleeping Horace's artillery. But as he stepped out of the door into the barnyard, he saw that they had made a mistake. Sam had effected their escape too soon. The barn was three hundred yards from the house and Sim, walking, had not yet reached the house.

He was within a few feet of it, however, and as he headed for the door he glanced casually over his shoulder toward the barn and saw two men where only one had a right to be walking. He came to an abrupt halt, looked at Johnny, and Sam for a moment, then whirling, headed for his car.

Johnny and Sam began running toward the house, Johnny brandishing the big automatic. "Hey, wait a minute!" he cried.

But Sim, knowing the abuse he had dished out, was not waiting for anyone. His motor caught and he backed the car out of the drive toward the highway.

Johnny was still a hundred and fifty yards away when Sim reached the highway and shifted into forward gear. With a curse, Johnny skidded to a stop, thrust out the automatic and fired two quick shots. The range was too great for accurate pistol shooting, but Johnny hoped that one of the bullets would take effect. Apparently they

didn't, however, for the car roared up the road.

In disgust Johnny handed the gun to Sam. "Go back and see that our friend Horace behaves himself. I'm going to take a look at those films. That bunk I told Sim may not be bunk after all. In fact, the idea's a good one."

Sam grunted and trotted back toward the barn while Johnny proceeded into the house.

IN THE office of the late Walter Penney, Johnny pulled a chair up to the filing cabinets and began examining the rolls of film. It was quite a job, for each roll contained over thirty panels and he had to examine each by holding it up to the light.

The first half-dozen rolls he examined contained almost all poultry and farm subjects and Johnny, not bothering to put them back into the containers, tossed them to one side.

In the seventh roll he came across some prints of people. A couple of them were group shots and one of the men seemed familiar and this was borne out a moment later when he came upon a closeup shot and despite the fact that it was on a negative, was able to identify Elmer Cobb, the Chicago gambler.

Johnny looked over the rest of the roll with care, moving to an electric-light bulb which he switched on and which enabled him to see the film a little more clearly. A shot of Cobb and Dr. Wheeler together examining a gamecock was of interest to Johnny. Then there were several pictures which featured Cobb, Wheeler and a sardonic-looking man. The fact that he had his coat off and appeared more oftener in pictures than anyone else caused Johnny to decide that this was the late Walter Penney.

A fourth man appeared in one of the prints: Horace, the hoodlum, who now lay unconscious out in the barn.

Johnny put this roll aside and examined further rolls of film. Three or four contained nothing of interest, but while browsing casually through the thirteenth or fourteenth roll, Johnny suddenly exclaimed in awe. He was looking at a medium close shot of—Lois Tancred!

Johnny studied the film for a long time, then slipped it through his fingers and

looked at the next rectangle. It, too, was of Lois Tancred. The girl standing before the door of a small one-room cottage that could have been a beach house, a tourist cabin, or perhaps a mountain cabin.

The third picture of Lois showed her looking up and laughing merrily at Walter Penney. Both were standing in front of the cottage, Penney wearing sweat shirt and shorts, and Lois knee-length pedal-pushers and a man's shirt.

There was a fourth picture of Lois and Walter Penney, wearing bathing costumes and standing on a springboard, perched over water. In the background was a glimpse of the cottage before which they had posed in the previous picture.

The implication of these pictures was obvious, and Johnny, whistling softly, rolled up the film, put it into its container and stuck the little aluminium tin into his pocket.

He looked through the rest of the rolls of film and found forty or fifty different snaps of Walter Penney and a great many of chickens and farm subjects, but no more of interest to Johnny.

Dumping the film back into the filing cabinet, Johnny made a quick tour of the house, then left it and strolled back to the barn. There he found Horace conscious, but lying in a stall and Sam, seated on a milking stool, twirling Horace's automatic.

"Hi, Johnny," Sam said cheerfully. "Me and Horsie been having a little game. He gets up to show me some boxing tricks and I knock him down. He musta been a good fighter when he was in the ring, the way he bounces when he hits the floor. Takes practice. Get up, Horse, and let's show Johnny."

Horace apparently had enough, however. He cursed Sam bitterly but he remained on the floor. Sam got to his feet.

"Find what you want, Johnny?"

Johnny nodded. "I think we'd better start back for town."

"What about Horsie?"

Johnny shrugged. "He was out here when we came."

Sam put the gun into the pocket of his topcoat and they started for the door. Then Johnny suddenly remembered something and turned back.

"My fifty bucks," he said to Horace.

Horace gave him the money with ill grace. "What about my gun?"

"We're keeping that for a souvenir—and in case I run into your chum, Sim."

THEY left Horace in the barn and walked to the highway, where they began plodding toward the village of Baker Hill. Although the distance was actually no more than two miles, it took them almost an hour to traverse, for it developed that Johnny's new shoes pinched and he had to stop a couple of times to rest his aching feet.

Then, in Baker Hill, they learned that they had just missed a train to the city and had to wait almost an hour before another came along. So it was one o'clock before they walked into the Eagle Hotel.

Johnny, having the room key in his pocket, was heading for the elevator, but Mr. McAfee, who was behind the desk, signalled to him.

"A message for you, Mr. Fletcher," he said, taking a slip of paper from the key slot.

Johnny took the slip and glanced at it. The message read: "*Please telephone Mr. Tancred at his office. Urgent.*"

Johnny looked up to see McAfee studying him. The hotel manager smiled quite pleasantly. "Is that *the* Mr. Tancred?" he asked, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"Naturally," said Johnny. "He wants to ask my opinion about a certain bond issue."

McAfee looked at Johnny with suspicion. "It says urgent; would you like me to call his office for you?"

Johnny shrugged. "Go ahead."

McAfee picked up the desk phone and said: "Elsie, get me the D. Tancred Company on LaSalle Street. Mr. Tancred—for Mr. Fletcher."

He lowered the telephone and looked at Johnny while waiting for the call to be put through. Johnny leaned against the desk and yawned.

McAfee suddenly raised the phone. "Mr. Fletcher calling Mr. Tancred." Then he blinked. "Just a moment." He handed the phone to Johnny.

Mr. Tancred was already on the wire. "Fletcher," he said, "I've been trying to get you. I wonder if you can come over to my office?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Tancred," Johnny said.

Then for the hotel manager's benefit, "A very important matter?"

"As a matter of fact," Tancred said, "it is rather important."

"Good," Johnny said, "I'll be over in fifteen minutes."

He hung up and handed the phone to McAfee. The hotel manager shook his head in bewilderment. "I don't understand it."

"I'll tell you about it sometime," Johnny said flippantly. "Now, if you'll excuse me I'll run over and see what I can do for Tancred."

He signalled to Sam Cragg and they left the hotel. They were about to cross the street when Johnny stopped. "Look, Sam, do you suppose I could count on you to do something—something important?"

"Why not?"

"I want you to run down to the office of *Pit and Main* and see Howard Corcoran—"

Sam winced. "I don't think Corcoran likes either you or me very much."

"I know; in fact, that's what I was counting on. He may get mad enough to tell you what I want to know."

"What's that?"

"The location of Walter Penney's summer cottage."

"Do you think he knows?"

Johnny shrugged. "He knew Penney better than anyone else, unless maybe it was Elmer Cobb, and I think it'd be a little harder to get the information from Cobb. Look, just ask Corcoran where Penney's summer cottage is located—the one located on the lake. That's all, get the answer to that and you've done a good day's work. I'd go down myself, but I can't tell how long I'll be tied up with Tancred. We're supposed to meet Otto Bender back here at the hotel at six."

He took some bills out of his pocket and gave them to Sam. "Take a taxi."

Sam took the money and stepped into a taxi at the curb. He waved good-bye to Johnny and the latter crossed the street and entered a drug store.

XV

HE LOOKED up the number of the Tancred home and entering a phone booth, dialed it. The smooth voice of the butler answered: "Mr. Tancred's residence."

"I'd like to talk to Miss Lois Tancred," Johnny said.

"I'm sorry, sir," was the reply, "but Miss Tancred is not at home."

"Don't give me that," Johnny exclaimed. "This is Mr. Fletcher and Miss Tancred's expecting my call."

"She's still not at home."

Johnny swore and slammed the receiver on the hook. Leaving the drug store he walked quickly down LaSalle Street to the offices of D. Tancred & Company.

He was ushered in promptly. Tancred shook hands warmly. "Sit down, Mr. Fletcher," he said cordially. Then he looked at Johnny and pursed up his lips. "What I have to say, rather what I have to ask you, is a little difficult. It means divulging a confidence, but I feel that it is my duty." He paused. "Mr. Fletcher, why did my daughter give you five hundred dollars last night?"

Johnny drew a slow breath. "Somebody told you she gave me five hundred dollars?"

"A couple of days ago I put two five-hundred-dollar bills into my wall safe at home. There was only one in there this morning."

"Your butler couldn't have taken it? If you ask me, he's a pretty fishy-eyed guy—" He stopped as Tancred shook his head and tried again. "Maybe Mrs. Tancred needed a little pin money."

"Mrs. Tancred has her own bank account. But you haven't answered my question."

"What question?"

"Why did my daughter give you five hundred dollars last night?"

"You said last night, not yesterday morning or this morning—"

"Last night."

"I see," said Johnny. "So you know I had a five-hundred-dollar bill last night?"

"Yes."

"Lanyard?"

Tancred shrugged lightly. "I'll go so far as to say that Mr. Lanyard was in to see me this morning."

"In other words you promised you wouldn't let anyone know he told you? You refuse to break a confidence. Yet you'd ask me to do just that?"

Tancred frowned. "Mr. Fletcher, I think it's about time we stopped beating about the bush. My daughter threw herself into the lake yesterday. She didn't slip and she didn't

fall accidentally. She tried to drown herself deliberately. Let's accept that as fact. My daughter is in serious trouble, has been for some time. I want to help her. I can't unless I know the cause of her trouble."

"You've asked her?"

"Of course. She refuses to tell me." A trace of bitterness came into his tone. "Yet she's confided in a stranger."

JOHNNY said quietly, "Sometimes it's easier to tell your troubles to a stranger." Tancred smiled wanly. "I've thought of that and I've also thought the reason Lois gave you that money was because she wanted you to help her."

"I'll admit that much, Mr. Tancred. The money she gave me wasn't a bribe—or blackmail."

"Blackmail?" Johnny chose to ignore that lead and Tancred went on: "I'm not unaware of the fact that a man was murdered yesterday, Mr. Fletcher, a man whom Lois knew." He drew a deep breath. "Is she implicated in that?"

Johnny shook his head. "I don't know, Mr. Tancred. You know your daughter better than I do. Do you think she's the type of girl who would commit murder?"

"I think all of us would commit murder, under certain circumstances." Then Tancred added quickly, "But Lois has been more cheerful since Walter Penney was killed. If she'd had anything to do with his death, she wouldn't feel so good, would she?"

"She would if the thing that Penney threatened, while alive, was worse than—the act of murder."

"No, you're wrong. While Penney was alive Lois tried to kill herself."

Johnny's eyes clouded. "Penney was killed at around eight o'clock in the morning. It was almost ten before—well, before I jumped into the lake after her."

"You're suggesting she killed Penney and then in remorse—or fear of consequences—tried to commit suicide?"

"I'm not suggesting that, no. I'm saying that *could* have been the case. It's an angle the police would snatch at—if they knew about the suicide attempt."

"But they don't know about that?" Tancred looked at Johnny sharply. "We're the only ones who know?"

"And Mrs. Tancred and your servants."

"I can vouch for them."

"What about Lois? *She* might tell someone."

"Charles Lanyard?" Tancred shook his head. He drummed on the desk with his fingers. "You aren't going to tell me why Lois gave you that money?"

"She hired me to find something for her."

"What?"

"That, I'm afraid, I can't tell you."

"Lois seems to have unusual confidence in you, a confidence by the way, that I'm inclined to share with her." Tancred regarded Johnny shrewdly. "This—thing—you're to find for Lois; do you have any clue to it as yet?"

"I've more than a clue, Mr. Tancred. I think I can promise you that your daughter's normal state of mind will soon be restored to her."

Tancred looked at Johnny for a long moment. Then suddenly he nodded. "Thank you. Just one thing more. I understand Lois is going out to Charles Lanyard's place tonight. Some sort of, uh, party—"

"Cockfight."

Tancred smiled. "You know about it!"

"Yes. In fact I'm going out there myself."

"Good. I—I was about to ask if you could go out there and, well, sort of keep an eye on Lois, and—and people. Lanyard will be rather occupied, I imagine and—well, I understand certain people will be out there."

"People concerned with the affairs of the late Walter Penney, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I'm working for your daughter, Mr. Tancred. Her interests are my interests. Also her welfare."

"Good. Good." Tancred nodded in satisfaction and, rising to his feet, held out his hand. "I'm quite pleased with my investment." He was looking at Johnny's suit.

Johnny grinned. "It's good material."

He left the broker's office. Down on La-Salle Street he stood for a moment uncertainly, then walked to Adams. He turned east and walked swiftly to State Street, watching the store windows, but not finding what he sought. On State he turned south, walked to Van Buren and beyond. Near Congress he found what he wanted, a camera supply store.

It was a rather small place and there were no customers in the store at the

moment. An anaemic-looking clerk was leaning over a showcase.

"What can I do for you?" he asked listlessly.

Johnny took the small can from his pocket. He opened it and took out the roll of film. "How soon could you print up some of these pictures?" he asked.

"Tomorrow."

Johnny shook his head. "I didn't ask how many hours it would take—I meant minutes."

The clerk's listlessness disappeared. "Huh?"

"You have a dark room here?"

"Yes, we do our own printing."

"All right, how long would it take you to run through a few of these pictures—and how much?"

"I couldn't do it right now, because I've got to watch the store."

"Why?"

"You got a point there, mister. I don't know why, unless it's somebody might bring in a roll of films to be developed, or they might even want to buy a roll."

"So you'd lose a sale; I said I'd pay for your time."

"How many pictures would you want?"

"Just five or six?"

"And you'd pay—five bucks?"

"I'd pay five bucks."

The clerk came around the showcase and picked up a card on which was printed: "OUT TO LUNCH." He locked the door and hung the sign in the window.

"Want to watch?"

"Yes."

THE photographer led the way into a small dark room. He laid out three enameled pans, filled the middle one with water and then filling a glass graduate two-thirds full of water, added four ounces of acetol. He poured the mixture into the first of the three pans, washed out the graduate, then poured in some quick-fix. He added water and poured the result into the third pan.

Then he switched on a yellow light and turned off the regular light. He took Johnny's roll of film, slipped it into a combination printer and enlarger and flicked on the switch. The light underneath the film showed up a rectangle.

"Which ones do you want printed?" the photographer asked.

Johnny stepped to his side and pulled the film through the slot until he came to the first picture of Lois Tancred. "This one and the next two."

The photographer took a manila envelope from a drawer, slipped out an inner envelope and from it took several pieces of printing paper, about 3¼ by 4½ inches in size. He put one, face down, in the top of the printer, pressed down the lid, counted up to five. Then he raised the cover, took out the piece of paper and dropped it into the acetol tank.

Without looking at it he moved back to the printer and slipped the film through to the next panel and repeated the process with a second sheet of paper.

He put that in the acetol. "Watch," he said to Johnny.

Johnny looked into the acetol tank and saw the first picture beginning to come out. The photographer ran through the third picture, then picked up a pair of plastic tongs and stirred the acetol. The first picture began to come up sharply, while the second one showed faint outlines.

The photographer took hold of the first picture with his tongs, swished it about in the liquid, then lifted it out and dropped it into the water. He sloshed it around a moment, then took it out of the water and put it into the third tank, the one containing the quick-fix. By that time the second picture was ready to remove into the water. Johnny examined the first picture that was in the quick-fix. It was an excellent picture of Lois. There was no mistaking her, nor was there any mistaking the building behind her. It was a cottage, of a rural type.

The second picture was dropped into the quick-fix and Johnny scowled at it.

The photographer brought through the third picture, then looked down at them. "Good prints," he said.

"Yes," said Johnny. "Could you run through one more of each?"

The photographer nodded and in three minutes more they were in the quick-fix. "That stuff sets them in one minute," he said, "but they ought to be washed for twenty minutes and then they ought to dry for an hour or two."

"I can't wait that long. Would it harm the prints to just blot them the way they are"

now? I don't mind their being damp."

"Well, they'll curl like hell when they dry and they're apt to have some yellow stains on them, but if you're not particular—"

"I'm not."

"Okay, then I'll fix them in just a minute."

He took the prints out of the quick-fix, sloshed them about in the water for a moment, then ran them through a roller which squeezed out the excess moisture. Then he put them between two pieces of cardboard and handed the cardboard to Johnny.

"That's how I earn my money," he said. "The regular charge for this would have been thirty-six cents."

Johnny took a five-dollar bill from his pocket. "It's worth this to me."

He retrieved the roll of film from the printer and left the dark room and the store. On the street he walked to Harrison and boarded a street-car.

XVI

SAM CRAGG entered the offices of the Corcoran Publishing Company and headed for the private office of the publisher. But before he reached it a man poked his head out of one of the small cubicles. "Just a minute," he said. "Who did you want to see?"

"The boss."

"About what?"

"What the hell's the idea?" Sam growled. "The last time you just told us to go right in."

"I know, but there's a new rule around here. Got to announce people and their business."

Sam looked through the glass partition and saw Howard Corcoran seated at his desk, reading a magazine. He said, "I'll announce myself."

He started for Corcoran's office and the man in the cubicle darted out and grabbed his arm. "Here, you—"

That was as far as he got. Sam reached out and pushing him lightly, slammed him back into his little office. Then he stepped to the door of Corcoran's office and opened it.

"Hi," he greeted the publisher.

Corcoran put down his magazine. "What do you want here?"

"I'm Sam Cragg, remember? Johnny Fletcher's pal."

"I remember, all right," Corcoran said, "but I don't think I have anything to discuss with you."

"Oh, I don't want to discuss anything," Sam said. "I just want you to answer a question. What's the location of Walter Penney's summer cottage?"

Corcoran glowered at Sam. "Get out of here."

"Sure," said Sam easily, "as soon as you answer that question."

"If you don't get out of here I'll throw you out."

Sam laughed. "You're kidding."

Corcoran started to push back his chair, preparatory to rising, then suddenly thought better of it. He surveyed Sam's bulk. His hand flicked to a row of pearl buttons on his desk and he pressed one of them.

"We'll see about that," he said grimly.

The door opened behind Sam Cragg and the man he had pushed back into his cubicle in the outer office came in. "Yes, Mr. Corcoran," he said.

"I want this man to leave our office," Corcoran said to his employee. "Throw him out if he won't go."

The man who had been summoned looked at Sam, then at his employer. "I'll call the staff," he said.

"Go ahead," Sam invited.

The man stepped back and called out, "Harvey! Alex! Grosvenor!"

Three men popped out of cubicles and converged upon their boss' office. They filled the doorway. Corcoran sized up his editorial staff and felt reassured. He got to his feet. "This man burst into my office," he announced. "He's a hoodlum and may be involved in a murder. He refuses to leave."

"You want us to give him the old heave-ho?" one of the editors asked.

"I want him thrown out," Corcoran said firmly.

The editors came into the room. Sam backed away. "Boys," he said, "you're making the biggest mistake of your lives. About four of you are going to get—"

He thrust out his hand and one of the editors bounced off it, recoiling back against his fellows. The weight of their numbers forced the editor forward against Sam. He

grabbed Sam's arm, started to pull on it and found himself thrown aside. But then the other three men swarmed over Sam. One got a headlock on Sam and clung to him like a pup who has grabbed hold of a grizzly bear. He was a nuisance but did not particularly bother Sam.

Another editor tackled Sam about the midriff and tried to knock him off his feet. The third darted about looking for an opening. Sam took hold of the man who was tackling him about the middle. He took a good solid hold on the man's shoulder and suddenly shoved down. The man's grip broke and he hit the floor with his face. He yelled in pain and surprise.

The third editor landed a blow on Sam's chest, then, but Sam ignored it. He reached up and grabbed the man who had a headlock on him and brought him over his shoulder and crashed him to the floor.

During all this time Corcoran, the publisher, was dancing about behind Sam in utter fury and hysteria. He shouted advice to his editors. When Sam tumbled two of his men to the floor, Corcoran lost the last shred of control and, grabbing up a straight-backed chair, swung it at Sam's head.

Sam, fending off one of the editors at the moment, had his arm raised and took part of the chair on it, but even so the blow knocked down his arm and the chair crashed on his head and shoulders. Sam went down to his knees and that gave the editors the chance they had been looking for. All four of them pounced down on Sam and in a moment were joined by their employer, Howard Corcoran.

The weight of numbers forced Sam down to the floor, but there he got leverage and with a roar, he heaved upward, spilling editors about him like duck pins. He got to his knees, caught hold of one of the editors and rose to the floor.

Using the man like a flail he laid about him. He caught one of the editors in the face with his victim's flying feet and the man spun clear across the room and brought up in a heap on the floor; he remained there quivering and moaning.

A second man was struck in the stomach by Sam's man and sat down abruptly on the floor, gasping in agony. A third editor cried out in sudden fright and scuttled on hands and knees out to the outer office. The fourth

editor was caught off-guard and taking a blow, sought safety behind Corcoran's desk.

And Corcoran—he began bleating and backing away from Sam, his hands raised to guard his face. Grunting, Sam hurled the man in his hands at Corcoran and both went to the floor. He followed through and kicking arms and legs out of the way, caught hold of Corcoran. In a single jerk he brought him to his feet and holding him by the throat, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat.

Finally he raised him two feet in the air and deposited him in his swivel chair with a crash.

"Now," Sam cried, "I asked you a civil question and I want an answer."

"W-wh-what do you w-want to k-know?" Corcoran spluttered abjectly.

"The location of Walter Penney's summer cottage!"

"It's up at La-Lake Monona, at Ma-Madison, Wisconsin," choked Corcoran.

Sam stepped back. "Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble."

The publisher gulped. "Yes, sir."

Sam wiped his hands and hitched up his trousers. He looked about the room at the editorial staff, the conscious and the unconscious. "Any time you boys want another workout, just call on me."

Then he walked out of the publishing office.

Downstairs, Sam strolled to Twenty-eighth Street and took up a post at the bus stand, to wait for a northbound bus. He waited there for two or three minutes and was just stepping off the curb to climb aboard a bus, when he chanced to look toward the door of the building that housed the Corcoran Publishing Company.

Howard Corcoran, the publisher, was darting out of the door. He ran across the sidewalk and climbed into a car parked at the curb.

"Are you going to ride with me or not?" the bus driver demanded of Sam.

Sam jumped aboard and the bus started forward. The driver was compelled to veer to the middle of the street as it passed Corcoran's car that was being toolled out into traffic.

The bus went past Corcoran's car and Sam seated himself just behind the driver,

his eyes to the rear, however. At Twenty-fifth Street Corcoran honked the bus to pull over and let him pass, but the driver maintained his right of way by sheer size, to Twenty-fourth Street. There, however, he had to swing to the curb and let off a passenger.

Sam groaned as Corcoran's car shot past the bus. The bus started off again, but by that time Corcoran's car, a light blue convertible, was a block ahead.

Sam, looking ahead, saw the traffic lights on Twenty-second Street turn red. Corcoran's car was caught and the bus pulled up beside it. Sam scrambled out and leaped for a taxicab that was waiting at the hackstand a few yards behind the bus stop.

He tore open the door and leaped in. "Follow the blue convertible," he cried to the cabby.

The man scowled. "I got a punch in the nose doing that last week."

"This time you'll get a punch in the nose if you don't do it," Sam retorted.

The cabby, starting to shift into gear, threw his gear lever back into neutral. "Okay, tough guy, that fixes it. You can hire yourself another boy."

Ahead, the lights turned green. Sam said, frantically, "Ten bucks if you keep on his tail!"

"Now, that's another tune," said the hack driver. He shifted into second and gunned his motor. The car leaped forward, made a wild swing around the bus and shot across Twenty-second Street, past the Lexington Hotel.

"Which blue car?" the cabby asked over his shoulder.

"The convertible, with the top up," replied Sam. "But don't let him know you're following."

"In this traffic I'll be lucky to keep him in sight."

HE DID well, however. At Van Buren he got caught by a traffic light, and Corcoran got ahead, but he was stopped at Adams Street and when the lights turned green again, the cabby wove in and out of traffic. He ignored a policeman's whistle at Madison and caught up with the blue convertible at Randolph. He practically rode on Corcoran's bumper crossing the Chicago River, but then the traffic began to thin a

little and he allowed a little distance between himself and Corcoran's car.

Nearing Chicago Avenue, the taxi closed up distance and took the inner lane, which was fortunate, for the traffic light almost caught him again. He started across on the yellow and then rolled behind and to the right of the convertible into the outer drive, past the Drake Hotel and along the lakefront.

Nearing North Avenue, Corcoran swung over to the right and the taxi driver was prepared for his turn-off into the clover leaf that brought both cars out on North Avenue within two blocks of Lois Tancred's home. For a moment Sam thought that that would be the destination of Corcoran's car, but it continued west on North Avenue, crossed Clark Street and rolled down North Avenue to Wells Street, to Sedgwick and then to Larrabee. There Corcoran turned north, but went only a block to Willow, where he turned left.

He crossed Halsted on Willow Street and began slackening speed after a short block or two. Suddenly he pulled in to the curb.

"Go past him," Sam yelled at his cab driver.

"Sure," the cabby retorted. "I'm an old hand at this." He drove another block, whipped about the corner and skidded to a stop. "He went into the bowling alley," he said to Sam, having gleaned the information by looking into his rear-vision mirror.

Sam got out of the cab, trotted a few steps to the corner and peered back. He saw the convertible parked at the next corner and returning to the cab driver, slipped him a ten-dollar bill, which left him, he discovered, a ten, a five and two singles.

"Okay, buddy, you earned it."

"Tell you what," the cabby offered, "I'll wait a few minutes, then turn back and park across the street from the bowling alley. You may want me in a hurry and if he heads west, I can make a U-turn. Parked facing east nobody'll be suspicious."

"Can you wait a half hour?"

"Why not? Not much chance of picking up a fare in this neighborhood, and I hate to go back empty to the South Side."

"Okay, then." Sam nodded to the cabby, walked to the corner and started eastward on Willow Street. As he approached the next corner he saw that the building Cor-

coran had entered had a neon sign over the door reading: *Tony's Alleys*.

He crossed the street and stepped up to the glassed door, but it was curtained on the inside and he could not look in. Shrugging, he entered and found himself in a combination tavern and poolroom. There was a fair-sized bar and three pool tables in the room. At the rear was a wide door that led into the bowling alleys.

Sam shot a quick glance about the poolroom and bar, but did not see Corcoran. He walked up to the bar and, putting his foot on the brass rail, said to the bartender, "Boilermaker's helper."

The man rubbed the mahogany with a dirty rag and scowled at Sam. "If you mean a beer, say so. This ain't no joint."

"Ain't it?"

"Wise guy, huh?"

"Uh-uh, just thirsty."

The bartender drew a stein of beer and blew the foam off, then set the beer on the bar. Sam put down a dime and as the bartender reached for it, he blew again into the suds, blowing away half of his glass of beer, but drenching the bartender's fist.

He took a big swallow of what was left and carrying the glass, stepped to the door leading into the bowling alley.

There were half a dozen men in the alley, of whom two were bowling on one of the alleys and the others just loafing about. But Corcoran was not in sight.

"What the hell!" Sam exclaimed.

He rushed back into the barroom and hurried to the window. Standing on his toes, he looked over the curtain that covered the lower half of the windows.

Corcoran's blue convertible was still at the curb and across the street the taxi was parked, facing in the opposite direction. Somewhat reassured, but puzzled, Sam turned back to the bar.

"Where's the guy that owns the blue car outside?" he asked the bartender.

"What blue car?"

"The one right outside."

"Is there a car outside?"

"You're damn right there is and a guy came in here a couple of minutes ago. Where is he?"

"You're the only guy that came in here in the last ten minutes," the bartender retorted.

Sam started to slam down his glass, then thought better of it and drained the contents. Then he set down the glass and went once more into the bowling alley. He went all the way inside this time and looked carefully about.

THEN he returned to the barroom and surveyed it.

"A guy named Corcoran came in here," Sam said grimly to the bartender. "His car's parked outside but damned if I can see Corcoran in here—" He stopped as he caught sight of a door behind the bar, near the front of the room. It was partly covered by a curtain, which was the reason he hadn't noticed it before.

Sam started for the end of the bar. He turned the corner and was reaching for the door when the bartender lunged for him with a bung-starter in his hand.

"Keep away from that door," the bartender snarled.

"Sure," said Sam, "if you say so."

He fainted at the bartender with his left hand and the man swung the bung-starter at it. Sam merely pivoted slightly and laid the flat of his right hand against the side of the bartender's head. The man turned a side somersault and hit the floor behind the bar.

Sam turned back to the door and opened it. He started into the room.

He expected to see Corcoran in the room, but saw instead—Sim, the plug-ugly who had escaped from Sam and Johnny out in Baker Hill.

The man was even more astonished than Sam. He was seated in a swivel chair beside a roll-top desk, but in his surprise rose so suddenly that he knocked the swivel chair over backwards.

"What the hell!" cried Sim.

Then he recovered himself and lunged for a drawer of the roll-top desk. Sam rushed across the room and kicked the drawer shut even as it came open. Sim yelped and struck at Sam Cragg.

The blow hit Sam in the face and he stepped back, chuckling. "Well, well, chum!"

Then he reached for Sim. Sim hit him again, with his right and then his left. The punches bounced off Sam's jaw and chin—and then he got hold of Sim.

He held him with his left hand and

hit him once with his right, a short chopping blow. Sim went limp in his grip. Sam threw him backwards over the scuttled chair.

Sim rolled over on his face, groaned and tried to lift himself up. He couldn't make it and collapsed back on his face. Sam prodded him with the toe of his shoe and turned away. There was a door at the far end of the little office. Sam stepped to it, opened it and saw a narrow hall and another door at the end of it, a door that opened on the street.

He strode to it and whipping it open, stepped out on the sidewalk—and discovered that Corcoran's car was gone!

While he had bickered with the bartender Corcoran had been in the office behind the bar. He had transacted his business with Sim, stepped out of the side door just before Sam's entry and had made his getaway while Sam fought with Sim.

Sam swore and ran across the street. The cabby already had his motor running and as Sam jumped in, he exclaimed: "He headed straight west for Clybourn. Hang on!"

He shifted into gear and made a sharp U-turn, barely missing the opposite curb, and zoomed his machine toward Clybourn Avenue a couple of blocks away. He reached the diagonal thoroughfare and turned right. Sam, on the edge of his seat, scanned the street ahead, but saw no sign of a blue car.

"He's got away!" he lamented.

The cabby shook his head and hunching grimly over his wheel, gave his old cab all it had. He roared down to Armitage, skidded to a stop, well out in the middle of the street and looked both right and left. Then he finally conceded defeat.

"I don't see him," he said. "He couldda turned any way."

"Try east," Sam suggested.

The cabby turned east on Armitage, driving well above safe speed, but he crossed Halsted, then Larrabee and finally reached Clark Street and Lincoln Park, without overtaking any blue car that was a convertible.

Sam exhaled heavily. "You did your best, buddy," he said. "It was my fault. I had to lick a couple of guys in there."

"Where to, now?"

"The Eagle Hotel, on Madison Street."

XVII

JOHNNY FLETCHER got out of the street car near the Auditorium and going to the entrance, started automatically for the door. Then he caught himself and going back to the ticket window, bought a ticket for fifty-five cents. He handed it to the ticket-taker who looked at him sharply and was still looking after him when Johnny went into the auditorium.

He started down the center aisle and had gone less than fifty feet when a little man came around a row of coops and almost collided with him. It was Jerome Somers, manager of the poultry show. He stopped and stared at Johnny in astonishment.

"I thought you were in jail!"

"A malicious rumor," Johnny replied loftily, "started by my enemies." He looked about the huge room. "Who's here today?"

Somers regarded him sourly. "You're not going to sell any books."

"Books? Who sells books?"

"That's what you were doing here the other day."

"A cover-up," Johnny said, "for my undercover work." Looking over one of the coops he spied a familiar face, that of Dr. Wheeler. "Ah, a man I want to see about a chicken."

He left Somers abruptly and going around the coops bore down upon Dr. Wheeler in the next aisle. The doctor was looking over a row of coops that housed huge gamefowl. The tags on the wire stated they were Whitehackles.

"How are you, Doctor?" Johnny greeted the surgeon.

Dr. Wheeler grunted. "Fletcher, isn't it?"

"Fletcher it is. Nice-looking birds you've got there. Fighting any of these tonight?"

Dr. Wheeler looked at him sharply. "What?"

"The main tonight, out at Charlie Lan-yard's place."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the doctor said coldly.

Johnny closed one eye in a wink. "It's all right, Doc, I'm going out there myself."

Dr. Wheeler scowled. "Just who—and what—are you, Fletcher? I watched your exhibition at the District Attorney's office

last night and I can't make you out. Then there's something Howard Corcoran told me about you—"

"Ah, yes, Cork; how is he?"

"Fine, as far as I know. Just what do you do around here?"

"Why, I admire the exhibits," Johnny replied. "I like chickens, especially gamefowl."

Dr. Wheeler looked at Johnny for a moment, then took several steps away and pointed at a gamecock in a coop. "What's wrong with this bird?" he asked.

Johnny went over and looked at the gamecock. He noted that the tag stated that the bird was exhibited by one Charles Hartigan, of Benton Harbor, Michigan. There was no ribbon on the coop. He looked wisely at the fowl, pursed up his lips and frowned heavily.

"Looks like an elegant fowl to me," he opined.

"What about his legs?" Dr. Wheeler demanded.

Johnny stooped and examined the cock's legs closely. Aside from enormous spurs, the legs seemed to be in excellent condition. "You mean the spurs are, uh, too long?"

Dr. Wheeler gave him a look of scorn and Johnny knew that he had erred. The doctor pointed at the tag on the coop. "The bird's been disqualified; now look at the legs again. What do you see?"

Johnny grinned foolishly. "Not a thing."

Dr. Wheeler snorted. "What about that stub—the beginning of a feather?"

"Oh, that," said Johnny. "I thought you meant something else."

"What else could I mean? A stub disqualifies a bird. I don't think you know a thing about gamefowl—or any other kind of chickens."

"I know when a cock can fight," Johnny growled. "And I think your Whitehacksles are going to get a beating tonight."

"Says who?" sneered Dr. Wheeler.

"I got money that says so."

"Well, bet it then," snapped Dr. Wheeler and, turning on his heel, strode off.

JOHNNY FLETCHER whistled softly. Then he caught sight of a hat in another aisle and hurried around to it. The wearer of the hat was Lois Tancred and

she was listlessly regarding the Jungle Shawls of Charles Whitney Lanyard.

Her face brightened in sudden eagerness as she saw Johnny.

"Johnny Fletcher!" she exclaimed.

"I've been looking for you," Johnny said. "I called your house and your snooty butler said you weren't home." He looked around. "Where's Lanyard?"

"He was here a minute ago. He went off to talk to some breeder about—" She suddenly grimaced. "Did you—go out to Penney's?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I had a little adventure out there. But I guess you're not interested in that."

"No."

Johnny said, "I searched Penney's house, yes, but I didn't find any letters. None that you'd be interested in—"

Her face showed disappointment. "I didn't necessarily mean letters. I thought you would understand—"

Johnny took from his coat pocket two pieces of cardboard. He raised one of them and slipped out the prints he had had made just before coming to the Auditorium. "Would these pictures be what you had in mind?" he asked softly.

Lois snatched the pictures from his hand and looked at them quickly. "Oh, yes," she said. "These are—" Then her face fell. "But they're no good—not without the film."

Johnny reached into his pocket—and kept his hand there. In making the movement his head had turned partly and he caught a glimpse of someone through the wire coops, someone on the other side, in the next aisle. It was Otto Bender and he was stooped, peering through the wire at Johnny and Lois Tancred.

"Bender!" exclaimed Johnny.

Bender straightened, an embarrassed grin on his face. "Hello," he said lamely.

"Is spying on people another of your specialties?" Johnny asked angrily.

"Not especially," said Bender. "Only, I just saw you and, well—I wanted to talk to you."

"Talk up."

"I think I'd better wait until you ain't busy," Bender said. "It's about that—that matter."

Johnny, looking over Lois' shoulder, saw

Charles Whitney Lanyard come around a corner and bear down on them. He reached out and took the pictures from her hand. She tried to snatch them back but Johnny said loudly, "Hello, Mr. Lanyard."

Lois whirled. She made a desperate effort and forced a weak smile to her face. "Through, Charles?"

Lanyard nodded, but his eyes were on Johnny. "What are you doing here, Fletcher?"

"Believe it or not," Johnny said, "I came to see the show. And what's more, I paid admission." He had covered up the pictures in his hand with the cardboard, but Lanyard's eyes fell to the packet.

"Did I see some pictures?" he asked, and reached for the pictures, but Johnny pulled them away. Lanyard said, "You were showing them to Miss Tancred."

"Yes, but you wouldn't be interested in them. They're—" Johnny swallowed hard. "They're just baby pictures of me." He laughed hollowly. "Silly things."

"You didn't think they were too silly for my fiancée to see."

"That's different; she's a woman."

Lanyard's face hardened. "Fletcher, I'm going to give you a bit of advice—"

Lois took Lanyard's arm. "Forget it," she said, "the pictures aren't anything."

"The advice," Lanyard said coldly, "is that you stop annoying Miss Tancred."

"He wasn't annoying me," Lois said.

"I don't want him hanging around you."

FROM the other side of the coops, Otto Bender put in his two cents' worth. "See what I mean, Fletcher? He's a millionaire and he don't like common people like you and me to be around him."

Lanyard whirled and snarled across at Bender. "As for you—you barber—"

"I'm as good a man as you, Lanyard," retorted Bender, "barber or no barber. And furthermore, I got a rooster that can lick any rooster in the world and I'm willing to back him with money, marbles—"

"—or chalk!" groaned Johnny, throwing his hands up in disgust and stalking off. He went past the center aisle and continued on to the commercial exhibits.

He grimaced as he saw his old friend, Chicken Cooley, standing outside of a booth.

"Keep a few poultry, Mister?" Cooley asked, sarcastically.

"Not many," Johnny replied, "just a few thousand on my estate in Lake Forest."

Chicken Cooley made a raucous sound with his mouth. "You and your bull. I'll bet you haven't got a sawbuck to your name right now."

"You lose," said Johnny, and pulled out his roll of bills, which still amounted to over four hundred dollars. "And how is business by you?"

Chicken Cooley stared at the money. "Business is fine," he snapped. "Least it was yesterday, with all the yaps and scissors-bills coming to see where the guy was murdered. Why don't you go and kill another man here today so we do a little more business?"

"So you think I killed the chicken raiser?"

"The law had you downtown last night, didn't they?"

"They may have you down yet, my boy." Johnny slapped the counter of Chicken Cooley's booth, then suddenly saw a small stack of thin magazines. He picked one up. "*Pit and Main*—since when are you handling this?"

"Since a couple of days ago. The publisher of the sheet was down and asked me to try it, along with my other papers. It's a punk sheet; I've only taken one sub so far."

"I know the publisher," Johnny said, "Howard Corcoran. You say he was here a couple of days ago? Was he here yesterday?"

"Yeah, sure."

"What time?"

"He was here when I opened up at nine. Why?"

"No reason." Johnny gave Chicken Cooley a half salute and wandered down the aisle.

Fifty feet from Chicken Cooley's booth was the row of coops under which Walter Penney's body had been found. Johnny looked around casually, then got down on his knees and raised the bunting that covered the trestles on which the coops were set.

He poked his head underneath and a couple of feet away saw an irregular dark spot. He moved over and touched the spot. It was dry but slightly sticky. A workman

had washed it up, but done a poor job of it.

He was in that position, with his head and shoulders under the coops and his posterior sticking out into the aisle, when someone came along and kicked him in the part of the anatomy that is reserved for kicking.

Johnny yelped and bumped his head on the boards above. Then, like a crab, he scuttled backwards into the aisle and looked up into the angry face of Lieutenant McNelly of the cops.

"What're you looking for?" McNelly snapped. "I warned you about that before; you're interfering with the work of the police."

"You call looking under this coop interfering with the police?"

"I call going around and questioning witnesses and confusing them so they can't tell a straight story, interfering with police work. I told you to lay off and I mean it."

"I meant what I said last night, too," retorted Johnny. "I'm a citizen and a taxpayer—"

MCNELLY suddenly grabbed a handful of Johnny's coat front and slammed him back against the chicken coops. "I've had just about all I can take from you, Fletcher!" he cried.

Johnny tore himself loose from the lieutenant's grip. "You touch me again," he said furiously, "and it'll be the last time you ever lay a hand on anyone."

The lieutenant's eyes glinted dangerously. "You talk a good fight, Fletcher."

"I can fight as well as I talk. If you don't think so, take off that tin badge of yours."

"I may take you up on that," said McNelly, "but not now." He turned on his heel and walked off. Johnny glowered after him and was still standing there when Otto Bender came around a row of coops.

"I heard the whole business," Bender said. "You sure told that flatfoot where to get off."

"Give the stupidest oaf in the world a badge and he thinks he's a tin god," growled Johnny, still angry. "This McNelly's riled me right from the start. He knows less about the murder of Walter Penney than these chickens."

"Well, nobody seems to know anything about Penney's death," said Bender.

"The murderer knows all about it," said Johnny, "and I'll lay you six-two-and even that I know who did it before McNelly does."

"I got a good notion to take you up on that bet," said Bender, "but I won't be around long enough to collect. I head for home tomorrow." He hesitated. "With a bankroll, I hope. Our deal's still on, isn't it?"

"What deal?"

"You promised to make Lanyard fight my rooster."

"After the way you talked to him a little while ago?"

Bender grimaced. "Why should that make any difference? The idea is to get him mad, isn't it?"

"But not so mad he'll kick us off the place."

"It's almost five o'clock," Bender said. "Don't you think we ought to get started?"

"Where's your rooster?"

Bender walked off a short distance and raising the bunting under a coop, pulled out a large carton. It was tied with a stout cord and had a number of air holes.

"Little Joe's all set," he announced.

"We'll have to pick up Sam Cragg at the hotel," Johnny said.

"All right, we'll take a cab."

"I'll meet you in five minutes."

"What's the matter with coming now?"

"I want to see Lois Tancred a moment."

Bender grunted. "Kinda soft on her, ain't you?"

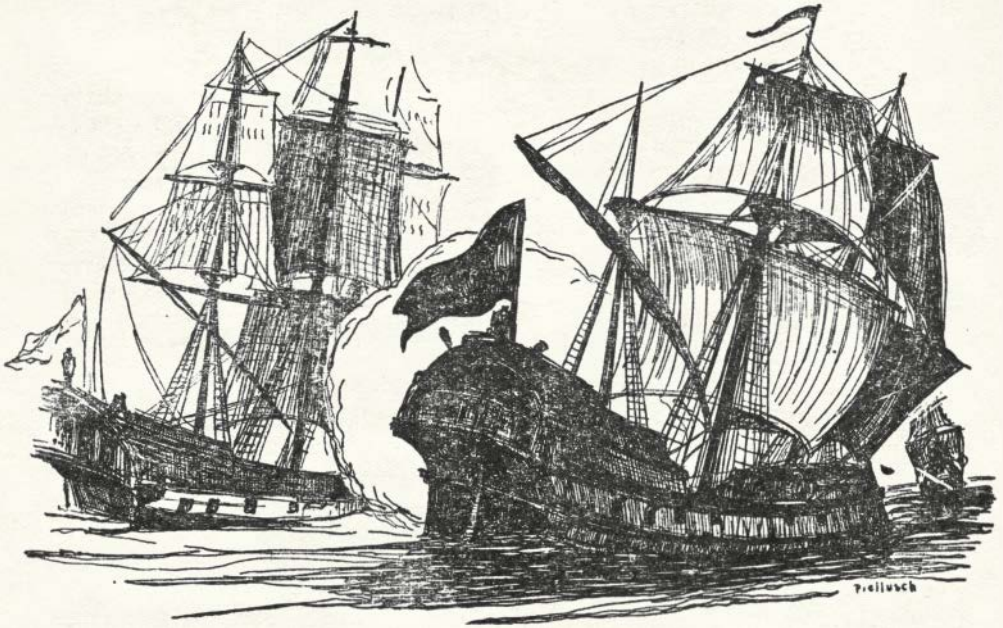
"I'm soft on all good-looking girls." He winked at Bender and strode off. But in five minutes' search of the Auditorium he failed to find Lois Tancred. Or Charles Whitney Lanyard. He finally headed for the door and as he approached it, Bender came out of the secretary's office.

"She left with Lanyard ten minutes ago," the barber told Johnny. "And guess what? Somers is going to be out at the cockfights tonight."

"Everybody and his uncle," Johnny said sarcastically. "Yet nobody knows anything about cockfighting."

(To be concluded in the next SHORT STORIES)

*The Second in Command Looked Upon a Ship Wholly as a Means
to Bring Men Within Sword's Point of the Enemy*



THE RIGHT TO COMMAND

By R. W. DALY

BROODING in the cabin of his finely built frigate, Don Antonio stared out through the stern windows of *la Gloriosa* toward the great hulk which it was his present duty to see safely through the perilous waters of the Caribbean into the open Atlantic. The *Conquistadore* rode serenely under the batteries of Cartagena, unperturbed by the hazards of the voyage which had proved fatal to so many of her predecessors.

It was this fate, and a desire to escape, which put the moody stamp of strain upon the hawk-like features of *la Gloriosa's* captain.

Don Antonio's veins held the blood of a Spanish grandee, and his heart was filled with national pride. These had led others of his countrymen to dispute the fact that the Caribbean had become an English lake. Don Antonio was more rational. Since the savage days when the pirate Morgan had

desecrated Panama, the English in Jamaica had plagued the silver ships of Spain.

Success, doubtless conferred by the devil to test the soul and virtue of His Most Catholic Majesty, had through the decades inspired the English to coin the insolent saying that "A Spanish ship chased was a Spanish ship captured." Reluctantly, Don Antonio accepted the validity of this statement, but acceptance did not reconcile him to the fact.

"Why do you hate the English so?" his wife had asked him suddenly, the week before he had sailed from Corunna, and they had been discussing the likelihood of war.

He had been unable to give her an answer which could calm her frightened eyes. He was not too certain himself. A son of Leon, he considered the Papal Line of Demarcation a fair division of the colonial world. The impious English, Dutch and French had substituted murder for enterprise, and Spain had proved too weak to

protect her empire. Don Antonio had a moral code in which might was never right, but his sense of justice compelled him to admit that the lay brothers of the Inquisition had frequently been too zealous.

While confused about the proprieties of using sword and rack to maintain dominion over the New World, he had no doubts whatever about the proprieties of simple thievery and piracy. His contemporaries in England would have been surprised to learn his opinion of their heroes Drake, Frobisher and Hawkins, and the subsequent infiltration of colonists.

“They are a race of brigands,” he had finally replied. “They are jackals who have fattened on the bodies of our dead.” He smiled at his wife’s alarm. “Do not fear for me, Donna. They will neither take nor destroy me.”

Don Antonio was not boasting. As a Spanish sailor, he was a rare man. Assured of command by his nobility, he had learned the trade of the sea in the turbulent waters of the Mediterranean, rather than spend his youth in indolence. When, at the wishes of his king, he had been called to the navy, he came to the ships with a knowledge possessed by few of his fellows. He earned the enmity of most and the respect of all, for Don Antonio had quickly risen to the rank of captain.

Scarcely thirty, tall, strong, confident, he had been naturally selected for a duty which required his abilities. For several years, ever since the North American colonies had sputtered into revolt against their ruler, the British concentration of force in the West Indies had imperiled the passage of Spaniards. Thanks to a complicated system of espionage which had been developing throughout the years after the pirates of Elizabeth had enriched themselves at Phillip’s expense, Don Antonio knew the odds which militated against the successful completion of his simple mission.

“The *Conquistadore* must reach port,” they had gravely told him in Spain. “It is imperative, Captain.”

MINISTERS could easily lay down conditions and require obedience, but ministers did not face Sir Peter Parker. Thanks to France’s support of the Americans, and the impending entry of Spain, Don Antonio

was confronted by a vigilant, superior enemy. He deemed it his duty to reduce the British advantages by any method whatsoever.

The chart of the Caribbean offered him a solution, but if Don Antonio accepted the solution, he would be forever disgraced if the *Conquistadore* were caught. If he did what was expected of him, he would be absolved should the *Conquistadore* fall to the English, but if he did what was expected, he was virtually certain she would be captured. He had a choice between protecting his career and carrying out his orders.

Had he been less able, Don Antonio might have ceased to worry, putting his trust in God, but he was too familiar with the mechanics of his profession to be easy in his mind about the British ships and frigates in the Island’s. The money in *la Conquistadore’s* hold absolutely had to reach Cadiz. Great plans were in the air, and New World wealth was a vital part of those plans.

While pleased by the compliment paid to his ability, Don Antonio wished that he had not been handicapped by the injunction to save every possible minute. He had to weigh anchor the moment that the last chest was placed aboard the *Conquistadore*. This precluded the safe route along the Spanish Main past Trinidad to emerge into the Atlantic at the foot of the Windward Islands. He had to go north. The route was not his preference.

A scarlet insect settled for a moment on his desk. Don Antonio watched until, rested, it flew away. He envied the creature the power of flight. For himself and his ship, he did not fear. In vain, he had pleaded for the Viceroy to put the metal into *la Gloriosa*, but the orders were definite, and the chests went into the heavier, slower vessel. The *Gloriosa* could fight or run, regardless of the Briton she encountered. The *Conquistadore* could scarcely move.

Don Antonio looked across his cabin to the statuette of the Blessed Virgin, which bore an intended resemblance to his wife. He murmured a prayer for guidance, and stood up. The lighter had shoved off from the swelling side of *la Conquistadore*. He had to choose. Without a sigh, he pledged his future for the sake of his country.

Pulling on a coat, Don Antonio carefully adjusted the ruffles about his throat, slung

his sword belt over a wiry shoulder, and picked his rapier from a bulkhead rack. Erasing the lines of thought about his brow, he left the cabin and went topside.

The sun was hot, with a cool offshore breeze sweeping over the quarterdeck. Eyes darting about in a customary quick examination of his watch officer's efficiency, Don Antonio strolled carelessly to the weather side and began a slow promenade as the watch vacated his place of honor. *La Conquistadore* was not quite ready, although she had her precious cargo aboard. Don Antonio concealed his impatience, forcing himself to look as indolent as the crew expected him to be.

Even when the great ship signaled her readiness to get underway, Don Antonio waited for the formalities of a report from the officer on watch, before setting *la Gloriosa* into action. While his second-in-command saw to the business of hauling up anchors, Don Antonio remained on the quarterdeck as an interested onlooker.

He had no desire to transmit his anxiety to his subordinates. Spain was still nominally at peace with England, and he wanted his crew to live in the illusion of an eventless passage home. They would have time enough to become uneasy. If they believed that they lived in a modern age which had outgrown piracy, he saw no need to correct them.

THUS, after an hour or so, the two vessels finally moved slowly through the channel of Cartagena. Don Antonio pointed out how the maneuver could have been conducted more satisfactorily, but voiced his criticism so mildly that the lesson was accepted without an offer to bare steel. His officers had learned to bow to his knowledge and did not ridicule him in private. This could have been his proudest boast, had Don Antonio been a boaster.

Under easy sail, *la Gloriosa* ranged out to the east, on the windward bow of her precious convoy, mounting guard on the money which was intended to strengthen King Charles for war with England. When his instructions were clearly understood, Don Antonio beckoned to his second-in-command, and returned to the cabin.

El Segundo Capitan don Amado Lugones was the type of officer who had permitted

the Spanish Navy to acquire the contempt of Europe. Despite the increasing complexities of naval warfare, Don Amado naively believed that bravery was a specific for all defects in seamanship and gunnery. A year in the realistic school of Don Antonio had failed to persuade him that bravery was insufficient. He was impressed by his superior's knowledge, though not in a fashion Don Antonio would have liked. He thought Don Antonio was undignified for knowing how to splice a line, and recoiled from the inroads made upon his ease by the schedule of drills which Don Antonio insisted upon carrying out.

El Segundo Capitan don Amado Lugones tolerated these annoyances, because he expected shortly to receive his own ship, after which he could freely put his own theories into operation. Because of this, he was a good subordinate. If he disagreed with Don Antonio, he said nothing, because soon he would want to have a loyal subordinate himself.

In the cabin, Don Antonio spread out the communications from the Viceroy and settled back while Don Amado digested their instructions. The silence of the cabin was broken by Don Amado's mumble as he painfully cut his way through the Viceroy's script. Swift reading and absorption of ideas therefrom were not qualities derived from the usual cavalier education of a Spanish gentleman, and Don Amado was no better equipped than the rest.

Don Antonio's black eyes rested thoughtfully upon his subordinate's sweat-stained, roseate face. He respected Don Amado's courage, was fully aware of the man's tradition-true distrust of innovation, and wished that he could have dispensed with the interview. He was obliged to transmit his orders to his immediate junior. This entailed tactful explanations, and he did not feel like making explanations.

Don Amado finished the correspondence and put down the papers. His honest face was radiant with elation. "So there will be war!" he exclaimed. "*Bien!*"

Suppressing a twinge, Don Antonio took off his coat. "Perhaps we are at war now, *mi amigo*," he corrected gently.

Don Amado's elation evaporated as he pondered the implications of the remark.

"Remember," Don Antonio explained,

"these instructions came from the dispatch we ourselves brought to the Governor. That was almost four months ago. Much can happen in four months."

"*Si*, that is true," Don Amado agreed reluctantly.

"Perhaps the English spies learned of our sovereign's intentions," Don Antonio suggested. "Perhaps we are now at war."

"Perhaps not!" Don Amado said hopefully.

"Perhaps not," agreed Don Antonio. "But we must assume that we are at war. In that manner, we will be cautious, and being cautious, we should be safer."

Don Amado chewed upon these words, showing that he did not quite understand how such an assumption could change anything. War was war and peace was peace. He stated his opinion.

HEARING him through, Don Amado replied, "We are not specifically instructed to call at Havannah. Thus we have a choice of routes. We can enter the Gulf Stream and go through the Straits of Florida, or we can sail due north and go through the islands. Which would you select?"

"Why!" exclaimed Don Amado, to whom there was no selection, "Havannah was not mentioned because we always call at Havannah. We will take the Straits of Florida, naturally."

Don Antonio nodded. "Naturally. That course affords so many advantages. We know it well. Cuba is at hand. The Gulf Stream carries us even if we should lose a wind. It is the sanest route. War or peace, even the English expect us to use it."

"*Si*," Don Amado murmured. Their grandfathers had carried the King's flag in the Florida Straits, and so would their grandsons. He wished the captain would finish. There was much to be done before *la Gloriosa* was fully secured for sea, and Don Amado was a man who had been taught to worry about the stowage of his hold.

"Assuming the English expect us to go that way," Don Antonio said, "it is wise for us to shape course for the Windward Passage. I am curious to see Jamaica."

In the midst of mentally shifting about his fresh supplies of provisions, Don Amado gaped. Rashness was a quality he had never expected to find in his quiet, conscientious

captain. If anything, Don Antonio had a reputation for being prudent, yet this was not a prudent plan. "We must not!" Don Amado gasped. "It is not safe."

"We must," Don Antonio replied firmly.

Don Amado frowned for a moment. "The court will not esteem you should we lose the *Conquistadore* because of this, Captain."

Disregarding the hint of disgrace, if not execution, Don Antonio shook his head. He did not argue. Don Amado's reaction strengthened his conviction that he had chosen the right course. If a Spaniard thought the treasure ship should be led along the Florida route, would an Englishman think otherwise? And if, in the weeks that *la Gloriosa* had been out of touch with Europe, hostilities had actually begun, then an unimaginative British admiral in command at Jamaica might very well propose to make a quick profit out of the war by intercepting the annual galleon off Havannah or at the exit from the Bahamas. Indeed, in Don Antonio's opinion, this would be almost an automatic move.

Don Antonio dropped the subject, and took up the matter of the route which he was to be followed. Thanks to a viceroy anxious to have *la Conquistadore* safely home, Don Antonio had a few score barrels of powder and several tons of iron stowed atop the regular allowance of ammunition given him by an erratically thrifty government. He proposed to do more than exercise his great guns. Too many Spanish ships went into action and introduced the majority of their crews to the smell of gunpowder. Don Antonio had no wish to strengthen the odds against him by neglecting the education of his men.

To Don Amado, a further program of drills and training was distasteful. He had the customary view that battles should be won by boarding. Since the days of King Phillip's peerless infantry, this had been the curse of the Spanish psychology. Hardened by the *reconquista* against the Moorish occupation of their homeland, the Spanish soldier had achieved a reputation for invincibility which was soundly based upon hand-to-hand combat. The Spanish carried this to sea with them, and built their ships high, to guarantee their special advantage in personal fighting. When the English declined the

duty of being agreeable, and substituted the great gun for pike and sword, the Armada was destroyed. Despite this lesson, Spanish commanders hoped to grapple, and the dreary centuries of frustration had not disillusioned them. A few, like Don Antonio, wanted to fight English-style, and were scorned for want of courage.

"Is this good?" Don Amado objected softly. "The men may want to trust the guns alone."

"God is just," Don Antonio replied, "but we must merit His Justice. Let us cooperate with Divine Providence. It can do no harm."

Unconvinced, Don Amado shook his head. He looked upon a ship as a means to bring their men within sword point of the enemy. Gentlemen were not expected to be artillerymen. That science was best left to impoverished, brilliant cadets. Still, mindful of his own impending responsibility, he made no further objection, and went off to his stateroom to draw up his orders for the practice.

He paused at the door, trying to find some way to persuade Don Antonio to give up the notion of proceeding through the Windward Passage. He could not. He could not appeal to pride, reason for fear, once Don Antonio had made a decision. For his own sake, if nothing else, he hoped that Don Antonio's madness would not be responsible for their deaths, and sat down to his desk with the intention of submerging his terror in work.

THE following morning, *la Gloriosa* startled her convoy by heeling about and unloosing a broadside at a hencoop bobbing lazily in her wake. On the quarterdeck, Don Amado observed the firing, because Don Antonio was below on the gundeck, passing from crew to crew. When each piece had expended a dozen rounds, the drums ended the practice. Unharmful, the hencoop drifted into the distance.

Surprised that the storm of shot had failed to demolish the flimsy target, Don Amado nonetheless, made a subtle attempt to exploit the failure by suggesting that the guns would always prove less decisive than steel. Don Antonio did not rise to the bait. He was satisfied that even the greenest landsman had experienced the unsettling uproar of cannonading. If he could blunt the paralyzing edge of horror which cut into every

man, Don Antonio felt that the viceroy's gift was well spent.

The practice continued the next day and the next, until the extra ammunition was almost gone. Don Antonio left the gundeck to stand side by side with Don Amado to watch the results of the training. On the fifth day, the last, a ball landed squarely on the barrel being used as a target. Promptly, Don Antonio ended the practice. The hit may have been lucky, but *la Gloriosa* had achieved a rate of fire which could be counted on to astound a complacent Englishman. No matter how poor the gunlayers might prove to be in action, the frigate's volume of fire would score some hits.

Don Antonio was pleased. His men were used to the sound of a broadside. With relative ease of mind, he led the *Conquistadore* toward the lush, wild, green hills of Jamaica.

Deliberately ignoring the allurements of Cuba, Don Antonio plotted a course which would produce a landfall on Cape Morant. As the days stretched on, the officers and men of *la Gloriosa* became increasingly apprehensive. The frigate was boldly trespassing upon the borders of territory ruled by Sir Peter Parker, Vice-Admiral of the Blue. Such disrespect was bound to be punished.

Don Antonio ignored the signs of worry which cropped out in the faces and actions of the men subservient to his will. They had only their lives to lose; he stood to lose not only his life, but honor, and he had a son who would be ruined. He knew what he was doing. If they suspected or doubted that he did not, he was still privileged to manage his command as he wished. His pride did not cause him to underestimate the English. If anything, he fully esteemed their proved ability. He was, however, also aware of the value of surprise, and felt that the sailing of *la Conquistadore* within easy reach of the ships at Kingston would never occur to Sir Peter.

The gamble was worth the consequences of failure. Should, in those lazy August days, the British have set traps for Spanish treasure ships, *la Gloriosa* would doubtless be too puny to beat off attack. Don Antonio was audacious rather than foolhardy. If the British, being closer to Europe, knew about the outbreak of war, they would send heavy frigates or even ships-of-the-line to straddle the usual Gulf Stream route. Perhaps at that

moment, the British were cruising watch-off Havannah.

LIKE Don Antonio, Sir Peter had to make a choice. What with the French already at war, Sir Peter's resources were limited, and what forces he could spare for the interception of the Spanish plate would have to be used efficiently. Armed with foreknowledge of hostilities and the custom of the galleon's visit to Havannah, Sir Peter could scarcely do otherwise than dispatch his heavier ships, while his lighter vessels patrolled the Windward Passage. After all, the French war came first, and the French trade concentrated at Cap Français for homeward convoy, and Cap Français was usually reached through the Windward Passage.

The morning that the masthead lookout reported the loom of Jamaica on the horizon, Don Antonio leisurely took station on his quarterdeck, prepared to back his estimate of the situation with his life and honor. The lines of the *Conquistadore* made any attempt at deception impossible, and besides, he derived a certain amount of pleasure from seeing the gold and red of Spain snapping at the leaping waves of British dominion.

As the heights of Jamaica imperceptibly rose above the horizon, Don Antonio was busy with his glass, watching for the first sign of tall ships. He picked up several small vessels at one time or another, but none that bore the stamp of a man-of-war. Insisting upon normalcy, he fed his people at noon, and kept them at their usual tasks until the first dog watch.

By then, Jamaica towered off the port bow and Don Amado was haggard. "Clear for action," Don Antonio directed. "Don't put out the fires until we have supped." He gave this order more because the men would otherwise have been idle than to relieve his subordinate's tension. He did not anticipate any trouble from Jamaica itself, even if signal towers reported him to the heavy ships at anchor. The lumbering *Conquistadore* was too far to the east for even the fleetest frigate to beat successfully into the wind to get at her. Dawn and the Windward Passage were altogether another matter.

While the officer of the watch kept an eye on the horizon for sudden danger, Don Antonio leaned over a table on deck and plotted the courses which he wished to have

followed throughout the night. He calmly ate his supper beneath the darkening sky, inviting Don Amado to join him, conducting himself as though *la Gloriosa* were swinging at anchor in the excellent harbor of Corunna.

Don Amado was less nonchalant. He did not savor conversation about the bright beauties of Jupiter as contrasted with the sapphire brilliance of Sirius. He persisted in stealing glances at the sinister slopes of Jamaica, where lights indicated the breathing presence of men innately hostile to Spaniards. He did not believe that it was possible to sail so close with impunity to Cape Morant, though Don Antonio serenely fixed and corrected *la Gloriosa's* position with that famous British landmark as a reference.

Don Amado waited for disaster to boom out of the closing night, and looked with anger upon the composure with which Don Antonio settled down on a cot to ride out the seige. The two vessels had no business being where they were, close to the bosom of enemies, and far from friends. The lanthorn impudently slung over the *Gloriosa's* stern to guide the *Conquistadore* seemed to Don Amado a challenge that the English could not afford to ignore.

"Must we show a light, Capitan?" he asked. "The visibility is excellent."

Stretched out on his cot, Don Antonio thoughtfully studied the stars. "*Mi amigo*," he replied, "we must regulate our advance to four knots, in order to be between Cuba and San Domingo in precisely two days. Until then, I do not believe we should fear."

"So?" Don Amado demanded tautly.

"It is there that a pair of frigates would be most usefully employed," explained Don Antonio. "Since the English do not waste force, it is there we may expect to find them. We must arrange to pass at night."

"This is insane!" blurted Don Amado. "We must carry full sail. They may chase us from Jamaica."

"Why?" Don Antonio countered reasonably. "They know what lies ahead for us. Our only advantage is the ability to choose the time of passing the point of danger. Night will be of some help to us."

DON AMADO did not accept his captain's logic, and thereby learned a lesson. The following dawn found him ex-

hausted, the captain refreshed, and *la Gloriosa* slightly north of Navassa Island, with an innocent sea stretching on all sides.

At noon, Don Antonio personally checked their position.

"We are making a little less than four knots," he said contentedly. "That is good."

By then, Don Amado was distractedly pulling at his beard, every sloop and brig a powerful ship-of-the-line in his imagination. He did not become less tense as the day and the ships crept on, and he did not have his heart in carrying out the normal routine upon which Don Antonio was gently insistent. The crew, informed by their friends among the quartermasters, were familiar with the situation. Don Antonio's heart was touched when, after the first hours of panic, they began to swagger about their duties. This voyage would be something to boast about in the inns of Spain.

When nightfall came, and the convoy was twenty-four hours from the center of the Windward Passage, Don Antonio considerately saved a bit of his subordinate's reputation by ordering all hands to sleep in the vicinity of their battle stations. He felt that the discomfort would be harmless and Don Amado was made more cheerful. The night passed without event, and in the morning, the Spaniards were working their way into the latitude of Cap Français.

Don Antonio dropped his casual manner.

Putting his best men at the masthead, he demanded quick reports of all strangers. With *la Conquistadore* plodding a thousand yards off her port hand, the *Gloriosa* underwent a final check of her thirty-two twelve-pounders. This was an inspection suited to Don Amado's taste, as Don Antonio stood on the main fighting top, glass in hand, examining the small craft which lightly speckled the sea.

La Gloriosa was ready long hours before Don Antonio's throat constricted while his eyes gazed upon the towering masts of a British frigate. The mess cooks were drawing rations for supper before he saw the second Briton, and a watch was piped down to eat when he saw the third. For the first time since making his decision, Don Antonio had doubts about his wisdom. For no valid reason, he had entertained the notion that only two British frigates would be cru-

ing in the vicinity of the Passage. There were one too many.

Slowly, Don Antonio went down the ratlines.

His supper awaited him on the quarterdeck, and he forced himself to eat for the sake of morale, but the food was dry in his throat. His face and pulse were feverish. Sending for his sword, he slipped the belt over his white silk shirt, and attempted to recapture some of the bravado which had brought him to this crisis. Ironically amused, Don Amado glanced at him, and said nothing. There was nothing to say.

Don Antonio turned to his signalmen, and sent a message to *la Conquistadore*, whose captain was furiously stomping around his quarterdeck. His plan of action having been transmitted, his men sated with a hot meal, Don Antonio glanced at the sun, and then at the lazing, watchful British.

"Full sail, *senor*," he said to Don Amado.

Lifting his hat, Don Amado made a leg, smiled at his superior, and went about the business of making *la Gloriosa* leap ahead of her consort. She had the simple task of throwing three British frigates or ships out of *la Conquistadore's* way. When an hour of light and distance separated her from the nearest Briton, Don Antonio beat to quarters. The order was superfluous. Men and officers were already at their stations.

Glass in hand, Don Antonio constantly studied his potential opponents, endeavoring to obtain precise knowledge of their strength. Only the nearest reflected his concern, although she did not call to her sisters for assistance, who were distant some six miles on either side of her. Britons were confident, and well might be.

Flying his true colors, Don Antonio drew within a mile of the central Englishman before being challenged. Dipping and snapping his colors, he fired a blank shot in reply. To his astonishment, the hammering of drums faintly echoed across the water. *La Gloriosa* was fleeting ahead at a speed which in five minutes would bring her into collision with the Briton, and the fellow was not fully prepared for action.

Almost singing with joy at the unexpected development, he had the pleasure of seeing a British frigate turn away from him, signals flying, and gunports closed. Fiercely, he pounced upon an almost helpless prey, his

superior speed carried *la Gloriosa* almost aboard, before he shifted rudder and showed his broadside. At musket-shot range, his men crouched away from loaded guns, he raised his trumpet, and in a booming, understandable English, identified himself.

The diplomatic relations existing between the two countries became apparent within a moment. A lusty British voice bellowed back at him, "His Majesty's frigate, *Thrush*, and be damned! Musketry spattered from the *Thrush's* fighting top, but did *la Gloriosa's* men no harm.

Don Antonio answered the discourtesy by discharging his broadside. Double-shotting his guns, and directing pointers to aim at the *Thrush's* upper works, he released four salvos before the *Thrush* showed her teeth. She was a light twenty-eight, and doomed, even though her fellows swept in through the twilight from the horizon. Mercilessly, Don Antonio administered a sound dozen broadsides at a range at which gunners could scarcely miss.

La Gloriosa suffered from nine-pounder hits, but when Don Antonio abruptly broke off the engagement, the *Thrush* was powerless to follow, masts and yards and sails tangled about her deck and sides. Elated by the divine intervention which had led him to a foe reluctant to prepare for a night action, Don Antonio lighted a lanthorn on his stern and another over his bows. Heaving to, outside the range of the *Thrush*, he waited for the British to determine his next move.

HIS general design was plain enough. To the south, as the sun's strength failed, *la Conquistadore's* captain was exerting every effort to reach into the wind. Don Antonio prayed that distance combined with feeble light would keep her character secret into the night, but cool eyes and brain in command of the eastern frigate foiled him. The eastern frigate left him to the attention of her mate, and turned towards *la Conquistadore*.

As quickly as possible, Don Antonio got underway, shaping an intercepting course by the elementary device of keeping his bows trained on the curious frigate. The prevailing easterlies did not permit him to execute this plan, and he was obliged to close-haul on the port tack, cracking on every possible stitch of sail. To the south, mindful

of the danger from the western frigate, and emboldened by *la Gloriosa's* mauling of the *Thrush*, the captain of the treasure ship held his close-hauled course for the mountains of Haiti, confident that Don Antonio would check the Englishman plunging down upon *la Conquistadore*.

For himself, Don Antonio coaxed his vessel to snatch every possible ounce of force from the wind. He could not afford to lose the race, for the Briton's guns might hole the bottom of *la Conquistadore*, and all would be finished. The Briton had the advantage of being able to sail large, but Don Antonio had the benefits of Spanish ship-construction. Crouched by the binnacle, Don Amado made use of his vacation from the main battery by watching the Briton's bearing, and soberly reported that *la Gloriosa* was imperceptibly gaining.

"Bien," Don Antonio said, when certain that he had the heels of the British frigate. "Double-shot your guns. We must hold him until *la Conquistadore* passes."

Don Amado straightened up. "He is a forty-four at least, *Capitan*."

"We are fortunate he is not a ship-of-the-line," Don Antonio replied quietly. "Take your crucifix and go below."

Despite the performance made against the *Thrush*, *la Gloriosa's* second captain was gloomy. There was no hope. His eyes transmitted the accusation he did not dare express. For a minute, Don Antonio coldly bore the furious misery which sickened Don Amado, who foresaw the end of the engagement. "Go below," Don Antonio said, "for Spain."

Mocking in bitterness, Don Amado lifted his hat. "For Spain, *mi Capitan!*"

The conversation was not lost on the men crowding the quarterdeck, but most had been inflamed by their abrupt victory over the wallowing *Thrush*, and did not sympathize with the second captain's gloom. They had won once for Spain, and would win again. They did not realize, of course, nor did they care, that the *Thrush* had been surprised, her commander annoyed by the need to interrupt his routine an hour before sunset, while this new enemy was fully awake and ready. Perhaps once in a decade, a British captain was careless. Divine Providence could not be expected to favor Don Antonio twice. The western frigate, beating fran-

tically to reach the scene before night obscured distances and shapes, made the escape of *la Gloriosa* impossible, unless Don Antonio abandoned his honor as well as *la Conquistadore*.

Only the heavy British frigate moved with any degree of speed, but by relative position, *la Gloriosa* had a third of the distance to cover, and Don Antonio was unafraid. His men were stirred by battle lust and were impatient for the range to close. Don Antonio steeled himself against their will to fight, waiting for the sleek, beautiful hull of his vessel to cut across the line separating *la Conquistadore* from disaster. Even then, when *la Gloriosa* was in place before her convoy, he delayed turning for long, precious minutes that moved her farther to windward.

Thus, at a mile range, the shadowy shape of the Briton perforce gave up sailing for the bulky treasure ship, because her captain did not care to have a strangely valiant Spanish frigate suddenly grasp the weather gage. Seeing the change, Don Antonio compressed his lips for a moment, and then ordered *la Gloriosa* onto the starboard tack. When she had daintily finished wearing, he violated one of his most cherished principles, regretfully opening fire at a distance little short of two thousand yards. He preferred musket-shot range, English-style, because it more often led to decisive victories.

Now, however, he was no longer striving for victory. The *Conquistadore* was creeping to the east and the friendly haven of Cap Français, where new French allies could give her protection for the final, less difficult leg of her voyage to Cadiz. Every inch that Don Antonio might be able to force the British into the West would give *la Conquistadore* more opportunity of meeting the French patrol off Cap Français. This, and only this, had become the sole object of his life.

He winced at the sound of his guns, imagining the smug comments which the rosy flashes would inspire among the officers of his hulking adversary, as the British contemptuously labeled him as one of the Spanish captains who had courage yet little sense. None of the broadside struck the Briton, though his outlines were hidden momentarily by the pattern of shot falling into the water. The spray glittered for an instant of

magnificence in the strengthening moonlight, and then subsided.

Deliberately, Don Antonio held his fire when gun-captains were ready for the next salvo, preferring to let the British find out at bitter cost that his men were better trained than most Spaniards. When enough time elapsed to occasion witty comments among the British, he let go a ragged broadside that, at three-quarters of a mile, amused his opponents. He glanced to the west. Dimly, he could see that the third British frigate had almost reached the shattered *Thrush*.

Grimly, *la Conquistadore* plodded on, gradually gaining to windward and possible salvation.

Again, while the minutes marched, Don Antonio held his fire. Again, his broadside, by order, was careless. This time, however, at a thousand yards, some lucky hits piqued the British. Slowly, the Briton turned to parallel *la Gloriosa's* course, and unmasked the mighty battery of an eighteen-pounder forty-four. His night glass did not tremble in his hands as Don Antonio ascertained the extent of the wrath he had invited, not even when the Briton heeled and glowed in the terrifying, violent glory of a full, uniform broadside.

DELIVERED in murkiness and anger, some of the shot drove into the graceful hull of *la Gloriosa*, seven hundred yards away. Even with screams ringing in his ears, Don Antonio was able to smile, for the Briton had played directly into his plans.

Dropping pretence, Don Antonio afforded his gunners the solace of making their true ability known to their opponents. Blessing, for the first time, the hours he had yoked them to the guns, the half-naked crews began to fire as quickly as they could load and aim. From stem to stern, *la Gloriosa* became a shuddering, recoiling creature, rolling away from the blows shifted by gun-tackle into her stout sides.

Voices were useless in the midst of irregular explosions. Commands could not be passed. Only habit, built upon training, kept all hands busy fulfilling the destiny for which *la Gloriosa* had been built. On the gun deck, Don Amado rocked with the ship and the booming, sword useless in his hand, stunned by the noise and the grim will of the crew.

By figures, carefully studied by historians,

long peaceful years after the action, *la Gloriosa* did not have a possible chance against the force of the *Cleopatra*. Outweighed, outgunned, *la Gloriosa* should have been blasted to bits within moments, particularly when the *Cleopatra* was commanded by Sir George Monmouth Pelham. Figures, however, do not always win wars. Molded by Don Antonio, *la Gloriosa* proved to be a vessel of rare metal, crew and guns fighting for Spain in a manner which wrung the heart and admiration of her opponent.

La Gloriosa clung so stubbornly and valiantly to the *Cleopatra*, the captain of the thirty-eight-gun *Hero* considered it his duty to abandon the attempt to track the receding, clumsy *Conquistadore* as she wallowed toward the darkness of San Domingo. The *Hero* flung her guns into the engagement, and both Britons then began the deadly stalking game of maneuvering until one or the other could deliver a raking broadside. Don Antonio was a superb seaman, and fended off disaster as long as anyone could who was hampered by steadily decreasing sail power and mounting numbers of killed and wounded.

It was *Cleopatra* that finally managed to cross *Gloriosa's* stern, and sent a full broadside of grape and canister whistling through her hull and over her quarter deck. Sir George was not surprised when, upon putting about to duplicate the maneuver, the proud flag of Spain was desperately hauled down.

Heaving to, Sir George himself boarded the broken frigate. He saw at once that she could never make port. On the quarter-deck, strewn with dead and dying, the remnants of the ship's officers awaited him.

"Your captain?" he asked, with a respect that he had never expected in his voice.

Dazed, their eyes went down to the desk where, white silk shirt ripped and red-

dened by his blood, Don Antonio had been unable to witness the surrender of his command. Sir George removed his hat.

"A brave man," he said simply, then asked the name of both captain and ship.

Defying the accusing faces of his new subordinates, Don Amado answered. Sir George frowned. "Then that," he said sadly, "that was *la Conquistadore*?" A lieutenant nodded. Sir George looked down at the lifeless body of Don Antonio. "There are a sixty-four and a fifty off Havannah who will be disappointed, *Senor*, but not as disappointed as I."

"We should have surrendered long before," Don Amado murmured, sick with the slaughter. "He held us to it."

Sir George took his measure. "French ships-of-the-line will soon be taking a convoy out to France," he said. "Your captain did his duty well."

Don Amado stared at the Englishman, whose voice held a cutting edge of sharp reprimand. He did not reply, for Sir George had something in common with Don Antonio which would forever baffle a simple, brave man. The right to command required more than mere breeding.

HIGH in a time-battered castle in Spain, a widow one day received a letter from a man she had never met. The letter, however, became a priceless heirloom for her son and the family, because Sir George Monmouth Pelham paid graceful tribute to the man who had fallen beneath his guns at sea. This she could not fully understand, because Don Antonio had hated the English so, she thought it would be known, but she none the less framed the letter and hung it below Don Antonio's sword which had come back with it.

His bright glory was all she had left of her husband.

Vengeance burns only while you struggle to attain it!

THE FLAME
by Hugh B. Cave



A novelette of
the outer Islands
in the next SHORT STORIES

*Short-Cut Creek; a Man Might Make It, but He'd
Never Get His Supplies Through*

FUGITIVE FROM INJUSTICE

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

JOE MEACHAM squeezed his solid one hundred and seventy pounds between a logger with a hang-over, and a panhandler. Also on the justice court prisoners' bench were tough-looking customers reeking of canned-heat hang-overs: a shifty-eyed fellow accused of rolling a drunk; a sober fellow who had hit a cop for no known reason; and three drunken drivers.

Joe's eyes shifted over the courtroom spectators. His partner, Eddie Kane, should be among them. "He better be among 'em if I'm going to get out of this jam," Joe thought.

He could hear sounds coming up from the waterfront to remind him the *Aleutian* would soon sail for Alaska. "Eddie and I had better be aboard," he reflected, "if we expect to locate Old Man Lane's claim this season."

Joe and Eddie, in their early twenties, had prospected on various Alaskan creeks. First in company with old sourdoughs to learn the angles of the game, and later alone. Young, full of enthusiasm, and willing to take a chance, they were of a breed badly needed in the north because the old-timers were dying out.

They had heard the usual stories about "lost mines" and "maps left by dying prospectors" but they wisely took no stock in such tales. Old Man Lane's lost mine was different. In the first place, the mine wasn't lost. Old Man Lane knew where it was, and he had made a fairly accurate map of the watershed before he even started looking for the mysterious gold-bearing creek. Then slowly, painfully, year after year, by a process of elimination he had located the source of gold that, annually, had turned solid prospectors into nervous wrecks.

Annually, far down the river, a small bar would contain gold. The near-by miners

put the gravel through the sluice boxes each year, apparently exhausting the bar. The following year the bar would yield another modest clean-up. Where did it come from? Certainly not from bedrock, because they had scraped bedrock.

Old Man Lane figured the ice in some gold-bearing creek in the higher country froze into the gravel. When the ice went out, gold and gravel went with it. By a trick of the currents, the ice piled up on the bar, forming a small jam each spring. It was shattered by the pressure and often ground into powder which meant the gravel and gold remained on the bar when the ice was finally carried out.

He was a sick man and should have stayed home the year he struck it. He came out on a raft that fall, skin and bones, with fifty thousand dollar's worth of nuggets in moosehide pokes. Fearing that if he staked the ground claim-jumpers would take over during his absence, he had not recorded the claim.

Two years passed before Old Man Lane admitted to himself that he had gone on his last Alaskan stampede and would soon hit the trail for the Great Stampede. Gold was no longer important in his life, but he did want his granddaughter to get the benefit of his many years' work. As it was unrecorded ground, he couldn't will the claim to his only heir, Margie Lane. Instead, he must select someone trustworthy, and make a word-of-honor deal. In exchange for the creek's location the other would agree to give Margie Lane fifty percent of the annual clean-up until the creek was exhausted.

Again Old Man Lane had turned to the process of elimination. It was dangerous country—a young man's country—and he promptly eliminated old sourdough friends whose bones were brittle, or who lacked the stamina to survive the hardships. Among



the young prospectors were several who had the stamina and courage to go through any hardship, but they weren't reliable. A smooth operator would take their poke before they even had a chance to split with Margie. Or they'd hang around town, getting drunk with the boys when they should be hitting the trail.

MANY faces passed in review as Old Man Lane lay in bed, but the one he saw most frequently, the one that lingered in his mind, was Joe Meacham's. Joe was about five feet nine inches, plenty wide in the shoulders, plenty deep in the chest. His back was built to carry heavy loads; and there was good humor as well as courage in his blue eyes. His hair was halfway between blond and brown. Old Man Lane liked his honesty, and he had an idea he would be a hard man to stop if things went wrong. He wasn't sure whether Joe Meacham could get fighting mad over injustice, but he hoped so.

Oddly enough, he gave little thought to Joe's partner, Eddie Kane, instinctively sensing that Joe was the leader of the pair. He had surprised the two men by calling them in without warning and putting the proposition to them cold turkey.

Eddie's eyes were on Margie during the interview. She was dark, quiet, and very lovely. Eddie, who rarely went below the surface, found her completely satisfying. Joe saw much of Old Man Lane's courage and power in Margie. He saw the same depth and loyalty in the girl. He had thought, "If she'd have been a boy, Old Man Lane would have had no problem. She'd have carried on where he left off."

Old Man Lane had asked many questions, then he had expressed a willingness to answer anything they might ask. Joe Meacham had done the asking, Eddie and Margie had done the listening. "Okay," the old man had said, "shake hands on it. No, not with me, shake hands with Margie. Death busts up a partnership, and I may pass on before snow flies. You boys are making a deal with Margie."

The girl's hand had been warm and strong in Joe's, he remembered as he sat in police court listening to the judge handle the drunks. "Ten days!" "Thirty days!" The judge's voice droned.

Joe remembered the map. "Snow Pass," was distinctly lettered, then "Headwaters." "River." The creeks, No-Grub, Show-Down, Hard-Luck, Trout, Fools' Gold and others were evidently named for significant reasons.

"What about Short-Cut Creek?" Joe had asked.

"It's a short cut," Old Man Lane answered. "It starts three miles east of Snow Pass, in False Pass. I took one look at the water and figured a skookum man, with a lot of luck, might make it through to the river, but he'd never bring his supplies with him. He just couldn't handle more'n his own weight. No, it'll take a couple of weeks longer to go the Snow Pass way. You will have to pack stuff around several stretches of bad water, but you'll arrive at the mouth of Rainbow Creek right side up and all together. Once through was enough for me."

"Rainbow Creek? Is that *it*?"

"Yep. That's where the pot of gold is. You can't miss it because the water runs still and mighty deep where she empties into the river. There's a six-foot stump that I usually toss a rope over as I drift past. That stops me, and gives me a chance to catch my breath before I start 'lining up' Rainbow Creek."

"**JOE MEACHAM,**" the clerk called, "charged with drunken driving." Joe jumped up and the clerk held up a hand and began, ". . . somly, swear t'tell truth, nothing but-truth, selp-you God?"

"I do," Joe answered. "Not guilty."

"Officer Calligan take the stand."

"We gotta call there'd been a wreck," Calligan said. "We found this man's car on the wrong side of the street. He'd knocked off a fire plug, and water was going fifteen feet in the air. This man was wandering around drunk and smelling of whiskey. We run him in."

This testimony was confirmed by Calligan's partner and two independent witnesses.

"What happened was this," Joe answered, "my partner and I were driving along on the right side of the street. As we neared the curve an approaching car swung wide. I could see he would never swing back again in time. Obviously, the driver was drunk,

so I swung over on the wrong side of the street. The other fellow missed me, but I skidded into the fire plug. I got a crack on the head and don't remember much after that. But I hadn't had a drink in several days. I'd been too busy getting an outfit together for an Alaskan prospecting trip. If I smelled of whiskey, I don't know where it came from."

The judge looked skeptical and asked, "Where's your partner?"

Desperately, Joe's eyes roved the courtroom. The witness stand being higher gave Joe the clear view denied him when he sat on the prisoner's bench. "There he is, in the back row, the fellow with the brown tie, green coat and hair plastered down. Hey, Eddie, come here, I want you as a witness."

The man didn't move, and a puzzled expression passed over his face. A policeman edged over and said, "You're wanted to testify. Get up front." The policeman jerked a thumb toward the witness stand.

"Listen, Eddie," Joe said, puzzled, "please tell the court that I hadn't been drinking the other night; that you know because you were with me all the evening."

"Oh, come now," the city attorney said testily, "you are leading the witness. You're suggesting the answers that you want. That isn't good evidence."

"I don't know what this is all about," the man said. "I never saw you before. I don't know a thing about this affair."

"What the hell's the matter with you, Eddie?" Joe asked.

"I'm not Eddie."

"You mean to tell me that you aren't Eddie Kane?" Joe demanded.

"Never heard of him," Eddie retorted. He turned and walked to the nearest seat, leaving Joe almost wordless.

Joe's eyes narrowed, his face flushed slightly as he thought, "So it is the old doublecross. He's going to make sure I'm sent to jail, then he's hightailing it for Rainbow Creek. He's doublecrossing me, and Margie, too. I'd never believed it. Hell, he probably figured I was dazed, so he poured whiskey all over me to make it look like a drunken-driving deal. Eddie *did* have a flask that night."

"I'm addressing the defendant Meacham," the judge thundered. "Why don't you pay attention?"

"Sorry, Your Honor," Joe said. "I'm just trying to figure out why my partner refused to recognize me."

"I think you just tried to pull a fast one," the judge said bluntly. "It failed. I sentence you to thirty days in jail." He banged the gavel. "Next case."

"I serve notice of appeal," Joe said.

"Very well," the court answered, "file the necessary bond."

As Joe walked back to the prisoner's bench, he suddenly whirled, dragged Eddie to his feet, then socked him. Eddie crashed to the floor, and as the nearest policeman grabbed Joe, Eddie got uncertainly to his feet and lurched up the aisle to the door.

The judge almost broke the gavel as he banged it. "Order in the court!" he roared. He was trying to remain calm and judicial, but his anger almost succeeded in getting the upper hand. "I fine you ninety dollars and sentence you to thirty days in jail for contempt of court!"

"There goes the mining season," Joe thought. "It'll be almost over when I get out of jail, and by that time I'll be so burned up I'll probably do something to get another term."

The police lost no time in hurrying him to the tank occupied by prisoners doing time. He was moodily contemplating the future when he heard the deep-throated tones of the *Aleutian's* whistle as she backed from her pier and headed for Alaska. "Sure as hell," he mused, "Eddie's aboard. And he's nursing a pip of a black eye." He found some small satisfaction in this, then suddenly he was sobered. "Say! Maybe Eddie got a crack on the head in that crash? Maybe he *don't* remember who he is? And—I popped him!"

JOE'S first impulse was to get word to Old Man Lane, then he decided against it. The old sourdough would probably grow suspicious of the pair and want nothing further to do with either. Three days passed without incident then Joe noticed an item in the newspaper. Belatedly, a reporter had made a story of the episode. Joe read hurriedly, then breathed a sigh of relief. No mention had been made of Lane's mine on Rainbow Creek.

At noon the following day the jailer said, "Okay, you've been sprung, Meacham."

Joe didn't ask questions. Someone had put up the bail, no doubt, and had arranged matters with the judge. Or else the affair had been reduced to a fine, and the amount paid. He hurried to the steamship office and learned that the *Afognak* had sailed early that morning and that there wouldn't be another sailing for five days.

A check at the wharf indicated Eddie had taken half of their outfit and sailed on the *Aleutian*. "So he wasn't crazy from a blow on the head, after all," Joe thought. "I'm glad I socked him."

That evening he decided to call on Old Man Lane and relate exactly what happened. The old man listened attentively. "I'm afraid Eddie's doublecrossed you, Joe," he said.

"Where's Margie? I'd like her around when we talk this over. She stands to lose plenty if Eddie stakes that ground," Joe said.

"Margie said she was going on a needed vacation," Old Man Lane replied. "She'll approve anything I do."

"Mr. Lane," Joe said bluntly, "there's only one answer to the whole mess—only one way to beat Eddie. Short-Cut Creek."

"Son, you'd never make it," he said. "You'd lose your outfit and probably your life."

"Could I go downstream without an outfit and live off the country?" Joe asked.

"If you could stand trout three times a day, for three months you could leave your outfit behind, but, son, you'd be sicker'n a dog on that diet long before the freeze-up."

"Short-Cut Creek is the only way to beat Eddie," Joe said, "and I'm taking a shot at it. Now tell me what to expect, any big waterfalls?"

"No. Just plain, fast water. There's Mist Canyon. Danged if I don't think the creek gets tired of running along like it should, so it turns over on its side," Lane said. "That's where a man with a big, heavy load runs into trouble. He can't maneuver his boat fast enough. It's like shooting rapids in a fog—problems jump at you without warning. No, Joe, don't do it. After all, Margie's young, smart and full of ambition, she won't starve to death if she never sees an ounce of that gold."

"The point is, you put in the best years of the latter part of your life, figuring out

where the gold came from," Joe argued. "So why should a doublecrossing bird like Eddie reap the profit? The answer is, he shouldn't!"

Old Man Lane looked at him a long time. "It's tough when a partner lets you down," he said. "It's hard to take. At first I thought you wanted to even up things with Eddie. Now I'm convinced you want me to have a fair share. I still warn you not to go, but you're young and when I look back and ask myself what I'd have done at your age, I know the answer. All hell can't stop you. Now, here's what you can expect—no rest, but six hours of constant battle. Conserve your strength, spread it out over six hours. You'd be caught in whirlpools, don't fight 'em. Keep away from their center, and in a few minutes, you'll be whirled out. Mostly, though, you'll have to think fast and act faster. Your brain will have to tell you what to do, when trouble climbs right into the boat with you."

JOE MEACHAM and his outfit went north on the *Kenai*. Several days later he was landed on a bleak, lonely beach, with his outfit—grub, a canoe, and a knocked-down boat. Snow Pass, ten miles distant, looked grim and forbidding. Joe shifted his gaze to False Pass which looked even less inviting.

Two natives, tough-looking men suddenly appeared. One resembled the average American Indian, and the other, somewhat shorter but broader, looked Oriental. There was a faint slant to his eyes, and if he had permitted mustache and beard to grow, there would have been fifteen or twenty hairs on each side of his upper lip, and a dozen or so hanging from his chin. "Me Pete," he said, then pointing to his partner added, "Him Hank. We pole outfit upriver, then pack? Him five bucks? Me five bucks. Every day. You feed 'em, white man's grub."

"It's a deal," Joe said. He recalled that some years ago two natives had packed up Old Man Lane's outfits. On other years the pair was away fishing, and the old sourdough had done his own packing, which meant he began relaying when he could no longer pole a boat.

"Lotsa packin'," Pete said. "One man. Come to beach—one girl. Come back to beach—you? Or you stay up there?"

Joe described the man, and they nodded.

There was no doubt of it—not that he had entertained doubt—Eddie was on his way.

"Pete, did you say you'd packed in a girl's outfit?" Joe asked, puzzled. "What did she look like?"

"Her belong Old Man Lane," Pete answered.

"Margie Lane! Up here?" Pete nodded. "I won't come back down."

Joe was stunned, worried and annoyed. She was inexperienced in northern life. He had his hands full trying to outsmart Eddie without a girl complicating things. "Which pass?" he asked, "Snow or False?"

"False," Pete answered.

By driving himself hard, Joe figured that he could make it through to False Pass before darkness. He made up a light pack, including sleeping bag and grub, and was ready. "Bring the stuff up," he told Pete, "and I'll be waiting with the dough. I'm afraid that girl may do some fool thing. Did she have a canoe?"

Pete nodded. "Good one. All covered with rubber top. Keep water out!"

"My God!" Joe groaned. "She's going to have a try at Short-Cut Creek."

He struck off upstream, setting a pace that he hoped to maintain all the way to the summit. Numerous creeks emptied into the river. A few were bridged by down trees, but usually he found a ford and waded them.

The stream forked at last, and he took the smaller fork leading in a series of falls to False Pass. There wasn't much chance of getting lost, as canyon walls kept him fairly well fenced in, though some of the lateral creeks higher up were almost as large as the main stream. Actually, he was forced to make a choice of forks frequently. Signs left by the packers helped him at times, but often they had waded the stream, leaving no footprints, because in so doing they avoided the brush and piled-up debris along the bank.

Receding snowfields dripped clear, icy water frequently, and finally the stream was lost in a gulch choked with snow already turning to ice. The packers had cut steps up to the summit, and these Joe followed. He was breathless and almost bow-legged when he gained the summit. For a moment he sat down, gasping, then as he stood up a voice called, "Dinner's ready, Joe."

Margie came around a mass of snow almost blocking the pass. "I saw you coming," she said, "and knew that you would be tired and hungry when you arrived. I'm very proud. I timed dinner perfectly." She smiled. "Were you surprised to find me here?"

Joe grinned. "You're the grandest sight I've ever seen. I thought you might have gone downstream."

"I'd never try it alone," she answered. "I've done quite a little paddling in my time. I've taken canoes through white water, but nothing like this."

She had made camp above snowline on the other side of the pass, packing wood up from timberline. Joe saw a country that looked like a turbulent sea. It was split up by a series of main canyons, each of which contained lateral canyons. Each canyon, of which Short-Cut Creek was one, eventually spilled water into the main river.

Now it was evident how False Pass got its name—it led to Short-Cut Creek which would turn back anyone in his right mind. Somewhere, far beyond the row on row of ridges, Eddie was making his safe, leisurely way downstream.

Steak, fried potatoes, stewed tomatoes, bread, butter, coffee and a can of fruit composed the meal. She ate slowly, watching him, studying him curiously when he wasn't looking. Finally, he leaned back and lighted a cigarette. "A meal like this, up here, is the last thing I expected," he said, "thanks. You're an amazing cook. And I'm not saying it because I was hungry or was raised to be polite. It comes right from the heart."

"Which is reached through a man's stomach I'm told," she said.

"This is no time for sparring or beating about the bush," he said. "Why did you come up here?"

"I read an item in the paper about Eddie doublecrossing you," she answered. "It was the first time I knew that you were in jail and not headed north. It was clear to me that Eddie planned to stake the ground then-record it, leaving the rest of us out in the cold. He could do it, legally, you know."

"Yes, I know," Joe wearily agreed.

"I tried to arrange for your release, but there was certain red tape involved. I turned it over to a lawyer, told Grandfather I was

going on a long vacation, and caught a steamer with very little time to spare. I hoped to find someone who would stop Eddie."

"And no one would do it?"

"It couldn't be done legally," she answered. "I thought possibly he would loaf along, confident that he couldn't be overtaken. I had an idea I might slip past him in the night, stake the ground and beat him to the recorder's office at Cold Deck. But when Pete told me of the lead he had, I realized overtaking him by way of Snow Pass was impossible. So I turned to False Pass, confident that you would show up in time. And here you are."

"How do we stand with each other?" he asked.

"Eddie has forfeited his rights," she answered. "That sort of boils it down to a partnership between Joe Meacham and Margie Lane, doesn't it?" She offered her hand.

"That's the way it is," he said, shaking hands. "What have you in mind?"

"I've had time to walk along the canyon and look things over," she answered. "And Grandfather has told me his experiences with Short-Cut Creek countless times. Taking a grub supply seems to be the main problem. Suppose we load the boat with grub, then nail a canvas over it from bow to stern to keep out the water. Suppose also, we lash everything securely to the bottom and sides so that things can't fall out if the boat overturns?"

"The boat might get through unless it was smashed," he said. "We might roll blankets tightly, lash them with rope, then nail the rolls at points where the boat is likely to get the greatest impact. If the blows were cushioned, the boat might not crack up."

"Now we're getting somewhere," she said. "You shoot the creek in a canoe. I'll give you a night to rest up, then turn the boat loose. You keep watch at the mouth of Short-Cut Creek. When the boat comes through, grab it. If it comes through in pieces, collect what you can. Some of the grub packs will float. The stuff in the cans can't be damaged. But if something goes wrong why——"

"I can stake the ground and go downstream in the canoe," he answered, "and re-

cord the claim at Cold Deck. We'll lose a season, probably start a stampede, and won't be able to work the ground for another year, but what the hell?"

"It'll mean claim jumpers," she said, "and endless trouble, but as you say, what the——?"

"It'd be too much to hope that Eddie breaks a leg or drowns," Joe said. "After what he's done I can't bring myself to wish him luck."

"Grandfather often said, 'Pick up your hand, look at your cards, and play 'em the best you can. The next deal may be a better one. The important thing is to stay in the game.'"

He grinned. "And there's a lot of money in this particular pot, Margie."

He stretched out by the campfire and her voice grew distant. He closed his eyes for only a few seconds—at least that was his idea—but when he opened them again the sun was shining, and she was coming up from timberline with a load of fuel.

"I feel like a fool," he growled. "Sleeping in daytime!"

"You've been driving yourself, Mister," she reminded him. "It's ten miles airline from False Pass to your starting point—longer on the ground, following the meanderings of the stream. And the last few miles are almost straight up. When you stopped commenting on my chatter, I realized you were dead to the world."

"And you kept the fire going steadily," he said.

"Yes, just as Grandfather taught me—not too hot nor too cold, just enough to keep you warm," she answered. "I climbed to the summit, crossed the pass and looked down the other side. Pete and Hank are on their way up."

PETE and Hank shed their packs shortly after nine o'clock that morning. "Put ears and iron shoes on that pair, make 'em walk on all fours and you'd have a good team of mules," Margie said, lifting one of the packs, and immediately dropping it.

"Last night," Joe said, "we had agreed that I was to go downstream and you were to turn the boatload of grub loose. You didn't mention what your next move would be."

"Return to the beach, wait for a fishing

schooner or passenger ship to come along and pick me up. I planned to go on to Cold Deck and wait for you to come out with the pot of gold." He carried one of the huge packs down to Short-Cut Creek. He found an eddy and a tiny beach that offered a spot to assemble and load the boat. He had to build a two-hundred-foot trail over a narrow ledge some ten feet above the stream. Here the water ran swift and silent, content to make only sinister gurgles. The roar of white water down-canyon came muffled, but steadily.

"Be careful you don't fall in," Joe warned. His own pack had bumped a rock and all but thrown him off balance.

He unpacked and spread the boat parts on the damp gravel. "When the boat's finished," he said, "we'll have your canoe, mine and the boat—practically a navy."

"We'll cache my canoe in a tree, bottom side up," she said. "You'll be wanting to go downstream next year, perhaps."

Late that night the Indians finished packing, and were paid. "You boys did four days' work in two," Joe said, "so I'm paying you for four days. Miss Lane will be along in a day or so. Help her get some kind of transportation to Cold Deck."

Margie helped with the boat and cooked the meals as the craft slowly took form. "What about the dynamite and caps?" he asked.

"You're certainly not going to take the stuff with *you*?" she declared.

"If the stuff is in the canoe," he answered, "I might keep it from getting a jolt. I think I'll pack the powder in the boat, and take the caps with me. If I see trouble coming, I'll dump 'em overboard."

"You'll look sweet letting go of a paddle long enough to dump caps over the side if trouble comes," she answered. "If what Grandfather says is true, trouble in these parts gives you no time." She gazed thoughtfully at the water. "I can see how it would happen suddenly—without warning."

When the boat was finished, Joe plugged up tiny vent holes in two empty kerosene cans brought up from the beach, and installed one in the bow and the other in the stern to give buoyancy. Each pack was securely lashed, and he put the dynamite caps in the center of a small, tightly rolled tent. He covered the boat with canvas, made it

practically watertight by nailing strips from bow to stern, then packed a few things in his own canoe. This, too, was covered with canvas, except for a hole for his body. A spare paddle was secured on top of the canvas. "I guess I'm ready," he said.

"Not yet," she answered. "You're going to get at least eight hours' sleep, and build up a little reserve strength. You haven't stopped since you started in."

"It's a race with Eddie, you know," he reminded her.

"But the creek is tougher than Eddie," she answered. She spread out her sleeping bag. "Crawl in. I'll wake you up in eight hours."

Joe admitted the soundness of her advice and fell asleep almost instantly. Hours later he was out of the bag, fighting off sleep and trying to understand what had happened. Then her voice came and he realized that he had heard it in his sleep. "Joe! Joe!"

He saw her being swept downstream and his first impulse was to plunge in after her. Instead, he realized nothing would be gained that way. So he shot her canoe into the middle of the stream where it would drift faster than the girl. With luck she could grasp it and hang on. He shoved the loaded boat into the current, and brought the bow line over a ragged rock and tied it. Then he thrust her sleeping bag into his own canoe and shoved clear.

He had the impression of standing still on rough water while the canyon walls raced astern. The roar of white water increased and suddenly spray drenched the canoe until water ran from the canvas top in tiny streams.

The walls leaped at him, and he swung the bow around, then pushed the stern away with his hand. The wall was mossy, damp and cold and left his hand coated with greenish water. He skirted an eddy, wondering if Margie or the canoe were in the center of a whirlpool. He couldn't see because the spray from waterfalls tumbling down the canyon walls somewhere ahead blotted out all view. It was like fine snow carried along on a light breeze.

At regular intervals he bellowed, "Margie! Margie!" His ears tried to separate the water sounds from a possible answer, but everything was a jumble.

The canoe rocked and water came over the

bow, raced astern and spilled off either side. He kept tense, paddle poised for instant action. He felt the stern shift and the water on his right rise high. He was sliding downward into a whirlpool. He saw debris circling around in the exact center. Floating wood suddenly vanished as it was drawn under. A small tree, stood upright as the roots were sucked deep. It would almost disappear, then rise a few feet. The leaves were young and fresh. A few days ago it had grown on the bank somewhere upstream.

Now he really strained as he kept clear of the center. Once he could have touched the tree with his paddle, then, as if for a whim, the whirling water spilled him into the main stream, and he bounced on through Mist Canyon. A series of rapids almost shook his teeth loose. He was sure Margie had drowned, but he never stopped looking. He cleared Mist Canyon and looked ahead to a hurrying stream hemmed in by sheer walls. He saw nothing on the restless water, but occasional rocks, clearing the surface like black, wet fangs.

He tried to relax. Old Man Lane had said it was a six-hour trip, but four hours after the start the walls separated some two hundred yards, and he saw a higher wall coming in at an angle, then caught a glimpse of the main river. He drove the canoe onto a gravel bar and got out. His arms were like lead, and his cramped legs hardly supported his body.

He staggered around restoring circulation, his eyes on the water.

"She might come out in the canoe," he said. "She might. I *could* have passed her in Mist Canyon." He gathered driftwood and built a fire against a log jam on the bar, but as he worked, he kept looking upstream.

He examined the bar carefully for signs of a canoe washing against the gravel, then being carried away again. He stripped off his clothing and crossed to the opposite side and searched another pile of debris for significant wreckage. He found none. He returned, warmed up by the fire, his eyes on the river.

Joe estimated he had had seven hours' sleep when Margie cried out. "Plenty," he thought, "but how did she fall into the stream? I'd watched her. She handled herself well. She used common sense. Never took chances. Maybe I should have gone in

after her. A sharp spurt would have brought me to her. Then what?"

He hardly moved for the next five hours, sitting by the fire, eyes on the stream, gambling on the thousand-to-one chance that she'd come through. Suddenly he jumped to his feet and stripped off his clothing. Their boat was actually in sight, drifting sideways, and awash, supported by the tins he had put in at the bow and stern. He dragged the boat to the bar, removed the canvas top and emptied it. He spread everything out on the bar, near the fire, to dry. Water, he knew, penetrated the sacks of flour a short distance, but the remainder would be dry. Sugar, coffee, spices were in watertight cans. Hams and bacons partly repelled water.

The tent was soaked through. He set it up on the bar, handling the dynamite caps carefully. But he kept watching the creek for wreckage. "She's gone," he said as twilight changed to darkness. "She couldn't stay wet this long and live. If she comes out of the river now—" He didn't finish, but the prospect was grim. He'd have to watch the bars and if the river gave her up, then he must perform last rites.

He slept that night from sheer exhaustion, and the sun had been up two hours when he awakened. He found a heap of coals in the burning log jam and cooked breakfast. He was pouring coffee when a voice said, "I'll take mine without sugar or cream."

Joe almost jumped out of his skin. "Margie!" He stood there, staring in disbelief, and somehow his arms went open and she was in them. She didn't cry, she just clung tightly to him until the tenseness left her body, then she almost collapsed.

Her clothes were dry and wrinkled, he noticed, and her face was gray with exhaustion. He made her comfortable, then offered her coffee. She drank it slowly. "It's swell to be alive—after Short-Cut Creek," she said in a tired voice.

"What happened, Margie?"

"I was walking along that narrow trail above the water," she said, "and a section dropped out. It gave way under me after it had supported you, carrying a hundred-pound pack."

"It gradually weakened under use," he said.

"I grabbed a piece of branch jammed into

the wall when the ice went out, and yelled. It gave way before you could get out of your sleeping bag," she said. "You shoved out the canoe, instead of diving in, thank God. I caught the canoe just as I was sucked into Mist Canyon. I hung on, keeping my feet ahead of me to take up the shock. A mile down the canyon my feet hit bottom. A small creek gushed from a break in the canyon wall.

The current was strong and almost tore the canoe away from me. I could feel my heels slipping as rocks gave way, but I managed to drag the thing a hundred yards up the little stream to a bar. I had a hunting knife and matches in a waterproof box. I got a fire going and dried out. I was afraid to go on because I might be caught by darkness, so waited for daylight—started as soon as there was enough twilight to see. But how did you bring the boat through?"

"When I first tied it up, during the loading process, a rough rock chafed the line," he answered. "Well, I tied it up, with the chafed place rubbing against the same rough rocks. In time it was bound to break loose. You'd better sleep, Margie."

"No, we'd better break camp," she advised, "and get on to Rainbow Creek. Eddie is likely to show up any time. You handle the oars and I'll just doze."

THEY presented a strange sight: A heavily loaded boat, towing two canoes, drifting downstream. A few strokes of the oars straightened things out, then the canoes would drift ahead. Joe let them drift until he spotted rough water, then he straightened out the boat with hard strokes, and the lighter craft fell astern.

Margie slept much of the time, but as they neared the mouth of Rainbow Creek, she sat up and rubbed her eyes. "We must be getting close, Joe," she said. "What about this fellow, Eddie? Is he likely to start shooting if we find him on the ground?"

"He surprised me when he doublecrossed me," Joe answered, "so I must admit I don't know what to expect of him. He can be tough."

"I'm sure that you can take care of yourself," she said. "I didn't want to be taken by surprise."

A half mile from the creek mouth she stood up in the boat and gazed intently

ahead. "I can see a canoe," she said. "It must be Eddie's."

He turned to the bank and they drew their own craft into the brush. A brush and tree-covered bank three hundred feet high bordered the river at this point. Taking only a few cans of meat and some bread they climbed the bank, and struck across a bench intersecting Rainbow Creek a quarter mile above the mouth.

"Here's where Grandfather cut down trees and whip-sawed them for sluice box lumber," she said. "There's a brush camp he used."

"But you'd never guess it working up the creek bed," Joe said. "He left no tracks, or trail that I can see. Say, there're several sections of sluice boxes and flumes stacked in that thicket."

Old Man Lane had insisted from the first that they study his map until details were thoroughly impressed on their minds. He didn't believe in packing maps to the scene of activities. There was too much chance of a claim jumper knocking a map holder in the head, and thus locating the hidden claim.

"There's the stretch he called the Mill Race," she said. "He always felt that it was a natural sluice box, but there was more water than he could handle, and no way of diverting the stream."

Old Man Lane had told Joe he was sure a man could take thirty or forty thousand dollars out of the Mill Race. It looked promising.

"There's Eddie," Margie said suddenly, pointing. "He's sizing up the stream."

"Stay here," Joe said, "I'm going down there and talk things over."

"Talk?" she asked softly. "Be careful, Joe. The law, if not the right of the situation, is on his side. He has a right to stake a claim."

"I'll try and remember several things, including the law," Joe answered. He slid down the steep bank, checking his descent by grabbing brush and limbs. The Mill Race muffled the sounds of his descent.

He slipped up behind Eddie Kane, jerked a six-gun from its holster, broke it, dropped the cartridges into the river and handed the empty weapon back to the amazed Eddie. "You—you—came down Short-Cut Creek!"

"For one instant after I hit you in the courtroom I figured maybe you'd got a crack

on the head and didn't know what you were doing," Joe said evenly, "but there's nothing wrong upstairs, except crookedness. Your actions prove that."

"You can't keep me from staking a claim here," Eddie said. "I know my rights."

"Hell, you can stake claims anywhere you want to, and I won't lift a hand," Joe said quietly. "It's a personal matter. You double-crossed me, Eddie, along with Old Man Lane and Margie. Whenever and wherever I meet you, one of us is going to take a beating."

"It's just a trick to drive me out of the country," Eddie said uneasily.

"I'm not ordering you out of the country," Joe said, "I'm just squaring an account. Okay, let's go."

"You ain't taking me by surprise this time, like you did in court," Eddie snarled.

"You caught me by surprise—in court," Joe retorted.

There was confidence in Eddie's eyes, but it turned to worry as Joe's fists began finding the target. He went down, then he got up again. Joe flattened him, then Eddie couldn't get up for all of twenty seconds. He finally lurched to a log and sat down, his eyes filled to the brim with a vacant stare.

Joe began clearing a spot for a temporary camp, and presently Eddie wandered off. Joe watched him sizing up the creek, and it was evident that he was considering the best site to stake a claim. When their trails crossed again, Joe said, "So it's you, eh?" He squared off, fists clenched, eyes hostile.

"You can't drive me out of the country," Eddie snarled. "I gotta right to stake——"

"Sure, you've got a right to stake a claim," Joe cut in. "and I'm not trying to drive you out of the country. I just don't like you. You're a doublecrossing so and so. When you get in my way you get socked, that's all. I just happen to be hanging around Rainbow Creek. I expect we'll be bumping into each other a lot. I imagine fifteen or twenty fights a day will be about average." Then Joe waded in.

Eddie fought desperately, and he dropped Joe twice, but the latter got up, and finally Joe's fist sank wrist-deep into Eddie's stomach, and he went down with a greenish color on his face. When he got up, he started downstream, but Joe was down there dragging out a piece of dry log for fuel. Eddie

climbed the bank and yelled down, "You ain't heard the last of this, Meacham. We'll meet again——"

"I hope not," Joe answered. "I don't like knocking off work and socking you—it wastes time."

HE HEARD Eddie working his way downstream, and he followed. Eddie might take a notion to drygulch him. Eddie loaded his outfit into his canoe and headed down the river. "He don't quit that easily unless it is a fist fight," Joe reflected. "He's up to something. He might report the affair to the marshal at Cold Deck, but the trouble is, there's too much fast water between here and there. It'd take most of the summer to *line up* a boat. Well, the season is short, and I got to keep driving and trust to luck I can take care of Eddie when the time comes."

Four hours had passed since he had slid down the bank to meet Eddie, and he hadn't heard a word from Margie. Perhaps she had purposely remained quiet so that Eddie wouldn't know there had been a witness to their meeting. She could testify, if necessary, that Joe *had* admitted Eddie had a right to stake ground.

There was no sign of Margie on the bench, and Joe went back to the canoes and boats. Margie's canoe, sleeping bag, and some of the grub was gone. "I'll be damned," Joe muttered. "I can't figure her. I thought I had a mining partner, yes—I was figuring the last few days, that I had a life partner, too."

Puzzled, Joe began packing the outfit up to the bench and across to the creek. He planned to use Old Man Lane's brush camp as headquarters, shifting supplies to the temporary camp he had made at water level. He figured an eighteen-hour day would be about right. He carried the sluice boxes and flumes down to the Mill Race and set them up. He diverted a small stream spilling down the bank into the flume. By shifting the upper section of the flume he could turn the water on and off.

Then he began driving a tunnel in the bank above the Mill Race. It was slow, hard work, and timbering was necessary to keep the water-soaked soil from caving in. He loaded the tunnel with powder, then sat down and waited two weeks. Constant rain

had kept the stream bank full. He slept twelve hours a day, fished in a nearby stream that was low and clear, and explored the headwaters of Rainbow Creek. It was a short stream, but drained numerous mountains and canyons which accounted for its volume.

Joe was returning from one of these trips, when he noticed bent branches and broken twigs. Someone had tried to approach the bank without leaving a trail. Fifty feet beyond, he uncovered a monument where rocks had been hastily piled. He removed the rocks, opened a tin can and took out a location notice. "So Eddie sneaked back and staked a claim," he mused.

The man had made a job of it. The area below the Mill Race where Old Man Lane had first operated, was declared Discovery Claim. He had let that alone on the theory, no doubt, that the gravel had been well worked. He had staked the area above, which included much of the Mill Race and some of the better ground upstream.

Joe saw other monuments, but he didn't bother to investigate them. Rain was drenching the brush, and he was already soaked to the skin.

He went to camp and dried out. Sometime during the night the rain stopped and the creek began to drop. The sun came out and the last of the clouds disappeared during the day. Joe waited until the creek was the lowest he had seen it, then he cut fuses and climbed to the tunnel. He placed a stick of powder containing a cap in the main charge, then tore out the timbers and watched the tunnel roof cave in. He lighted the fuses and hurried downstream to a safe place.

It wasn't a spectacular blast. The earth shuddered, muck and rock kicked out of the bank, then suddenly the mass above began moving. Just as it stopped, a second and third blast started it again. The narrowest part of the canyon filled almost level with the bench. As the water drained out of the Mill Race, leaving only pools, Joe further drained the pools by a series of small blasts at the lower end of each.

Trout flopped around, or moved sluggishly in shallow water. He shoveled them into downstream pools, then began digging through the gravel to bedrock. It wasn't a thorough job, and he saw nuggets in the dirt he tossed aside. "Why bother with the blue

milk when there's thick cream ahead?" he grunted.

HE HIT bedrock, and began shoveling the dirt into the sluice boxes. He cleaned out the pool and went on to the next. Each was like a giant rifle which had retained gold, sand and gravel. Huge boulders had prevented ice carrying gold and gravel from going on downstream. The ice that had carried gold to the river bar each year had formed nearer the creek mouth. Mill Race ice had been trapped until it had melted sufficiently to clear the boulders.

When water began spilling over the sides of the sluice boxes, Joe knocked off, picked out the heavier gravel, then hastily shoveled gold and gravel into a can and carried it up the bank.

At the end of thirty-six hours he was tiring, but the waters behind the dam were steadily rising. As long as rain held off the dam would stand the pressure awhile longer. But a sudden deluge would take it out.

Forty-eight hours of driving slowed him down mentally as well as physically. He moved in a fog, and nothing seemed real. Gravel trapped by boulders that didn't readily yield was deserted for easier areas.

"I guess I'm through," he muttered when sixty hours were behind him. "The hell with everything." He was short-tempered and cursed childishly over trivial obstacles. Twice he kicked the shovel handle because it tripped him.

Muddy water was coming from the base of the dam in increasing volume. He cleaned the sluice boxes, then carried the gravel to a safe spot. "The hell with the sluice boxes," he muttered, "let 'em go!"

He gazed stupidly at them a long time, then remembered the work that had gone into them—whip-sawing the lumber, trimming it, fitting the boards. One by one he dragged them to the top of the bank. He sat down and smoked. Tobacco tasted vile. He watched movement on the dam, then suddenly a writhing mass of muck and water burst free.

Things happened swiftly, and for a moment exhaustion gave way to excitement. The breach momentarily closed, the sides tumbled in, then the dam was gone as a solid wall of water raced to the river, cleaning the banks of trees and brush.

Joe crawled into his sleeping bag and was dead to the world. Hours later, he stirred stiffly, looked around, muttered, "The hell with everything," and went to sleep again. He got up finally and ate something. The creek was low and clear, but running swiftly in the Mill Race.

"I wonder how much gold I've got," Joe muttered. "It'll take a lot of panning. No, I'll run the whole works through the sluice boxes again. That'll be easier. Hmmm, what about Eddie? He'll be waiting at Cold Deck with lawyers and what not to get a big cut. He'll claim the gold came from ground he staked, and he won't have trouble proving it. Then I'll work him over again and probably go to jail. And if I escape, I'll be a fugitive from injustice. Hell, I'm in a rut and the rut goes around in a circle."

He took his time about running the gold and gravel through the sluice boxes and did a thorough job. He panned the tailings and got more gold, then he guessed the value—seventy thousand dollars' worth.

"If I had the legal title to the claim," Joe mused, "I'd come back next year with a seven or eight-man force, blast off the other bank and clean out the Mill Race—right. Then I'd put in the following seasons upstream—if I owned the ground. Funny about Margie, too, lighting out the way she did."

He carried the gold down to the creek mouth and brought the boat down from its upstream cache. He hid the canoe in a tree. No telling when someone might need it.

Then he shoved off, with pokes of gold stowed in the bottom of the boat for ballast.

JOE MEACHAM grew tense as he neared Cold Deck. He expected to see Eddie Kane waiting for him with a deputy marshal, ready to take charge of the gold until the ownership was determined. But there was no sign of Eddie. He sent a native kid for an expressman to haul his stuff to a hotel. When the expressman came Joe said, "Stop at the bank." People watched him curiously as he unloaded the gold. "Gold from Old Man Lane's rainbow pot," someone said. "If a man could get upriver,

there'd be a stampede. Water's pretty fast in spots, ain't it?"

"Twenty miles north I came through the fastest water I ever saw, except once," Joe answered. He was thinking of Short-Cut Creek. That would always be the fastest water he had gone through. A man would drown in anything faster.

He went over to the post office and asked, "Any mail for Joe Meacham?"

The girl handed him a stack of letters, all in the same handwriting. The top one had been mailed in Cold Deck a couple of months ago. The remainder carried a Seattle postmark. Joe opened the top one and read:

Dear Joe:

I watched you from the creek bank. You're not going to kill Eddie, just make him keep out of your path. It seems to me, facing a short season, you'll have your hands full with the creek without trying to keep Eddie out of your hair. I think he'll stake the ground, then contest the clean-up in court. I'm beating him to the punch, I hope, by staking the ground myself—Grandfather's claim will be Discovery. One above is mine; two above is yours, but it doesn't matter, does it, as we're mining partners. I'm going south on the first boat. Grandfather will want to hear what's happened. It'll add years to his life.

Later: Eddie Kane just came in. He was the most astonished man in the world when the recorder told him the ground had already been located by Joe Meacham and the Lanes.

There was more to the letter, and the ones following were pretty special. Joe had a fair to middlin' idea he had a life as well as a mining partner. He made a bee-line to the steamship office. "How soon can I get a boat south?" he asked, then he saw Eddie waiting table in a hash house across the street. "Think I'll go over and order the best feed in the house," he thought, "and pay the bill in gold dust. Naw . . . I guess I won't either . . . the sucker. The poor, damned sucker."



THE MAN WHO MADE IT RAIN

By SAM CARSON

HELL'S CORNER bore out its name this heat-cursed Sabbath evening, with a searing blast beating through the cottonwood grove, clinging as the tired trees did, to the bank alongside the almost dried up bed of Diablo Creek. Banjo Shedd had wandered over early, for there was activity in the grove, and here it was that Brother Garth was preaching, red hair and beard reflecting the uneven light from kerosene torches. He was a giant of a man, this

Brother Garth, no ordained man of the cloth, but a homesteader who preached more of hate toward the cattlemen than the brotherhood of man.

Til Ammens lounged in the saddle at the bridge leading into town. Beside him was Purdom, the livery stable owner. "Blaming us cowmen fur the drouth," Ammens growled. "Webb, if he don't stop, some hot tempered cowman's going to calm Brother Garth, in a permanent manner."

Purdom chuckled. He had a sneaking

fondness for this bellowing homesteader, Garth. "You folks did dam up Diablo Creek and wreck what ditches they'd run in the lower valley. A lot of people lost their crops."

"They asked for it," Ammens commented drily. "Any fool who thinks he can dry-farm this water forsaken country, needs a lesson. And don't cattle have to have water?"

"I ain't arguing, Til. What's he doing now?"

Brother Garth was producing rods, and a mysterious looking gadget with dials from a gunny sack. "I have here," he proclaimed, "the surprise promised you folks. This is a device to bring rain—rain which will bless our crops and our stock."

Even Ammens and Purdom joined the circle closing in about Brother Garth. But none crowded nearer the crude platform upon which the speaker stood, than Banjo Shedd. None paid him any attention. Banjo was that sort of a person, even in Hell's Corner. He had a vague connection with Purdom's stable, doing odd jobs in return for a straw pallet in a shed. It didn't occur to anyone to ask where Banjo got his food. Bob Manley paid him to clean up the store once or twice a week, and Miz Susie used him for errands at the hotel. People just accepted Banjo as part of the landscape. He had never been known to venture an opinion, save about the weather. The weather was Banjo's hobby, in a manner of speaking.

For the last year, since Brother Garth had arrived and become a Sunday night feature, Banjo Shedd had been his greatest admirer. In truth, Brother Garth was quite a man, with magic in his voice. He was becoming the spokesman for the homesteaders, and cattlemen like Til Ammens were becoming disturbed. It wouldn't take much more leadership to make the homesteaders a political force. But if this possibility disturbed the cattlemen, it didn't bother Banjo Shedd. Brother Garth was his hero, a defender of the little man and now, by his own words, a maker of weather.

"My friends," the red-bearded man announced, holding aloft the collection of whalebone rods and box with the many dials, "I cannot promise where and how the rain will come. But I saw these instruments

bring rain, up in Montana, with my own eyes. The man who owned this device has passed from this earthly vale, and I wrote his widdier, asking the price. She set the price, and I invested my own funds in the purchase. All I ask is for some—er financial help from those among you who have the faith. Brother—" his eyes fell upon the rapt features of Banjo Shedd—"Brother Shedd will pass the hat," he finished.

Banjo shrank from this public notice. His first reaction was to push through the audience and start running. Then he felt exaltation at thus being singled out. Slowly he removed his battered hat. And when he felt coins dropping into the upturned head-piece, Banjo lifted his head. Slowly but surely, pride was born within his sorry being. Brother Garth was moving along with his explanation, and the collector of donations wished he could listen, but men and even their wives were opening lean pocket-books and fumbling for money. Purdom suddenly materialized in the flickering light, and he was grinning. But he tossed a coin into the hat. "Wuth it," he laughed. "Wuth riding ten miles to see. What time does he aim to bring the rain, Banjo?"

BANJO SHEDD didn't flinch. He met Purdom's eyes. "It'll rain shore, whenever and wherever Brother Garth says." Purdom sobered. "If the man figgered on prayers for rain, maybe I'd trust him. I don't like this bus'ness."

Banjo went about his affairs. The hat was heavy with coins when he came back to the platform, and Brother Garth dumped the contents upon a bench. "Thankce, friends," he called forth. "Thankce—you've nearly paid for the instruments."

It seemed to Banjo, that all that money should pay for every gadget Brother Garth had on display. But after all, he reflected, rainmakers probably came high. The price hadn't been mentioned, and surely a man of Brother Garth's attainments wouldn't distort facts, at least not vital facts.

Some of the audience drifted away, men like Til Ammens and Purdom. But the bulk of the homesteaders remained. One thin fellow, after considerable prodding by his wife, stepped up on the platform. He looked ill at ease. "Brother Garth," he mumbled, "we—that is some of us—well,

we want to know when to look for rain. I mean, when that thing works?"

"My friend," Brother Garth boomed amiably, "I'm glad you asked that question. Tomorrow, at high noon, I ride due north. I ride alone. At a proper place, of which the grips of the whalebone will warn me ahead of time, I'll set up.

"But don't expect rain at once. We must be patient. It may take more trips, every day at high noon, till the rainmaker works. This business of changing the weather takes time. There is a formula I must follow, one which I must keep secret."

With that Brother Garth gathered up his gadgets and strode off through the night. The homesteaders held together for a time. There were some, not exactly skeptical, but still, from Missouri in a manner of speaking. But others, like Garth's questioner, expressed confidence. "Back in Kansas, five-six years ago, there was a rainmaker," a voice announced. "Seen him with my own eyes. He'd set off bombs fur two days, and then he sent up a bal-loon."

"Did he make it rain?" someone asked.

"Well, maybe it was three or four days before she poured down. But when she did come, brother, it blamed near washed the whole country away. Folks talked about hiring the rainmaker to get it to stop. Yessirree, I know some folks can do things with the weather."

"There was an Injun up in Montany," another recalled, "who took a week to do his stuff. I know fur a fact it rained, twice when he made medicine."

THESE testimonials affected Banjo Shedd mightily. Long after everyone had left, Banjo remained in the cottonwood grove. He'd like to be a rainmaker. The majestic terror of mounting thunderheads had always awed him. As a child he had imagined that some being alien to the ground, rode inside the storm clouds, and the feeling hadn't left him entirely yet. If he could have been able to read, and had access to a library, probably the story of Prospero and his command over storms would have been his choice of plays. Before he crawled to his straw pallet, Banjo Shedd resolved to stalk Brother Garth during his pre-rainmaking activities.

Such action was denied him. Brother

Garth loaded up his equipment and struck off before daybreak, the neighbors said. He was headed due north.

From Purdom, Banjo got the information that Brother Garth had gone past the Ammens ranch, headed for Lone Mesa. That afternoon, Banjo watched the northern horizon. But the sky remained cloudless, and the beating sun sent all forms of animal life to whatever shade was available.

The next day Brother Garth traveled southward. Successively, he journeyed eastward, then westward into the lava beds. On Saturday, he called for a meeting in the cottonwood grove. The attendance was high, for by now, Hell's Corner's citizens, as well as cattle people, had become interested. Dramatically, Brother Garth related his activities. "Toward the four corners of the earth I went," he said, holding the collection of rods aloft. "Precious chemicals I set off into the atmosphere, as is required. For hours I labored on this vital mission. And now—and now—" he paused, lowering his voice, "I must fail, yes fail unless—" Again he paused, looking about.

"Unless I have your support. This drouth is a tremendous one. It resists the ordinary efforts of the rain maker. Listen, you people who have suffered, have seen your crops dry in the sun, your livestock wasting at dry water holes—I am resolved to fight on, till precious moisture from the skies above soaks into thirsting soil, and brings back the green of nature to the land.

"But I must buy more chemicals, and that will take days for them to come. Time is precious, even hours. My friends, now is the time to contribute. Give now! Help me in this battle for life."

Someone launched into a hymn. The act was spontaneous. And Banjo Shedd reacted. He doffed his hat, and through the crowd he pushed his way. Coins were dropping into the crown before Brother Garth, alert to see Banjo's action, had added his deep voice to the singing.

It was a notable success, this collection. Men, and women too, shoved toward him, hands extended, and Banjo found himself joined in the singing. Maybe his voice was cracked, and off key, but that didn't matter. Banjo was happy.

The collection was a pronounced success.

This time Brother Garth didn't pile the money in sight of his audience. Somehow, he managed to remove the collection from Banjo's hat, in behind a slicker, and other objects. Banjo later recalled that the sum was extremely sizeable. At the moment, however, he wasn't concerned. Brother Garth's efforts would continue, and that was the main thing.

This time, after the assemblage began to melt away, Brother Garth paused in the act of extinguishing his kerosene torches. He beckoned Banjo. "My friend," he said, "you are a true helper in the cause."

"I know," Banjo managed to stammer, "that you can bring the rain."

Brother Garth regarded him thoughtfully. "It has come to me that I have overlooked the value of one with consuming faith, Brother Shedd. That is bad. Come with me."

This was more than Banjo had ever expected. Eagerly he helped carry Brother Garth's belongings to the cabin just outside Hell's Corner. The latter seemed preoccupied. He bade his guest wait outside, and Banjo heard the clink of silver, as if the man inside were stowing the money hurriedly. There sounded a thump, and Brother Garth stepped outside. "Brother Shedd," he spoke, "I have enough chemicals left for one more trial, before I send in my order to Denver. How would you like to try the rainmaker tomorrow?"

"Me—make it rain—" Banjo's throat went dry. "But me—I ain't fitten to try, Brother Garth. It's you—"

"Even the most humble are possessed of great strength through faith, Brother Shedd. Be here at daybreak. I will explain what to do. Say no word of this to anyone."

"I'd die, afore I'd blab a word, Brother Garth. I shorely would."

"Tomorrow you must bring your own horse. And—" he added drily, "your own drinking water, just in case you fail."

No initiate into some strange, exclusive order ever surpassed the purpose in Banjo Shedd's soul when he risked all to slip a horse from Purdom's stable. It wasn't a matter of stealing. Purdom would let him have the animal under certain conditions. But this was the first time Banjo had borrowed a horse without mentioning that fact to the owner. To him, the end justified the

means. Banjo was a bit scared, yet determined. To be Brother Garth's lieutenant justified any action Purdom might take later. During a night of fitful sleep, Banjo had envisioned the majesty of storm clouds, himself a lone figure, blessed by Brother Garth. Forgot was the dryness of the night and the distant bellowing of cattle which had no surcease these days, or nights.

BROTHER GARTH was up, his horse saddled. This was confusing. Banjo noted that the man had prepared for a long trip.

His blankets were rolled inside a slicker, and the saddlebags bulged. Furthermore, Banjo scented coffee, which Brother Garth neglected to offer his visitor. The man seemed in a hurry and talked to himself. Banjo followed him around till the larger man exploded. His words shocked Banjo, who drew into one corner. Then Garth remembered. He clapped a hand on his volunteer helper's shoulder. "Brother Shedd, you must forgive me," he said. "I have so much on my mind. The strain is great. Very great. Are you ready?"

Banjo swallowed hard. "The rainmaker—?" he all but whispered.

"Oh—of course." Brother Garth shoved a tripod into his arms. "And this—" Banjo took the pail filled with a tarry substance. "B-but the box and the rods?" he inquired.

"We are dividing up today, Brother Shedd. See yon mountain behind the lava bed? Upon the south ridge I will set up today. You travel till the sun is straight above you, due north. Then set the tripod, and hang the pail from the hook. Burn the chemicals in the pail. It will take the better part of an hour."

"Is that all?" Banjo asked timidly. "I thought—"

"You have the faith, don't you?" Brother Garth demanded.

"Of course, but the box with the dials, and the rods?"

Brother Garth grunted. He went to the saddle and pulled forth a slender rod. It was limber. "All right, hold to that as the chemicals burn. Keep pointing it toward the sky."

He mounted his horse. Banjo felt ill at ease. "What time—er, how long before I come back?"

"Wait till sunset." Brother Garth set off, and he wasn't taking it easy.

Banjo had the feeling that something was wrong. Still, who was he to judge the action of a maker of storms. Suppose he—Banjo Shedd, let Brother Garth down! The chemicals had to be burned. Hadn't Brother Garth spent four days at the task, bucking the greatest drouth ever to plague this country? True, the pail reeked of tar, but Banjo Shedd was no judge of rain making chemicals. Maybe it was just coincidence.

Banjo was thirsty before the sun reached the zenith. His course ran parallel to the lava beds, and the mountain Brother Garth had mentioned, loomed to the westward, cool by comparison to this flat, rock-strewn land.

In truth, Banjo Shedd was weak of spirit when he judged it high noon. But he had a job to do. Looking at the sky, it was all very depressing, for the sky was cloudless, although, as he told himself, there was a slight mist today. It wasn't exactly a haze. And the horizon looked fuzzy. It seemed to him that a low cloud of dust grew, building up along the trail to Hogan's Notch, usual entrance into the lava country. But what outfit would be moving across there, in such weather. Certainly it couldn't be any of the cattle spreads to the south. Being engrossed with his task, Banjo didn't think much about the dust cloud. He put up the tripod, hung the pail and found that the contents were highly inflammable. Black smoke, fat and sky bound, leaped into the dry wind. True to instructions, Banjo took the whalebone and held it aloft.

There were no clouds. But the haze had a queer look, as if it were blotting out the horizon, and erasing the blue overhead. And now the wind was easing, so that the smoke from the bucket crawled upward with little incline to its trail. "Wonder if Brother Garth's set up by now," Banjo thought.

It seemed that the heat was lessened with the retreat of the sun into the growing haze. The heat lessened, but Banjo Shedd began to sweat. Now the wind had stopped entirely. Banjo's horse whinnied, uneasy too.

THE first roll of thunder was startling, but unbelievable. Banjo was pointing the rod skyward when it happened. Startled, he dropped the rod. As he bent to pick it

up, a breath of cool air, as refreshing as a dash of cool water, struck him. And now Banjo saw clouds—clouds forming in the haze above, and to the west. Forked lightning poured down upon a rock-crowned ridge.

Banjo Shedd stared. "Brother Garth done it," he cried. "He's bringing the rain like he said. He—great gravy! I helped do it." Grabbing rod and tripod, Banjo kicked the still flaming bucket downgrade. He scrambled into the saddle, holding to his impedimenta and set out on a dead run for Hell's Corner.

The livery stable horse was no match for the storm. It overtook man and animal, whipped them, lashed them with rain and hail and raced on, leaving Banjo to plod through slanting rain which was still falling when he crossed the bridge by the cottonwood grove. People were out everywhere. Banjo had heard a homesteader whooping, two miles out. Hell's Corner was alive, and should be. Banjo rode directly to the livery stable. He wasn't afraid of censure now. Not when he'd explain his role to Purdom. Nothing mattered, now that Brother Garth had succeeded.

The group of men before the hotel puzzled Banjo. Here were homesteaders, townsmen and they didn't look jubilant at all. They were peeved about something.

Banjo rode to the stable, unsaddled the horse and fed it. Purdom wasn't around. Banjo saw one of the Ammens' hands striding through the mud. "What's the excitement about?" Banjo asked.

"Ain't you heard?" The cowpoke spat and laughed. "That snake of a Garth was ketched running off with money he'd collected to make it rain. They're dividing the money up at the hotel."

"But—but Garth, he did make it rain," Banjo protested.

"Lookee, a peace officer hit town last night looking for Garth. He'd skinned some folks up in Wyoming, and other places. They found the skunk in the lava country, hightailing west. Made it rain? Huh. You didn't donate, did you?"

This was all a mistake. Banjo felt that someone ought to explain. Why, if Brother Garth hadn't made that last setup, and it took two to do it, there wouldn't be this rain. This was a ground soaker. It would

fill water holes and make the grass green. And they had Garth up at the hotel, dividing out his money!

Banjo Shedd knew that he had to face whoever had assumed leadership, be it peace officer or Hell's Corner's citizens. He had a duty to perform. Hadn't he—Banjo Shedd—burned the chemicals and held up the rod, while Brother Garth was making medicine on the mountain ridge!

When Banjo entered the hotel office, Miz Susie was standing beside Sheriff Gates and a stranger wearing a star on his vest. Purdom was there, and Til Ammens, and seated on a bench, looking very dejected, was Brother Garth, his rainmaking gear in one corner. At the desk, Purdom and Ammens were still stacking coins. "Ain't but one way we can do it fairly, Sheriff," Purdom said. "Nobody knows for certain how much he turned over to Garth. So maybe we'd better just distribute the money, in equal amounts, say right before dark."

"Anything you say," the sheriff agreed. "But if you people up in Wyoming don't send this buzzard to jail, I want him here."

"We got plenty of charges," the other officer said. "Swindling—extortion—forgery—"

"Sheriff—all of you," Banjo Shedd blurted, "you all are making a pow'ful mistake. You shorely are."

Miz Susie frowned. "Banjo Shedd, you git out of here," she ordered. "The idee, taking up for this swindler."

"He made it rain," Banjo protested. "I helped him. It ain't right, to do him this way, when all he done was bring rain like he promised."

When Sheriff Gates started to wave Banjo out, Purdom intervened. "You took a horse and I was aiming to do something about it, Banjo. What's on your mind?"

BANJO told them, in detail and step by step, till the first bolt of forked lightning came. "It was pow'ful chemicals he used," Banjo said. "You folks are mistreating Brother Garth. It rained, didn't it? Brother Garth made it rain."

Purdom looked at the sheriff, then at Brother Garth, who didn't lift his head. "Banjo," the livery stable man said gently, "they overlook Garth on the trail. He had his rainmaking tools strapped to the saddle. In other words, he didn't have anything to do with the job. Ask Brother Garth if that's not so."

This time Brother Garth looked Banjo Shedd full in the eye. "It's the gospel truth, Banjo. That was tar in the bucket I gave you. And the whalebone, I bought off a feller back from Alaska. Gettin' the money was what I wanted. What's the use of denying it?"

Banjo Shedd assimilated this information. "You—didn't have anything to do with the rain?" he repeated.

Brother Garth shook his head.

Banjo Shedd lifted his shoulders. Outside the rain was still falling. "Then I was the only one trying to bring the storm," he said. "Tar and a whalebone rod! Maybe that was all. But it rained, didn't it?"

Somebody laughed. Purdom gave the scoffer a hard look. Silence fell upon the group as Banjo Shedd turned and walked from the room, head erect.

No more would he feel inferior to other men. He, Banjo Shedd had no doubts. The gift was his. Faith was jarred, but not shaken too much by Brother Garth's duplicity. The man had been traitor to a cause. But in ceasing to be a hero to Banjo, Brother Garth had bequeathed something infinitely more vital.

Banjo Shedd had made it rain.



"Death in Ambush"

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by

WALTER De STEIGUER

BURY ME DEEP IN A BOXCAR



By WILLIAM L. ROHDE

SINCE the lunch would go on the Chief's expense account, Mohawk Daniels had onion soup, followed by a porterhouse steak, blueberry pie with two scoops of ice cream, and three cups of coffee. On the last coffee he lit one of the Chief's New Hampshire Havanas and sighed. Civilization had its advantages.

Terence Liffy, chief of the Atlantic and Northern Railroad's police department, watched the younger man wryly. A lamb chop and milk were Liffy's diet—by order of the company surgeon.

"I wish I could put down a feed like that, Mo," the Chief sighed, "I can remember when—but it ain't the same as digging into a good steak right now."

Daniels grinned. "Life strikes its balance,

I couldn't afford to pay the check. You're solvent."

Liffy rubbed his red jowl. "Yea—well, you're back on the payroll as of today. Drake's personal order."

The younger man scowled at the mention of the A. & N.'s general manager. "Kiss him for me. He couldn't find a place for me when I came back from Japan, because I resigned before enlisting. Now he's on a spot and tells you to hire me again—to get him off it."

"Well, jobs are scarce. Maybe I can find somebody else."

Daniels grinned again, showing the flash of white teeth that took the grimness from his heavy jaw, and made him look younger than his thirty odd years. He knew Liffy—after four years under him as a railroad

. . . *and the Railroad Bull Came Incognito, Just Like the Correspondence Course Said*



bull—and he felt at ease. Besides, it *was* nice to be back on a steady payroll.

"O.K., I'm one of your slaves again. Now all I've gotta do is find those five boxcars that the headlines tell me are missing, with about fifty grand worth of merchandise in 'em."

The Chief nodded soberly. "You've guessed it—of course. I had Murph on the job. He got run over by a switcher in Gill yard."

Daniel's eyes clouded as he nodded. "I read about that, too. Murph was a good Joe. I met his wife once. Too bad."

"Yea—too, too bad. Do you think Murph was the kind of a lad to walk under a switcher at night or any other time?"

The cigar left Daniel's lips. "No . . .," he murmured reflectively, "no . . . you mean, maybe he didn't?"

Liffy shrugged. "It's listed as an accident. He was chopped into hamburg. Let's just

say somebody bopped him on the head and laid him on the ladder track. After that 0-6-0 went over him, nobody could prove a thing."

DANIELS was silent. He felt the start of a tingle at the base of his spine. Murph was a nice guy all the way through. You could get mad at anyone who'd cancel him out. You could get awful mad.

"Your face is getting red," Liffy said. "That's a good sign. You're going up to the Vermont Division, where those cars were last seen. Might check on what might have happened to Murph; it's a cold trail, but you've warmed up on 'em before."

"The lies and the Staties have been all over the ground. What'd they turn in?"

Liffy took a sheaf of papers from inside his tweed coat and handed them across the table. "Here's all the dope. Also your new pass. This case needs a railroad man. Even the FBI boys insisted the cars were lugged off to Canada or down the Conn River lines. You and I know they'd never get through the yards and waybill checks without getting stopped."

Daniels nodded. "You couldn't bribe all the crews that'd have to handle a long move. Those cars are up there somewhere."

The Chief nodded approval. "I'm glad to hear you say that. I've taken a riding from everybody. Most bright boys claim someone came down the Canadian National branch and took 'em away. Now that's possible—but damned unlikely. I think you oughta check everything else first."

"I will."

Chief Liffy put a twenty on the tray that held their meal check, and watched the blonde waitress who took it away.

"You want some help?" he asked. "I can give you Champoux and Phillips."

"Not at first. How about sending Champoux up to White River, where I can get him when I want him?"

"O.K., and I'll be ready with Phillips on this end. I'll be up there myself if you hit anything."

The change came back and the Chief tipped the good-looking girl generously. Daniels grinned. "Lovely girl. Do you eat here often?"

"Forget it," Liffy grunted. "The company surgeon mentioned that, too."

The two men crossed the street to the North Station, looking a little like father and son, down from Marblehead for a day in town. Mo Daniels stopped his superior inside the station arcade.

"So long, Chief. Don't send me any railroad messages. Send me commercial telegrams at the Raymond in Unity Falls. I'm not too well known up there. I'll go in cold, and see what I can dig up."

Liffy pulled his ear lobe in thought, and then nodded appreciatively. "Good deal, Mo. If you can get us off this one, you'll be set with the A. & N. for a long pull."

They shook hands, and Daniels went up to his room in the Manger. He packed and closed the folding suitcase hanging from the hook on the bathroom door, and called a bellboy.

The desk cashed the \$200 check which Chief Liffy had advanced him. He paid his bill and went downstairs to the ticket windows.

He bought a coach ticket to Unity Falls, checked his case at the baggage counter, and picked up a general timetable at the information desk.

NUMBER SEVEN had a new Diesel on her head end. The ride was a bit smoother than the last time Daniels had gone up into the mountains behind steam power. He spent the time reading the Chief's data and studying the map of the area in the timetable.

Among the sheets the Chief had given him was a consensus of what he had already known from the newspaper accounts. The A. & N. Railroad was missing five loaded boxcars from a section of its Vermont Division! The cars had disappeared during the past three weeks; two from Unity Falls yards; two from sidings at Gill; and one from the passing track at the town of Gill.

There was a scathing letter from the Association of American Railroads, pointing out that they had only lost one car in their history—and a series of reports from railroad detectives, the State Police, and an FBI man. The latter all followed the same line—someone must have sneaked in with a small switcher and run off with the cars, or railroad employees had spirited them away in regular freights.

Daniels matched his memory of the territory against the map. Unity Falls was a four-way junction, with yards located on the northwest side of town, where the branch led off through Chankoman, Foster, Babylon, and Gill "sidings" to Gill, where a Canadian National branch joined the A. & N.

Four passenger trains a day passed over the branch, as well as two regular freights and an unknown number of freight extras.

It was rough, winding, mountain railroading, with—as near as he could remember—a dozen industrial sidings and large marble quarries between Unity Falls and Gill. They would be the first question marks—cover them with a fine tooth comb.

To get the cars past Unity Falls or north in a regular train would require the co-operation of a dozen railroaders—yardmen, trainmen, and even signalmen and operators. It *could* happen, but add the fact that crews were always changing, and the cars had vanished over a period of time, the cars must be, by all logic, somewhere on the branch north of Unity Falls.

There was no mention of Murphy's death in the reports. Evidently no one linked the "accidental" death with the missing cars.

THE Raymond Hotel had not changed in the past four years. The same four Yankees—or their twins—sat in the lobby and watched passersby with keen eyes. When traffic was slow they engaged in target practice at the brass spittoons.

Daniels saw his case to a room hospital-clean and about as inviting. He washed and went down to the bar.

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up, and after downing two roast-beef sandwiches the railroad detective was where he wanted to be—highball in hand, almost among the group at the bar.

He had picked them correctly, all railroaders.

The young number grabber—yard-clerk—beat on Daniel's ears happily. The trainmen hardly deigned to listen to an office man.

"Yessir," he was at the repeating stage, but Daniels didn't mind, "we really handled cars during the war. Alla yards full. Eidy and niny car trains. Just lil trains now."

"Gee," Mohawk held up two fingers—

two more bar rye—"I don't see how you keep track of all those cars."

"Have to. Every car numbered. Numbers collected every time car moves."

"Didn't I see in the papers about the railroad losing some cars around here?"

The yard clerk pushed his stained felt hat—worn high crowned in imitation of the old timers—and hunched over the bar. For a moment Daniels thought he might start to cry.

"Isa shame," he said, "two of those cars went out of our yards here. I hadda answer so many questions. Just think how it looks—"

The yard clerk looked like a dead loss. He was too drunk to be acting. Mo had counted the shots and credited the boy for staying on his feet.

A man was buying drinks for the railroad gang who looked as if he belonged with a different crew. He wore a well-made hunting jacket and a red cloth cap.

Mo nudged his drinking partner. "Who's the big boy?"

"Thas Barto Flowers. Owns nice car. I wish I could get a new car—"

The man named Barto heard his name mentioned—the yard clerk bellowed a bit in his fog—and he turned.

"Well," he shouted, "look at junior! Someone must have given him an extra coke."

The trainmen laughed slightly—willing to be agreeable, but showing a shade of resentment that an outsider should ridicule one of their number.

The yard clerk straightened up and lost his balance, tumbling against Flowers who gave him a generous push. The boy stumbled along the bar and swayed.

"Cut out the shovin'," he said, "I didn' do nothin' to you."

Flowers laughed again. He had a good looking, over-polished face, and he spoke very precisely.

"It'd be a long day when you did do anything to me, junior. Just run along home and sleep it off."

WATCHING the man closely, Daniels could see that he was fairly well greased, but he carried it with the steadiness of experience or natural ability to hold a heavy load.

The yard clerk moved along the bar towards Flowers. Whether he was going to do anything or not didn't matter, for Flowers hit him with a clean right that laid him out on the floor.

Daniels told himself to keep his big mouth shut, and said, "Maybe you'd like to try that on me. The kid wasn't bothering you."

Flowers smiled and took a step towards Daniels. "Why, certainly," he said, like a man who has been offered a cup of tea, "I'm sure we can oblige a stranger."

Daniels stepped back and let the foot fly up in front of him. His own foot followed it, and Flowers landed on his back. Daniels stepped coolly away from the mahogany, waiting for the big man to get up.

It was all over. A small convention which included the bartenders and the hotel manager assembled between the two men. Daniels shrugged and went out the door to the lobby.

"Nice quiet little town you have here," he told the gray-haired man behind the desk as he left a call for six.

The old settler entered the time on his sheet.

"Yep," he said, barely opening his lips, as if he had treasure in his mouth.

The little room still looked to Daniels as if it belonged in a hospital. He drank two glasses of water and turned in.

THE bell on the old wall telephone, shrill as the tinkle of a toy train, roused Daniels. He had good use of the temperamental shower bath, which played surprise by shooting unexpected bursts of cold and hot water, and took a khaki field jacket and O.D. wool trousers from his wall pack. Into the pockets of the jacket he stuffed three rolls of 620 film, a dozen cigars, and a Mauser 7.65-MM automatic. An extra clip for the Mauser, containing eight shells, held down the left bellows pocket, and he slung an Argoflex camera over his shoulder.

In the coffee-shop he waded purposefully through a double orange-juice, bacon and scrambled eggs, and two cups of coffee. He ordered a white meat of chicken sandwich to go, and placed it with the clip in the jacket pocket. It completed the balance of the coat.

The morning was bright, clean, blue when

he walked away from the hotel towards the railroad yards. There was enough of a snap in the air to extend the lungs and put new-day zip in the senses. Going down the embankment to the yard-office he lit a Cleopatra—puffing and tasting appreciatively without inhaling. An O9a Class switcher was working the hump, its smoke making mushroom patterns against the cloudless sky, and Daniels unsnapped the leather flap covering the lenses of the Argoflex and took several pictures. A 2-8-0 Consolidation was heading up a westbound freight near the small gray office building, and he made quite a fuss about getting her in the proper focus and angle.

As he was making the second shot of the freight engine, the battered screen door of the yard-office was opened by a man in a brown, front-buttoned sweater and a battered felt hat. He came over to Daniels.

"Gonna put us in the movies?"

"I'd like to," the proper laugh went with the remark. "I'm just a railroad picture fan. You've got some nice subjects here."

"Yeah—little early in the day for good lighting, though. We had a camera fan excursion here last month."

"Well, well." Mo stuck out his hand. "They call me Mo."

The other man gave him a hard grip. "I'm Fred Patch—yardmaster."

Daniels showed the proper amount of respect and hesitance. "Glad to know you. I'd like to take a few more pictures . . . of course if it isn't allowed . . . the light is getting better. . . ." He paused. "My full name's Mo Daniels. I don't get much chance to take pictures in Boston. I'll be responsible . . . glad to sign a release. . . ."

Working his life away on the outskirts of the community, meeting no one but railroaders, the yardmaster showed the friendliness developed by many of his kind.

"You c'n take pictures. Just keep off the tracks, an' put the camera away if we have a wreck, or you see the general manager with the superintendent's wife."

They laughed at the broad joke. Daniels wondered what Drake would look like if he heard that one.

"Like to see the yard-office?" Patch continued.

"Sure—I'm a real bug on railroads."

The yardmaster enjoyed playing guide. It

took him an hour to usher Mo through the four small rooms of the office. He explained the telegraph—the train consists—the teletype—and was still going strong when they reached his personal office. Mo picked up a car list.

"Wow, look at those cars. There must be about eighty cars in this train. How do you keep track of 'em all?"

The explanation took ten minutes, until Mo could inject. "Didn't I read about you folks losing some cars near here—got 'em on the wrong list, eh?"

Fred Patch shuddered, leaning back in his battered oak chair with its legs heavily reinforced with wire. "Naw, we didn't get 'em on the wrong list. Dammit—the talking I've had to about those cars."

Daniels nodded sympathetically and slid a cigar across the desk. He lit a fresh one himself.

Patch bit the end off the gift and accepted the matches, before he said. "Two of those cars were last on record right here, but where they went—God only knows."

He puffed bitterly. "An' the questions. From the AAR and the GM's office and all the cops in the country."

"Gee. Where could anybody put stolen railroad cars? Where could they have gone?"

Patch shook his head. "I dunno, but I can guess at the general direction. You couldn't move 'em east or south from here on accounta the three-trick towermen and ticket agents at Unity Falls station—I mean by sneakin' up with a special engine or sumpin. They had to be taken up the line west, or off the branch at Gill to Canada. But there's a twenty-four hour train order office at Gill, so the cars *oughta* be between here and Gill."

Mo nodded. "Seems like. Have they searched?"

"Searched! Everybody and his brother has covered every bit of track and car on that line. Now the cops insist they might have gone south." He snorted, "Cops—they're all dumbbells."

Mo figured that was interesting—maybe right. "How about the grades?" he asked, "Could they have been rolled?"

"Maybe, from here. And there's nobody around the yards at night. This is a day yard-office only, but cars disappeared first from Gill and Gill sidings. There's a steep

grade up and down the hill at Gill sidings. They couldn't make it either way without power—the railroad dicks and the troopers tried it."

"Was there a railroad cop named Murphy around here once?"

Fred Patch looked up sharply at the question. "Yeah—he had an accident. Nice guy, too. You know him?"

"Met him once or twice." Mo sighed and stood up. "Well, I want to go up to Gill and get some pictures of the C.N. junction."

The yardmaster went to the door with him. "Like a ride?"

"Sure."

Patch shouted to an engineman in grease-stained coveralls. The power-pilot was reading his orders and clearances in front of the telegrapher.

"Hey, Chuckie. Wanna take this camera bug to Gill? Mo Daniels, an old friend of mine."

The man nodded. "Anything to bust a rule, Fred. Let's go, Mo."

Patch waved good-bye and laughed. "Don't pay any attention to that old buzzard. He never broke a standard rule in his life."

Chuckie called something over his shoulder that sounded like 'Pie-eating pencil-pushing delayer'.

DANIELS sat on the brakeman's cushion as the Consolidated pulled the slack out of her fifty car drag with a grinding of steel. The fireman called, "High green," as Chuckie eased the throttle bar a bit more towards his bent head. They clashed through the switches at the west end of Unity Falls freight yards and picked up speed on the downgrade of the branch.

The violence of the roar in an engine's cab surprised Daniels, but he kept his eyes glued to the rails as they twisted through the rock cut and green-brown hills toward Chinkoman, eight miles away. He looked for a place where a trick might be connected to the main line in a hurry, perhaps in a few hours on a dark night. It might be an old mine spur, or an industrial siding long forgotten.

His vigilance brought him nothing. The railroad roadbed wound through cut and over fills that made a hidden connection with the main impossible. They rolled through

Chinkoman, which consisted of a small wooden shack to shelter passengers from the weather and a single siding. There was a Pennsy car of coal on the side track and a half unloaded car of lumber.

The fifteen miles from Chinkoman to Foster was more of the same, but a mile from Foster they began to pass a number of factories, and several spurs that lead to marble quarries. It was impossible to check them properly from an engine cab.

Daniels shouted in the fireman's ear. "Hey, can I get off at Foster?"

The man turned his head above a blue bandanna that shielded his neck and nodded. "We'll stop for a set-out. We roll through town and back the cut in. Drop off."

"Right."

Daniels went over to Chuckie, glad that he had ridden ships in tough weather. The engine deck was worse than a DE's plates in a gale. He put his hand on the hogger's left shoulder. "Thanks for the ride, Chuckie." He shouted in the stocky man's ear. "I'm going to take some pictures at Foster."

The engineer grinned and raised his right hand in salute.

Daniels was in the gangway behind the fireman when they passed the Foster station. The fireman hooped an order aboard and stepped back out of the way. Daniels went down the ladder and hit the cinders at a full run. Chuchie waved his arm from the cab window, easing the Consolidated down for a stop forty car-lengths ahead. Daniels walked back along the track.

HE PASSED the Foster station again. It was a fairly large building with an oversize freight and express shed attached. Daniels remembered that there were several schools in the surrounding countryside—ticket and express business would be good. There were no houses in the little valley that sheltered the railroad and the station, but three macadam roads radiated into the hills and forests.

Through the bay window that housed the operator's desk, Daniels saw the man who had hooped the order to the fireman and a girl who appeared to be the ticket agent or clerk. He waved at them and continued walking back along the train. The caboose was stopped when he reached it, and a hun-

dred yards further back he passed the flagman seated on a rail.

"Hiyuh," the man said. He was a cheerful youngster of about twenty-five—probably left on the roster from the wartime hirings.

"Hello," Daniels said. "Gonna be here long?"

"Naw. Set off three and pick up one."

"Thanks. Say, who handles the switching around here? I mean, where's the nearest engines?"

The youngster got up and rubbed the cold place. "There's an 0-6-0 works out of Gill. Maybe comes down here once a week."

Before Daniels could reply he went on. "If you're tryin' to figure out where the missin' cars went, Bud, you can forget the Gill switcher. My Dad's the hogger an' he's been on her nine years. They've questioned him silly. He's gonna poke the next guy that tries to tie him up with those cars."

"Thanks again," Daniels said, "I hope he does."

About a mile from the caboose Daniels reached the first siding west of Chinkoman. He walked the length of it and began to work back along the dozen or so tracks he had passed.

He walked to the end of each of the spurs, searching carefully for a possible extension back of the bumpers or long blocks piled at the end of the iron rails. Most of the rail surfaces were heavily rusted near the ends, but he left nothing to chance. Whenever he found spotted cars, he looked them over on all sides for possible number changes or camouflage.

He found nothing. He followed one long spur back into a cut in the hills, even though the weeds grew high between the ties. It ended beside two small quarries that had surrendered their quotas of marble and had been abandoned. He inspected the end of the rails—and with a sigh concluded that nothing had traveled on the little branch for at least six months.

He passed Foster again and followed up all the sidings to the west. The three little used factory cut-offs were fruitless, and the last was a spur leading to a quarry where trucks and cranes were laboring with roaring motors. He followed the rails, bright with the look of use, back to their ends. One passed a building with the sign "Flow-

ers Marble and Engineering Company," erected on top of it in bright blue paint.

There were three branches to the spur. One ended against a solid hillock—another stopped beside an open pit where two flat cars were being loaded with marble blocks.

He checked the end of the track—it led into trees that had been standing for two hundred years. He was following the last tangent of light rail toward where it circled a pile of earth when he heard a hail.

"Hey, you."

Daniels turned. A man was coming toward him from the working pit. He had evidently climbed out when he saw Daniels pass by the flat cars. It was the man called Barto Flowers.

"Hello," Mo answered and stood still.

"Well, I'll be—" Flowers recognized him. He still wore the red cap and the tailored hunting jacket, but he had on polished laced boots, instead of the trousers and shoes he had worn when he kicked at Daniels.

He came up to the railroad detective and stuck out his hand. "Say," the tones were over-polished and rounded, like an Oxford accent acquired in two months, "I want to apologize for last night. Too much booze."

DANIELS shook the hand briefly. "That's all right."

"Good. What can I do for you?"

"I'm a camera fan. Looking for some good pictures of the pits."

"Did you get the flat cars and the blocks?"

"I've got some like that. I'm looking for the unusual."

A bulldozer roared past the men towards the pile of earth. They jumped back.

"Well," Flowers said, "you can't wander around here. You'll be costing me some accident money. But if there's anything I can show—"

"I guess not. I'll be on my way."

"O.K.," Flowers walked towards the railroad with him, "try the quarries off Gill sidings. They're much bigger."

"Thanks."

Daniels followed the track he had checked with his eyes, tracing its course past the earth dump. He cursed inwardly when he saw that it circled the point where the bulldozer was working and ended in a pile of sand.

Flowers stopped at the railroad right-of-way. "So long, good hunting."

Daniels nodded. "So long."

THE sun said it was near noon. Mo glanced at his watch—11:45. The day had warmed and he felt thirsty. He went into the Foster station and carefully rinsed the communal cup before drinking. He went outside and sat on a baggage truck in the sun to eat his sandwich.

The first half was comfortably down when the girl came out of the station. Daniels had seen her through the bay window, but she gained through nearness. She had black hair that fluffed up as though it had a mind of its own, and she glanced once at Daniels with eyes that showed friendly interest. She had a figure that her blue tailored suit hid with promises. Daniels spoke before she could turn back.

"Just taking the air?"

"No," her voice was deep, "drinking some of it in. Did you ever smell a railroad station for eight hours?"

Mo laughed. "No. Can't you get the place air-conditioned?"

"You can't even get a supply of paper towels."

"Write to the president of the railroad." He swung his feet down off the truck. "Don't let me drive you in. I'm friendly."

Her eyes opened a little at that and Daniels could see that they were large and gray. "You must be. That's the smoothest contact that's been made in a long time."

Daniels white teeth flashed, and the girl seemed reassured. She came over and leaned on the truck.

"Aren't you lost up here in the country?"

"Sort of. But I've got two hobbies. Taking pictures and dancing."

"It's a nice place for taking pictures."

"Yea, but where do they do the dancing around here? My name's Mo Daniels."

The girl looked him over with considerable care. She discounted the GI pants and coat against the camera and white shirt with spread collar.

"Maybe it ought to be Speed Daniels," she said. "They have good music at the Rosario in Unity Falls."

"Quite a coincidence. I'm staying at the Raymond. Guess I'll go down to the Rosario tonight. Say, about nine. And I'll be wearing

a double-breasted gray suit that wasn't bought off the ready-made rack."

The girl whistled. "My name is Rita Parks. Is there any wolf in your family tree?"

"Not even as a nurse."

From the bay window came the rapping of metal on glass. Daniels saw a heavy, sour-looking man peering at them.

"The spare operator," Rita said. "All right, Daniels. I'd take a lot of chances to dance with a smooth talking man who wears a decent suit. But I've long nails."

Mo grinned again. "They call me nice mannered Mo."

"Say," he called as she turned to enter the station. "How can I get to Babylon and Gill without walking?"

"Section foreman in ten minutes," she replied and went in.

IT WAS hardly ten minutes later that a motor car putted out of the woods that lined the track toward Chinkoman. The solitary rider of the car threw out the clutch and stopped at the station. He came out in a minute with a running order in his hands to find Mo gazing at his gasoline galloper.

"Hello," Mo was direct, "will you give me a ride up to Babylon or wherever you're going?"

As he spoke he held out his hand with four cigars in it. The man took the smokes and walked around the track-car.

"Climb on," he said.

They clattered through Babylon like a Model T running on the rims. The little station was a second Chinkamon, with only two small sidings, both empty. Daniels could see that they were both bounded by the highway.

Two miles beyond Babylon they encountered the up-grade to Gill sidings. A country road paralleled the tracks until the foreman stopped his straining mount at the small collection of yard tracks that were Gill sidings.

"End of the line," he said, "help me lift the car off."

Mo gave him a hand, and then walked down the tracks to the spurs that led to the quarries.

Darkness was falling when he finished the job of patrolling each and every bit of track in the quarries and in the small Gill

yards. It had been a long job—a rough one on his legs and shoes—and absolutely fruitless. If there were any missing cars in the Gill sidings, or any way of running them off other than along the regular rails, it would have to be by sky-hooks or atomic power.

Mo muttered to himself and walked through the Gill yards towards the town of Gill. He'd have to get a bus or taxi to take him back to Unity Falls. A bus used to run every hour. It would take him—

"Spang!"

The sound whipped from the metal of the hopper car which he was passing. It was followed by the blast of the shot from somewhere behind him, in the gathering gloom of the freight yards. He hit the cinders and squirmed under the drag of cars, Mauser in his hand.

Five minutes or more passed without a sound or a target. Daniels moved towards the point from which the shot had come, crouched low, peering under the lines of freight cars that were standing on each side of him. The sound of a switch engine echoed from the hills to the west, probably working at Gill, but the yards were deserted.

He was about three cars from the end of the string when he heard the creaking sound. Too late he realized it came from the top of the boxcar beside him. He leaped to one side and threw up the Mauser. Blackout.

HE WAS back in the engine room of the Liberty. He was sleeping with his head on a deck plate. The engines sounded bad. Have to get up and see where the Third was. Or was it the First's trick? The engine sounded louder. He opened his eyes. It was awful dark. A rumbling string of crashes above him! We're hit! The darkness cleared a little as senses sharpened.

He pushed himself to his hands and knees, and felt wood and cinders beneath his hands. He hit his head on something hard and the world threatened to leave him again. He thrust out a hand. What's that? He held onto it and felt it vibrate. A long piece of metal. A string of clashes were approached him now. Suddenly he realized where he was—lying beneath a railroad car, and a locomotive was taking out the slack!

He pulled himself forward with a des-

perate lunge as the clashes roared over his head and a huge wheel rushed towards him. He went over the rail, close enough to the approaching metal disc for it to pin his heel. He wrenched himself away at the cost of a crushed shoe and bruised foot. It had caught the flange instead of the outer rim—! He knelt on his hands and knees and lost the chicken sandwich.

Daniels limped into a dingy bar on the outskirts of Gill. He ordered a glass of water, a cup of coffee, and a shot of bourbon. He drank the water first and went into the small washroom. The man in the mirror looked better than might be expected. A thread of blood had oozed from under the black hair and dried on his forehead. He plugged the washbowl with paper, since there was no stopper, and soaked his head in the cold water.

When he combed his hair he looked almost normal, but the ache stayed in his head. He went through his pockets. The Mauser and clip were missing. He looked in his wallet—a single five! Whoever conked him wanted it to look like an accident, when Daniels turned up as chopped meat, but couldn't pass up some easy dough.

He swore. In the detective books they never shook you down if they were going to kill you. The private eye always had his dough when he escaped. He supposed he could kiss his camera good-bye.

Daniels sipped the coffee and the bourbon, letting the warmth and the liquor ride through him. He was beginning to feel better, and the better he felt the madder he got. Murphy's death was no accident, lightning might strike twice, but not with the same pattern.

He found a filling station on the highway, and hitched a ride to Unity Falls. In the front of the friendly salesman's car he relaxed and thought it over.

The yard clerk—could anyone be that naive? Fred Patch—too friendly for a yardmaster? Barto Flowers—more phony than his speech? Rita Parks—a shrewd girl from the country? The sour-faced operator at Foster—a spare operator in more ways than one? The guy or guys who shot at him and slugged him? The thinking had his head aching again when the salesman stopped his Frazer at the Raymond Hotel. Daniels thanked him and went up to his room.

HE PUT through a call to Terence Liffy at his home. He heard the Medford operator make the connection and then the voice of the A. & N. police chief.

"Hello. That you, Mo?"

"Yea, Chief. You were right about Murph's death being no accident. I nearly got the same treatment."

Chief Liffy whistled as he asked for and got the details. Then he popped the \$64 question. "Who did it—or who is the best bet?"

Mo hated to say it. "Damned if I know. But they're not greenhorns. They know their business."

"You can say that again. What's next?"

"Wire me some dough, and you might as well have Champoux move down here to the Raymond. I've got one more lead that might pop this thing."

"O.K., Mo. Want me up there yet?"

"No, Chief. I'll contact you."

"Good boy. Watch yourself."

Daniels hung up and used the shower before he dressed himself in the double breasted gray. He slipped his spare gun, wishing it were something heavier than a .25 Colt, into the inside breast pocket. A clean handkerchief held it upright without bulging. It was five minutes to nine when he went down and walked along the street towards the red neon sign of the Rosario Cafe.

Rita Parks was sitting alone in a booth near the door. She had an old-fashioned before her that was nearly gone. The blue suit had been replaced by a dress of green silk that did no harm to her skin, hair, or figure. Daniels whistled softly as he sat down.

"Glad you came," he said, "and glad that dress came with you."

"Thank you. I came to see you in that suit. It really does fit."

He grinned as he ordered two old-fashioned. "Feel like dancing?"

Rita nodded. Mo forced himself to forget his headache. When Rita snuggled up during the second chorus of *As Time Goes By*, it took no effort to forget everything. They danced three numbers and sat down. His bruised foot ached a little.

"How did everything go at Foster today?" Mo asked after the small talk collapsed.

"Just grand."

"How's the spare Op?"

She made a face. "Ted? Oof. It's a crime to put a girl out in the country with a man like that. He's all hands."

Daniels laughed. A man came into the Rosario and stopped at their table. It was the yard clerk. "Hi," he greeted Daniels, "just wanta say thanks for last night."

"That's all right. Sit down."

Yard clerk introduced himself as Marcus Zak, and after four more old-fashioned everything was first names.

Daniels brought up Fred Patch. There was little comment except that he was a good yardmaster. He mentioned the missing cars, but no new ideas were suggested. Finally he turned the talk to Barto Flowers.

"Quite a boy," he said, "must have been around by the way he talks."

Marcus grimaced. "He was in the army a while. Railroad troops in France."

Rita added, "That's a tough gang of workers he's using now. I don't know what contracts they have."

Something clicked in Daniel's mind. "Say," he asked, "are those trucks up at the quarry licensed for the road?"

Marcus nodded. "Most of 'em. They go all over."

"Do they have a winch truck, or a big tractor job that carries a cable?"

The yard clerk nodded again. "Sure. You can bet they're all owned by the bank, though."

Daniels did some more thinking while Marcus made some uncomplimentary comments on the credit rating of the Flowers Company. Then he yawned.

"I hate to break this up," he said, "but I feel like little air. How about a walk, Rita?"

"Why not?"

She smiled at Marcus and they went out into the brisk air of the evening. There were no stars out, but Daniels felt better as they walked down the street. He breathed deeply.

"Say, is there any place we can hire a car?"

"Oh, Mr. Daniels—with or without gas?"

He had to laugh.

"You're all right, delicious. But I need a little transportation."

Rita stopped in front of a '46 two-door Ford. "How's this?"

He stared. "Yours?"

"Sure. Don't get ideas. I worked all during the war and saved my money."

She rummaged in her handbag and handed him the keys. "You drive, Mo. It isn't far to Foster."

The V-8 engine was whipping them along the concrete when Daniels checked his watch. It was 11:10.

He wheeled the car into a white painted drive-in and cut the motor.

"I just remembered I didn't have anything to eat lately," he told Rita. "Let's take aboard a little chow. What time do operations stop at the Flowers' Company? Nights, I mean?"

Rita lit a pair of cigarettes. "About eleven or twelve. They usually work under the floodlights."

"Uh-uh." He ordered four hamburgers and coffee on two. "Well, I'm sorry to cut our first date a bit short—but there'll be a repeat."

Rita puffed contentedly. "You haven't cut anything short. If you think you're going to prowl around the Flowers place without me you're crazy."

He blinked. "Now wait a minute. I didn't say anything about prowling. I'm just taking you home."

"And walk back to Unity Falls?"

"I'll hitch a ride."

"You've been in New England longer than that."

He smoked in silence until Rita turned on the radio. A man with a voice like the portent of doom talked about world news as though he planned it, and then made a smooth transition from murdered civilians in Greece to the hair tonic that would positively fix your love life. Rita found a smooth dance band.

The food was put away in silence that became a bit more friendly as the coffee took hold. By the time he gunned the V-8 towards Foster again, Daniels was grinning. Rita caught the smile.

She said, "If you shut off the engine this side of the hill, you can coast all the way to Foster station. It's closed, you know, and you could put out your light—"

Mo corrected her, "Your lights. Now look, sugar, you can come for the ride and take me back to town. But you stay in the car and wait for me. O.K.?"

"If I don't see anything interesting, I'll

stay right in the car and wait for you."

"Good girl. Probably nothing in my ideas, anyway."

The hell there isn't, he thought. It *has* to be this way.

HE BRAKED the lightless car to a stop beside the Foster station, and got out quietly, easing the door closed.

"Sit tight," he whispered, and headed across the tracks.

He never knew that an empty night in the hills could seem so alive. He stumbled on the ties of the Flowers siding, and there was a steady murmur from the blackness of the trees and bushes. The breeze was talking to the leaves.

He held the small pen-light in his left hand, but did not use it. The Colt now weighed down his right-hand coat pocket. It felt better that way. He followed the right hand branch of the little spur with his feet, the bit of track he had not explored, but had seen end in a pile of sand. It seemed like an hour before his shoes munched up the sand heap—he had reached the end of the siding.

Daniels stood uncertainly for a minute, thinking unpleasant thoughts. Here we are, hero. Now turn around and go home. There's nothing here—and you couldn't see it if there was.

He felt the end of the rail again with his toe. The sand above it was firm and solid. He put the pen-light in his pocket and crouched down in the darkness, scooping sand away from the iron like a hound clearing a buried bone. His heart beat more quickly; he was uncovering the rail, but there was more and more of it!

After a few minutes of digging Daniels stood up and wiped his forehead with a gritty hand. He'd moved a lot of sand, but he hadn't reached the end of the iron. Grimly, he began climbing across the pile of sand, trying to follow a straight line in the darkness.

He plowed and slipped forward for about ten minutes before he slid down onto firm ground again. He imagined he had passed the mound of earth he had seen the other day. He took a few steps to one side, and then the other—he could feel no railroad tracks.

The rays of the pen-light revealed bare

ground to his right, but almost beyond the glow to his left, hugging a rise, were the prettiest pair of rails he had ever seen. He ran over to them and flashed the light on the iron. It was rusted, but the rust was crushed and flaked with the passage of recent wheels! Here and there the skeletons of twigs and weeds were crushed to pulp across the rail. He began to follow the tracks.

Daniels let his feet do the tracking, using a flash of light only when he had to. The roadbed seemed to go uphill for a few hundred yards, and then top a rise and start down. He stumbled and staggered along in the blackness for what seemed like hours.

It was the change of ballast that saved his life. He felt the soft earth, leavened with marble chips, change to solid marble dust or crushed rock. He took a few more steps and flashed on the light. He was looking into a forty foot drop that ended in a rock ledge with a pool of black water beyond!

Daniels stepped back. He turned the light on the rails again. They still looked old and rusty, but something had passed over them. Not enough traffic to shine the steel—perhaps just a few cars! Some of the abandoned quarries were hundreds of feet deep. It would be some job raising the car bodies and trucks. Why didn't the box cars float? Whoever put them in the drink must have emptied them first. There might—

"Don't move, wise guy," the voice was strong and hoarse, accented by the glare of two powerful lights that nearly blinded Daniels. He stood still.

The voice was cool, slow and precise. "There's a BAR on your belly—Browning Automatic Rifle—you know what they can do. Put your hands up and face the quarry."

Daniels put his hands up and turned as he was told. A BAR throws a lot of .30 caliber.

The methodical voice spoke again. "Search him, Clint. Do a real job. If you move, wise guy, I'll shoot your belly button off and never even burn Clint's coat."

Daniels didn't move. The man called Clint took the Colt .25 and everything else that was loose. "How'll you like that camera," Mo asked, careful to move only his lips, "and how about my dough."

Clint laughed. "You won't need 'em, nousey. I'll keep 'em for you."

The precise voice cut them off. "All right. Walk down the track to the office building. Make a play if you want to—you'll be easier to handle dead."

Daniels led the way to the wooden building, his path lighted by the beams of two flashlights. He wished he hadn't cut his GI insurance in half.

THE room was lighted by two bare bulbs. It contained a cheap single-pedestal desk and a few chairs. The litter on the desk top and the dusty windows looked unused, as though someone had thrown the room together to look like an office. It reminded Daniels of a quickie set in an old movie.

The man called Clint pushed him into a chair, and the precise voice moved around the room until he could confirm his guess. Barto Flowers stood in front of him with a BAR cradled comfortably in his arm.

"Well, snooper," he said, "it looks like you've put your foot in it this time. Get some rope, Clint, plenty of it, and do a real seamanlike job on this laddie."

The false refinement in Barto's tone grated on Mo's nerves. A far-gone sadist ought to sound like that.

"What's the idea," it was the best he could think of, "I haven't done anything but trespass. You're mighty touchy."

Flowers sat on the corner of the desk. The flash-guard of the Browning was six feet from Daniel's chest, and the big man kept one finger in the trigger guard. Daniels sat very still.

"The play is the thing," Flowers misquoted. "Act out the part to the very last. Keep the show going. But every scene must end, and most are tragedies."

Daniels bet himself even money Barto had started by pulling wings off flies and sniping at dogs with a .22.

Clint came in with a coil of half-inch manilla line and laced Mo to the chair until the railroad detective could not move a limb. The knots he could see were all squares and bowlines, and interlaced the wood until he was practically part of the furniture. Flowers continued to enjoy himself.

"The railroad bull came incognito," he said, "just like the correspondence course said. He solved part of the mystery, but was captured by the villains. The next chapter should be the arrival of reinforcements."

Mo felt like spitting in his eye. He wondered if he could reach that far. If Rita had sense enough to take a ride for some help, he'd help Barto recite the last verse—by keeping time for him on his skull.

The door opened and Rita was pushed into the room. The two men behind her looked like truck drivers who didn't care whether they stole the trucks before driving them.

"Nice going, Al," Flowers greeted the first man, "bring the Ford around back of the warehouse. We'll take it with the others."

Flowers ordered Clint to tie Rita to a chair. He used the rest of the coil of manilla and did his usual thorough job.

"You and Sam go down to the switch," Flowers told him when he had finished the last knot "they might let that car down to us anytime. Tell Al to start working the bulldozer as soon as he gets the Ford out of sight."

The men went out, and Flowers laid the BAR on the desk and lit a cigarette. The gun might as well have been in China as far as Daniels was concerned. He wondered if he could still wiggle his toes. Circulation was stopping. Flowers watched him and grinned.

"No," he said slowly, tasting the words, "there won't be any last minute escapes. You'll still be in those chairs a hundred years from now."

Rita had sat white-faced and breathless until now. She suddenly threw back her head and let out a scream that shook the window. Flowers laughed delightedly—an unusual high giggle at the end sounding grotesque as it came from his husky frame.

"I think you'd better stop that, my dear. There's no one within several miles, I'm sure, but I must be careful. Just cry if you want to."

Rita's eyes flashed at him. "I'm not yelling because I'm scared, you scum. I hope somebody *can* hear me."

"Tut, tut. Names—names." But Daniels thought he saw a red flush on the thick neck.

MO SMILED at her, although he felt like groaning. "Never mind, kid. The boys will find us in a few minutes."

"There aren't any boys," Flowers said, "so you can stop playing that tune. Mr. Champoux did leave the hotel at White

River, but he certainly won't be able to trace you for some time. Oh, yes, Daniels," he pulled a yellow envelope from his pocket with exaggerated politeness, "a telegram came for you tonight. One of my men picked it up."

He opened the envelope. "I'll read it for you. 'Forty thousand dollars' worth of freight missing from cars routed through Vermont Division. Check and trace. Department of Police. A. & N. Railroad.' "

Daniels scowled. "That runs your take over a hundred grand. Where'd you learn your business?"

Flowers touched a match to the message blank and watched it burn. "In France. We used to take it by the trainload, then."

"Yea. I was one of the guys who put your kind behind barb wire. Too bad I missed you."

"Isn't it? I believe you got several friends of mine life terms."

"At Cherbourg?"

"That's right. It was a wonderful training for my present business. I did well after you were sent to Japan."

Daniels swallowed. His throat was tight. "The enemy should have paid you, too. You fouled the boys up front plenty for 'em."

Somewhere outside a bulldozer roared. Evidently Al was starting to push the sand off the concealed spur.

"Gimme a cigarette," Mo grunted.

"Sorry," Flowers lit one for himself. "That's only in Mexican wars or French executions. The sooner I can have you and the girl carried out and placed in the boxcar, the better I'll like it. When we push the car into the quarry with you in it—I'll feel even better."

Rita gasped. "You beast!" She made a sound like a sob and was quiet.

Daniels raced his brain overtime and got nowhere. His legs ached from the tight ropes. He made conversation.

"You sure fooled us, by using a winch to haul the cars over the hump at Gill. But don't forget—someone else is going to figure that out."

Flowers shrugged. "The highway has been there right along, and no one thought that a truck might haul the cars along the grade. Anyway—will you care very much? At the bottom of the quarry?"

"I dunno. How deep is the water?"

"Your bravado is touching. The quarry is so deep that it'll take a diver to reach you—and a professional at that. I doubt if it will ever be tried."

He glanced at his watch. "My men should have started the automobile car rolling by now. I think I'll keep an eye on things until it comes in. Too bad you two aren't close enough to kiss each other good-bye."

He chuckled and went out, taking the BAR with him.

Daniels grinned at Rita, although he felt more like cursing. "Chin up, kid. Can you move at all?"

"Not an inch," she shook her head from side to side until her eyes watered. "I'm really fixed."

Daniels tried the same maneuver. "Me too. Well, someone will find us soon."

RITA'S head sagged a little and Daniels made conversation. The little room was depressing. "Just think, when they dropped those cars down from Gill they had to ride 'em up towards Chinkoman and back, like a switchback. Because the Flowers siding leads off west."

Rita did not answer. Daniels subsided.

The bulldozer continued to grunt and roar. Daniels' eyes were fixed moodily on the door. They narrowed as it inched open. Then, through the narrow slit, came the head of—Marcus Zak!

"Get in," Daniels hissed, "and shut that. Got a knife?"

He didn't stop to wonder if Marcus was working with Flowers. That would be too much. The yard clerk scuttled across the floor and sawed at the manilla with a pocket-knife.

"Gee—" he said, "you sure figured it out. Is that why they tied you up? I follered you all the way from the drive-in. Boy, is Patch gonna be excited—he's my uncle."

Daniels hissed again, urging the boy on. "Hurry up on those ropes. Then get Rita free."

In a minute he was out of the chair and searching the room for a weapon. They were not out of the woods yet. Flowers had at least four well-armed men, and it might not be possible to reach the car.

"Where's your car?" he asked Zak.

"At the station."

Daniels groaned. The two men waiting at

the switch near the main line would probably find it. He went through the desk. Not even a pair of scissors! Just as Rita was freed, and staggered to her feet with a gasp, he found—an old fashioned heavy umbrella!

He felt the point. It was ground sharp, a habit in the back country, where winter ice is treacherous. It was their only weapon.

Rita was swaying on her feet. He put an arm around her and massaged her arms roughly. "Can you make it?" he asked. "We've gotta do some movin'. Maybe some running."

Rita lifted her head and tried to smile. "You bet," she said, "let's get out of here."

Daniels paused, his hand on the door. "You don't know how tough this is," he told Zak, "but *don't get caught*. We'll try and make the woods and *keep going*."

The other two nodded. Daniels opened the door and hurried through it.

The Flowers Company working lights were on, spattering pools of light here and there in the blackness. Off to the left a moving glow marked the bulldozer, but ahead, towards the railroad line and the station, darkness was complete.

The door thudded shut behind them when a man trotted around the corner of the office building. The light over the door was in his face. It was the man called Sam, possibly coming to report Zak's car?

He was too close to Daniels to stop. His hand sped towards his hip pocket as he saw the group. The railroad detective was carrying the umbrella at high port, but the man was too close for a thrust. He whipped the oak handle at the chin in front of him—butt stroke!

Sam went down, rolling and shouting. From behind them came the tune of a Chicago piano. 'Flam-flam-flam—' three shots and then silence. Marcus Zak gurgled horribly and fell forward onto his face.

Daniels jumped forward away from the light and looked toward the sound. Barto Flowers was hunched over the BAR, desperately trying to work the cocking lever!

"Run for the station," Daniels gasped, giving Rita a shove away from the door. The man on the ground had his hand at his hip again. Daniels kicked him in the head as hard as he could, and ran after Rita.

THE two figures stumbled and galloped, covering the ground but risking their ankles. Over the rails and ties and bits of lumber, until Daniel's back began a definite itching. How long would the stoppage hold up Flowers? Bless the BAR's that needed good care or else—

He guided Rita around a light on a pole—afraid to go through the glare—afraid to lose any time. He got an arm under the girl's elbow and helped her pick them up and lay them down.

They were past the lights, and running alongside the spur that connected the quarries and the railroad line. Somewhere ahead would be the man watching the switch.

"Get behind me," Daniels gasped, leaping past Rita, "man ahead. Keep running."

He narrowed his eyes. Was that a blur ahead? They'd be outlined against the lights of the yard!

'Flam-flam-flam-flam-flam'—Flowers had cleared the stoppage, but his targets were in darkness! He'd be following them now, a vicious, wet-mouthed killer with a heavy weapon—eager for a quick kill.

There came a sound ahead of them. A questioning grunt, then, "Hey, who's that?"

Daniels still carried the umbrella. He held it low, right hand back at the handle, left hand forward on the cloth, ready for the "long thrust."

An instant later he saw the man—just a heavier piece of blackness in front of him—and the man saw him! 'Wham!'

The roar of a handgun in his face seemed twice as loud as the bursts of the Browning. He felt a blow on his right side, like the smash of a club, but a second later he was stabbing in the long thrust at the figure in the dark. The running lunge carried him into the man and over him as his target went down. The umbrella twisted from his grasp, its sharpened iron point embedded in the man beneath him.

Daniels scrambled to his feet. His hand touched the handle of the improvised bayonet and he tried to withdraw—the point would not come free.

The man on the ground did not move, and for a moment there was only the sound of his groaning breath, like the moan of a stuck pig at the hands of a clumsy butcher. Daniels began to search wildly on the dark ground for the gun.

"The station," he gasped as he scored his palms on the rough cinders and stones, "wait for me there."

The sound of Rita's stumbling trot went away from him towards the railroad. He glanced after her a moment later, while he pulled the fallen man to one side and pawed the ground under him. His jaw clamped together when he found he could see the building looming in the night. He glanced up—the moon, coyly hidden beneath the clouds until now, was peeping through a kidney shaped opening.

He looked back along the spur track. A figure was walking deliberately past the last of the lights, towards him. It was Flowers, with the BAR cradled in his arms! As soon as the hunter's eyes focused, the automatic rifle would do the talking.

Desperately Daniels passed his torn and aching hands in wide circles, peering at the earth with his nose inches from it.

He felt like roaring—and found he was muttering. "Let me have that gun—oh, let me have that gun. We don't want to go out cold turkey—"

His hands came back to the now still body of the man he had charged, and with a last hope he followed the arms down to their ends. The right hand was still firmly curled around the butt of some kind of automatic! He wrenched it free.

EVEN as he gained the weapon his eyes flicked towards the lights of the yard. Dimly outlined against the glow at his back he saw the figure of Flowers, crouched and peering straight at him!

Daniels found the trigger guard and fired one shot in Flowers' general direction as he dove for the ground. The BAR yammered eight or ten times while he rolled into the small ditch beside the track. He could not hear the slugs—probably Flowers was not holding the BAR down.

The railroad detective jumped to his feet and sprinted for the station. It was an even chance that the Browning's twenty-shot magazine was empty, after the bursts in the yard and the stoppage. Rita's shout guided him to the platform before the bay windows.

"Mo, here. I broke in the window."

The moon still cast its dim, unwanted light upon them. On the mast over the sta-

tion the green order-board light glowed sickly, casting a few gleaming spears of brightness downward from the edge of a poorly fitted lense. It was a fine setting for funerals.

"Climb through the window," Daniels whispered quickly, "look out for the broken glass."

He stared back along the dark tracks as Rita went through the opening and landed somewhere with a crash. Where Flowers had been there was a darker shape upon the ground. Daniels could imagine the cautious killer, careful of his own skin, lying prone to unbutton the empty can on the BAR and shove on a full magazine. It was no target for an unknown automatic—and an unknown number of shells. Daniels crawled through the window.

"Get the telephone?" he almost shouted. A sob answered him. "It's dead. It fell to the floor with me."

He moved towards the voice and located the girl's hands in the darkness. He took the old-fashioned upright telephone from her and felt along the wire. It had pulled from the box!

"Down on the floor," he said. "Push the pedal for the dispatcher's 'phone."

"I've got it," Rita's voice was shaky, but with an undercurrent of brave control. "I don't think it will work."

"Why?" Daniels gasped.

"The operator grounds it every time he goes off."

"Where."

"I—I don't know. The box is on the wall."

Daniels thought of the junction boxes he had seen, with their innumerable pegs. He swore feelingly and ran his hands over the operator's long shelf. The phone on its extension swivel swung towards him when he touched it and he put the headpiece to his ear and barked into the mouthpiece.

"Hello—hello—"

There was no answering sound. The line was dead.

HE PULLED a packet of matches from his pocket and crouched beneath the shelf that flanked the bay window. In the quick glow of a single match he saw that the gun he had taken from the man on the track was a Colt .32 automatic. One more

light allowed him to slip the butt catch and check the magazine. He dared not take time to count the remaining shells carefully, but it looked like four—one in the chamber—five! Five slugs to stop two or more men and probably an armory.

"Stay down," he grunted, and thrust his head out of the broken window.

His pupils ached as he searched the darkness. The blur was gone from the ground where Flowers had been. As he searched the terrain for movement he thought of the well-armed men who could be moving in on them. How many? Where?

A patch of darkness straight out from the building caught his eye. A shade of movement. Flowers had circled out to cover the station. Stop him from moving in.

He estimated the range at 150 yards. Too much, but—he aimed about a foot above the black patch and squeezed the trigger.

The instant the slug was on its way he fell back across the shelf and onto the floor. He could hear Rita's strained breath beside him.

Br-r-r-am! Glass showered them, as lead chunked and hammered through the windows and paper-thin walls of the old building. Chips of wood flew from the walls in noisy ricochets, and a metallic clang rang like a gong as one bullet found metal.

Daniels counted an eight or ten burst—you could never be sure. He bounced to his heels when the cannonade paused, and fired another shot at the dim shape in the darkness. He had hardly hit the floor when the balance of the Browning's magazine ripped through the wood above them.

"Oh—" Rita gasped, "something hit me."

Daniels grabbed for her in the blackness. "Where? Bad?"

"No-o," the girl was fighting for self-control. "A piece of wood or something, I think."

Daniels scrambled to his feet and stood swaying against a side wall of the room. He lifted his right foot and felt a squishy sensation on his foot—blood was filling his shoe! Then that light-headed feeling was real!

"Look," he said, "I don't think Flowers carried more than one magazine with him. Make a run for it out back and through the woods. I'll hold 'em."

Rita groaned. "I'll try—but I don't think I can go far. My ankles hurt—I'm—"

"All right, kid," Daniels soothed her, "we'll see it out together."

He didn't tell her why he couldn't go with her. The top of his head felt soft, and there was a singing in his ears. How much blood could you lose?

A rumbling roar came towards them from the quarries. Daniels peered cautiously from the window. The bulldozer!

He tried to think as the lights of the big machine crawled down the road on the opposite side of the tracks. Tanks against them now! How close was a .32 to a bazooka?

He watched the lights on the bulldozer wink out as it circled and began a frontal approach on the station.

"Look, Rita," he said, "if those babies know anything, they'll figure us to be on the floor. The next bursts will be low. Can we get up anywhere?"

"The ticket rack," she said in a moment, "over here."

He followed the girl's voice, and felt the rippled wood front of a closed ticket case. He put the Colt in his pocket and found the girl with his hands.

"Up you go," he said, "lie down up there."

It was a wrenching effort to hoist himself up the front of the wooden cabinet. His side began to burn sharply before he was lying alongside Rita on the two-foot shelf. He pulled the Colt out and watched through the top of the dirt-encrusted windows as the black blade of the bulldozer crawled towards them.

"Oof," Rita coughed, "there's two inches of dust in my face."

"Steady, sugar," Daniels reassured her, "that's better than six feet of dirt."

Then he wished he hadn't said that.

From out of the night came a distant clatter, like a cement mixer idling. Daniels cocked his ear, but the sound was drowned as the bulldozer, its blade carried high to shield the driver, crawled up on the rails and lurched toward them.

It paused for a moment on the tracks, as though gathering itself for the lunge at the building—and then Daniels heard the roaring clatter again.

Rita screamed, a short, bitten-off sound, as Daniels slid down from the case and

leaped straight at the huge steel blade beyond the windows. But he stopped at the side of the small bay and peered to the left.

THE engine of the bulldozer thundered suddenly, and the big machine moved—backwards! It had hardly gone a foot when a black shape zoomed out of the night and struck it broadside, with a rending of steel and a crescendo of sound like a destroyer's broadside! Flowers' stolen car had arrived!

The boxcar rammed the bulldozer along the rails like a pin struck by a bowling ball. Daniels watched with awe until the heap of shattered metal that had been a man and a machine was tossed on its side several hundred feet down the track. Like a bull that has tossed his victim, but carries a sword in his heart, the boxcar lurched from the rails and skidded to a stop across the roadbed. One truck, free of the kingpin, bounded through the wall of the long freight house as though it were plywood.

"Wham," Daniels gasped, "scratch Al for sure."

He listened as a metallic clatter broke the stillness. "What's that?"

Rita's voice came from above him. "The telegraph."

"Hey," he shouted, "why didn't you tell me?"

His hand found the key on the shelf and he flipped open the switch. Dead! But the sounder continued to chatter. He ran his hand along the scarred wood and found another key. The opened switch stopped the sounder!

Deliberately he broke in with slow, inelegant Morse. 'DS-DS-DS HELP AT FO.'

The circuit went dead. Daniels cursed as his eyes probed the darkness again beyond the station. Flowers would never give up now. The egomaniac would try to kill them if he had to die himself.

The sounder rippled rapidly, too fast for Daniels to read the chattering brass tongue. He opened the circuit.

'LOW,' he sent.

'G-E-T-O-F-F,' he deciphered the answering clicks with angry amazement.

'SHUT UP U BSD,' he pounded firmly. 'SEND POLICE TO FOSTER HURRY SEND POL.' The circuit opened.

'WO,' the sounder asked.

"Who," Daniels roared, eyes watering

from his watch of the night outside. "Who, he says."

'MOHAWK DANIELS,' he sent, and prayed that some listening operator would remember the name of the A. & N. detective. 'RUSH HELP TO FOSTER RUSH POL.'

The sounder went dead and Daniels closed the key with a helpless curse. Then the brass tongue began a rapid, lightning paced cricketsing. Too fast for Daniels.

His head felt like a balloon now, and his legs felt weak. He stifled a sob of weariness, and whispered, "Stay up there, Rita. Sit tight."

He lay down on the floor beside the office desk, where he could see the lighter patches of the window openings. It was an effort to keep the spinning world in focus. He bit his tongue until the salt taste of blood was in his mouth.

"Dowanna lose *more* blood," he thought foolishly, "need a transfusion now—"

A creak echoed from the platform *beside* the station. Daniels tried to twist himself on the floor to watch the side door of the office, but he wedged against the desk and had to roll away.

"Wham!" The door crashed open and the sound of a heavily breathing body thudded into the room.

Daniels rolled a half turn from the desk and rose up in the darkness. His shoulder hit something hard and he grabbed it; the fat wood forepiece of a BAR! He gripped the serrated wood with his left hand, and then dropped the Colt and hung on with his right also when the gun began to roar and buck!

Thunder and hell and flame blasted in the small room, as Daniels gritted his teeth and rode the leaping weapon. For once, a BAR was properly prevented from riding up!

The burst stopped and Daniels put his 200 pounds into a heaving twist that tore the chatter-gun from the firer's hands and sent it spinning from his own. A fist came out of the blackness and exploded on his throbbing right side. He fell across the desk and crashed to the floor on the other side.

Steps thundered around the floor. "Where are you, you punk?" Flowers' voice roared, "... damn bull ..."

The world was spinning in velvet whorls in Daniels' head as he grasped an object

that had fallen to the floor with him. In an almost detached manner, as if he was drifting in another plane, he identified it. The ticket stamper.

He crawled towards the back wall of the office, dragging the heavy iron stamp with him.

"Hey, killer, over here!" It was Rita's scared voice!

Daniels swayed to his feet, watching Flowers' body pass across the dim light from the windows. "What a brave girl," he could not control his idle thoughts anymore. "She's really wonderful."

He took a cautious step forward, until he could faintly see Flowers in front of the ticket case, looking upward. The faint phosphorescent glow of the man's face outlined his head.

The knife-blade terror of Rita's scream blotted out the sounds of heavy breathing as one of Flowers' groping hands found her.

Daniels swung the ticket stamper backward like a pendulum. He whirled it in a full arc that ended with a bone-crushing, ox-felling crash on top of Flowers' skull. Daniels followed the blow and Flowers down to the floor and into a sea of black ink.

He tried to open his mouth, then thought he had better not. All the black ink would flood into it. He was gliding forward . . . down into the ink . . . have to get. . . .

THE rain on the window was the first thing Daniels saw when he opened his eyes. At first he thought it had awakened him, but then he followed his arm up to the man in a white coat who was holding it and smiling cheerfully at him.

"How do you feel?" The man wore a stethoscope. Oh—a doc.

Realization flowed back into Daniels' senses like cream filling a jar. "Gee," he muttered, "I made it."

"You certainly did," the doctor said. "You're full of brand new blood. Now—how d' you feel?"

Daniels breathed deeply and wiggled his head. "Fine," he said at last. "Hungry."

The other man laughed. "Great. We'll have some warm milk right up. Here's some people to see you for a minute."

"O.K.," Daniels said. "But make that a steak with hash-browned."

Terence Liffy came around the edge of

the green screen that hid the door, followed by a broad-shouldered man who wore an expression of permanent boredom, and—Rita Parks.

Liffy walked over to the bed and shook Mo's hand with a weak, awkward grip. "Hello, Mo," he said in the soft tones induced by hospitals, "great going, boy."

"Thanks," Daniels spoke in normal pitch. "Get me a steak and the fixings and we'll call it a bonus."

The chief chuckled, and jerked his head towards the man with him. "Lieutenant Milligan of the State Police. He wants a statement and so forth—"

"O.K.," Mo interrupted, "suppose I eat and you come back when I feel more like sitting up and talkin'. I'm starvin'."

Milligan tried to look agreeable. "Sure, Daniels," he said, "in about an hour. Will you tell me now what gave you the lead? We went over all that ground."

Mo looked at the white ceiling. "Just leg-work—and enough railroad sense to know where to look hardest. How's Flowers?"

"He'll live to be tried for Murphy's murder. You gave him a good concussion," Milligan said. He waved his hand briefly and went out.

"I wish I'd hit him harder," Daniels muttered.

Liffy looked uncertainly from Rita to Mo Daniels. "Well, I guess I'll drop back in an hour, then. Take it easy till you feel chipper, Mo."

He went out and Daniels lay back and looked at the screen behind which he disappeared. He needed the hour—to think about a kid named Marcus Zak, who let easy dough go to his head, but paid off when he found the depth of the game. The yard clerk had to be in the deal—you can't pick valuable cars every time you swipe one without inside help. Maybe the less said about him the better—and less heart-break for his yardmaster, and uncle, Patch.

Daniels looked at Rita. "We made it, gorgeous. How do you feel?"

The big gray eyes had twinkling lights in their corners. "Pretty good, now. Do you always try to make the first date so exciting?"

"Sometimes. It speeds things up. You could get well acquainted in a common grave."

She shuddered. "Stop." Then saw him grinning at her. "Well, it will seem quiet around here when you leave. You do know such interesting things to do."

Daniels pulled the pillow up behind him and sat up.

"I think I'll stick around awhile to clean things up. C'm on over here a minute and we'll talk it over."

She sauntered towards him. Daniels had to lie back and laugh, for as she came very close he could hear her humming, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

The Story Tellers' Circle

(Continued from page 4)

the Story Teller's Circle saying I liked to shoot the breeze via intelligent letters. The readers of SHORT STORIES are sure some writers on their own account! I've been answering mail ever since, and every one of the letters has had something in it that makes it worth saving.

"Man in California told me how he raises guinea pigs for laboratories—reader in Oregon gave me the facts about logging up his way, and on the side gave me some new ideas of his on the actions of the subconscious mind!—and a girl in New Orleans really knows Banana Country politics—and I'm still swapping airmails with an FBI agent who is trying his hand at writing, and doing pretty well for a first attempt!

"A great gang. And I think we have something here. Wouldn't this be a great old world if everybody were as friendly and helpful face to face as they are when swapping ideas of mutual interest?

"Hey? On that one I'd better jump off the Story Teller's Merry-go-round—Al Hammers will say I've gone soft and quit on me!"

William L. Rohde

Summer Search

A LOOK at the stories—always welcome—which come into our SHORT STORIES' offices makes us think of that old song "Yes, We Have No Bananas!"

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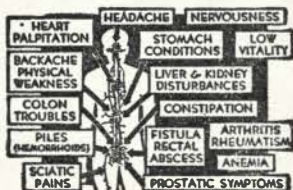


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Which is nice but keeps us searching in vain through piles of material for more of those *good* sports stories you want to read. P. S.—Maybe we'll have an early winter!

The Sea and its Men

"**'ISLAND FREIGHTER'** was written because *the idea and the characters intrigued me,*" writes its author Charles Yerkow, "but then I suppose every writer works on the same basis. My interest in the sea and its men is deep-rooted, I don't know why. I wish I could say it's family tradition, but it isn't, and maybe therein lies the deep-rootedness. I've used a friend's motorboat along the Long Island bays and harbors (couple of months ago motorboat got self wrecked).

"Research and imagination put my Captain McGrin and the scene down into New Guinea coastal waters. What may appear to be easy-going along that coast proves to be very tough indeed—mud, sand and silt bars, and jungle—and so I had to alter some of the setting facts in order to carry the action. Shipowners had a really red-taped time reclaiming their vessels after the war, and such men as the mate figured, unfortunately, into quite a bit of action down there. The mystery of the freighter is also a fact, and I'm sure the reader will find it intriguing. The only thing I can say about Captain McGrin is that he was a tough man who knew what he wanted to do.

"About myself—born 35 years ago not far from New York's East River. A mixed education of American and European school rooms, and mixed jobs from salesman to instructor to foreman to ghost-writer to fiction writer. Had three motorcycles and a lot of spills, and flew the old-time Wacos, Motis, Travelairs, Fledglings and Eagle-locks. Taught photography and judo (wrote a two-volume text on this subject—'Modern Judo').

"And the above certainly proves that it's easier to write a story than to write about yourself and your work!"

Charles Yerkow

From the Lodge of the Red Gods

A LOT of SHORT STORIES readers are interested in far places and life on the remaining frontiers of the world. Here is an interesting letter we received the other day from one of them.

"Editor SHORT STORIES: I wish to let you know that the SHORT STORIES MAGAZINE is

the most appreciated magazine of its type in the north, for it takes one to all corners of the earth, I especially like the stories of the Black Australian Trackers and the Mounted Police over there. You have the right idea, that is as well balanced assortment of, sea stories, Texas Rangers, lumberjacks, prospectors and a big city plot at times.

"The recent story about the prize fight managers, Tony and Shorty was the best ring story I have ever read, that writer knows his fighters and how!

"I well remember my boyhood days in New Ontario, among the lumberjacks, prospectors, trappers and the Boomer Railroad men. When my brother and I would hit the bush to trap for the winter, we'd buy about 50 old magazines in a second-hand book store in Winnipeg. We had to read these magazines over about three times during the winter. When one takes out for the bush in the fall, he looks his equipment over pretty thoroughly before he starts and don't take anything he is liable to leave on the portages and those magazines were just as essential as our guns, grub and blankets.

"We never threw a magazine away but would either leave them in the cabins or pack them for miles to a neighbor's cabin to be swapped for others.

"I have also trapped in British Columbia, Nevada and Alaska, working at the jobs the country afforded during the summer. Therefore have been a lumberjack, buckaroo, miner and a railroadman. And for the benefit of any young adventurers, I can honestly advise them, that for an honest-to-goodness trapper, Ontario is the best and that the Ojibwa Indians are just about the best woodsmen I have ever seen. There is the lure of the north, the call of the wild in the country between Lake Winnipeg and James Bay, there is a snap to the air up in that country. What I mean the air has a twang to it. And the spruce and tamarack pop and snap in the frost and the ice booms and cracks like distant artillery. The half-breeds have that stamp of the frontiersmen about them, the lithe graceful movements of what one would expect in trappers and lumberjacks.

"Now for Nevada. That state has what I would call real cowboys, called buckaroos down there. One sees less of the drugstore

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Ruins health, happiness and prosperity. Treat it in your home with ALCONOX—helps bring relief quickly, easily, inexpensively—in a few days—with or without drinker's knowledge! Treatment does not interfere with the social or working life of the drinker. NO BOOKS TO READ. ALCONOX is a READY-TO-USE, PREPARED FORMULA, and is the only low-priced method sold under a MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Doctors endorse the treatment and find it very efficient. ONE HAPPY USER WRITES: "Please SEND ME ANOTHER WONDERFUL TREATMENT AT ONCE FOR A FRIEND WHO IS A VERY HEAVY DRINKER. I BOUGHT FROM YOU BEFORE AND HAD WONDERFUL RESULTS ON ALL WHOM I BOUGHT FOR." SEND NO MONEY—JUST YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS—then pay postman \$5.00 plus a few cents C.O.D. charges. (If you want to save C.O.D. charges send \$5.00 with your order.) Treatment and instructions sent in plain wrapper.

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"REDUCE"

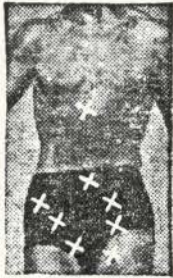
a DOCTOR'S 14 day PLAN

Here is the 14 day Reducing Plan of Dr. Edward Parrish, M.D., well-known doctor. For lunch, take 8 Dr. PARRISH'S TABLETS with glass of juice or any beverage. Take nothing else for lunch, except coffee, if desired. For breakfast and dinner, DON'T CUT OUT FOODS YOU LIKE — just cut down on them. This plan cuts down your caloric intake, and you lose weight naturally. NO HARMFUL DRUGS — NO EXERCISE — NO COMPLICATED DIETS — TRY THIS PLAN AT LEAST 14 DAYS. RESULTS MAY AMAZE YOU.

DR. PARRISH'S NEW TASTY TABLETS are not yet sold at stores. Send \$2.00 for \$2.25 size or order C.O.D. First box must satisfy or money back.

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Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion appliance. This marvelous invention for most forms of reducible rupture is GUARANTEED to bring YOU heavenly comfort and see it—day and night—at work and at play—or it costs you NOTHING! Thousands happy. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or springs. For men, women, and children. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Not sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and Proof of Results. Ready for you NOW!

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If you get up many times at night due to Irritation of Bladder or Urinary Tract, and have never used PALMO TABLETS we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 20 tablets FREE. If not delighted at the palliative relief received, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it. Send No Money. No C.O.D. to pay. Write today and we will send you PALMO TABLETS by return mail postpaid. Address: H. D. POWERS CO., Dept., 615-M, Box 135, Battle Creek, Mich.



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type of cowboy in Nevada then in any other place that I have been and as for trapping, a man can use a car and have 20 times the trap line a wilderness trapper has and these Nevada trappers make as much as I have seen trappers make anywhere.

"British Columbia offers a good deal to the trapper and it has the advantage of a canoe and saddle horse country combined and one sees the prettiest valleys and mountain scenery in British Columbia that I have ever seen. Martin trapping is the big thing in that country.

"Alaska of course, where I am is the great frontier, where the high-powered rifle, squaw and whiskey bottle still rule supreme. The great swaying northern lights and the vast distances make this country luring and adventurous. The trappers up here are some of the best in the world and are gathered from the far corners of North America.

"But the prospectors; now they are men of something of the same caliber, whether a desert rat in Nevada, a bush with his burro or Ford, a bush rat in British Columbia with his canoe or cayuses. A squawman in Northern Ontario with his canoe or outboard motor. Or in Alaska with his airplane or long river boat. Prospectors are true frontiersmen. A standbetween the savagery and civilization. Some of them single adventurers and some of them gone native, but all have the rugged stamp of individualism, adventurers and lovers of nature. . . . There is a sort of two-type prospectors. One a native. Such as French-Canadian breed, of the northern Canada production. The Mexican in the desert country and the native sourdough productions up here. But then there are the white men from the western states, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. These white men are very rugged and have prospected over a large part of the earth, and while a young lad I often listened to their stories, some of them lies, about far and distant lands.

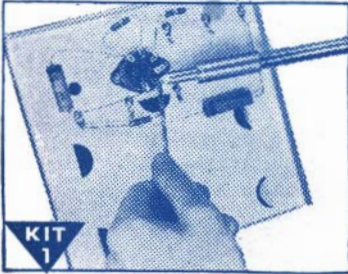
"Well I hope the SHORT STORIES MAGAZINE continues to be published so that my son can read it and get the feeling out of it as I did and still do. For these men in your magazine are my type."

George Gale
Nenana, Alaska.



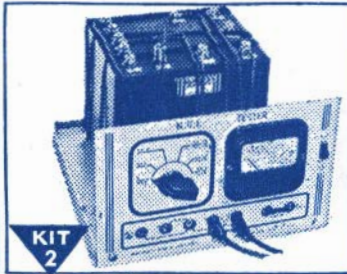
I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

I Send You Big Kits of Radio Parts



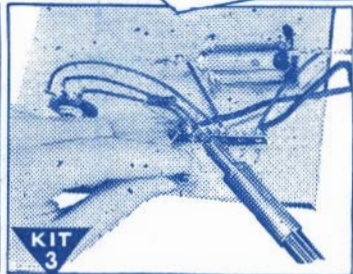
KIT 1

I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



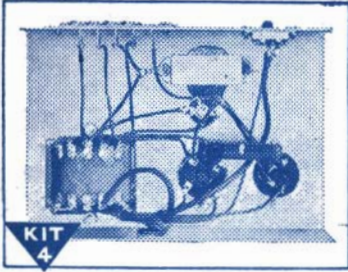
KIT 2

Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



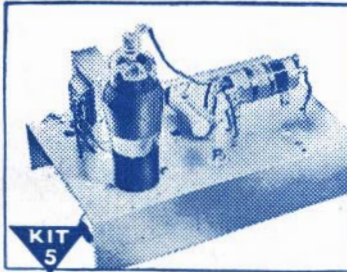
KIT 3

You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



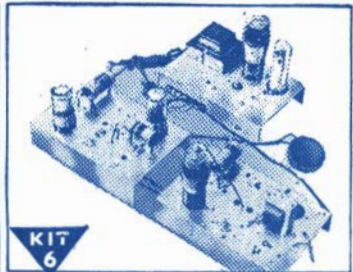
KIT 4

You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



KIT 5

Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



KIT 6

You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

KNOW RADIO—Win Success I Will Train You at Home—SAMPLE LESSON FREE

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in RADIO—Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY manuals that show how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier

to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even greater opportunities as Television, FM, and Electronic devices become available to the public! Send for FREE books now!

My training includes TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS • F M

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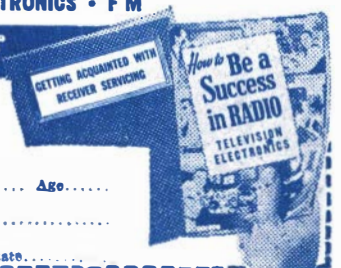
Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my FREE 64-page book. Read the details about my Course, letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just MAIL COUPON NOW in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8FM, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C. OUR 34th YEAR OF TRAINING MEN FOR SUCCESS IN RADIO

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FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

DISEASE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

The cause of the disease is not a germ as so many people think, but a vegetable growth that becomes buried beneath the outer tissues of the skin.

To obtain relief the medicine to be used should first gently dissolve or remove the outer skin and then kill the vegetable growth.

This growth is so hard to kill that a test shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy it; however, laboratory tests also show that H. F. will kill it upon contact in 15 seconds.

DOUBLE ACTION NEEDED

Recently H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It both gently dissolves the skin and then kills the vegetable growth upon contact. Both actions are necessary for prompt relief.

H. F. is a liquid that doesn't stain. You just paint the infected parts nightly before going to bed. Often the terrible itching is relieved at once.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

GORE PRODUCTS, Inc. N. F.
823 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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